



UPDATE: DNR HOLDS PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM MEETING

The Project Advisory Team (PAT) for the Straight River Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) met on Thursday, July 17, 2014 in Park Rapids.

Project Background: The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is establishing a Groundwater Management Area in the Park Rapids area to enhance its ability to make better decisions on groundwater appropriation permits. The DNR shares responsibility for managing groundwater resources with public sector partners, as well as with individuals and businesses that use groundwater. The DNR is responsible for permitting high volume groundwater users, for collecting information on groundwater resources, and for providing technical assistance that supports groundwater conservation.

AGENDA TOPICS:

Greg Kruse, Water Monitoring and Surveys Unit Supervisor, MN DNR

Greg presented on Strategy 2a—*Improve information available for groundwater management decisions—Improving the monitoring network.*

DNR has cooperative agency water monitoring efforts with federal, state and local governments, private industry and about 2,500 citizens that help us monitor across the state. DNR monitors about 860 observation wells across the state as well as a stream gaging network at over 260 sites. Groundwater monitoring has increased through funding from the Legacy Clean Water funding. We have the ability to provide real time information from indicator wells.

Research studies also provide information that assists with decision making. Two major studies have been completed on the Straight River. A 1994 USGS study and a 2002 DNR study both showed declines in stream flow are likely occurring because of water use.

Additional efforts that will improve monitoring include identifying water resources that require monitoring, automating data collection and telemetry, acquiring SCADA system data from high-use permittees and integrating resource data for informed decision making.

Tom Hovey, Water Permits Unit Supervisor, DNR Ecological Water Resources

Tom presented on Strategy 3—*Improve the management of groundwater appropriation permits.*

Decision making is at the heart of the permitting process and includes a number of considerations. Some are internal, others are outside partner requirements. Actual decisions are made in the field and very close to the application site.

DNR must consider current and future projected water levels, water quality, ecosystems, and future generations when assessing sustainability for groundwater resources.

The permitting process is changing. We are monitoring more, using new tools, re-evaluating groundwater standards and addressing cumulative impacts. DNR is increasing coordination with other agencies and partners.

Our goal is to develop a consistent process for altering existing groundwater appropriation permits. Existing permits review considerations include a consistent set of permit review questions, changes in the neighborhood and the permit turnaround time.

Advisory Team Discussion

The PAT had small group discussions about monitoring and the criteria that should be used for permitting applications and renewals. Suggestions included, define negative impacts for all categories, for example, trout streams, define the “neighborhood” and design monitoring for long range planning. Groundwater monitoring should be tied with surface water monitoring where possible and applicable. Participants noted that advanced notice of permit changes is very important for farm operations. DNR should monitor in order to forecast next season’s permit alterations which help with making fair decisions. This gives farmers the ability to make planting and crop-type decisions based on thresholds.

Participants considered the question: What is a fair and reasonable way to alter existing permits?

A sample of responses:

- Evaluate and grade on conservation efforts and best management practices
- Model ahead of the problems and map data to anticipate where monitoring information is needed
- Open communications are important. Discuss fairness for the neighborhood in order to budget fairly
- Alterations should address the sustainability not just a generic reduction and should solve the problem
- For cumulative impacts, we need to agree on triggers as thresholds ahead of time. Then we need to decide how permits will be altered when we reach those thresholds

NEXT MEETING OF THE PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM (PAT)

The next meeting is scheduled for August 21 at 9:00am-12:00pm at the Northwoods Bank in Park Rapids, MN. The Advisory Team meetings are open to the public and time is provided for attendees to offer comments and ideas. The tentative topic for the August meeting is Strategy 6 - Effectively address specific groundwater management challenges in the GWMA, focusing on 6b - *Partner with local, regional, state, federal and tribal governments and individuals, businesses and institutions in the private sector to address the challenges of groundwater management.*

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on this project, please contact Tim Crocker – DNR Project Manager at 320-616-2450, ext. 232, tim.crocker@state.mn.us. You can also [visit the DNR webpage](#).