

Surface Water Planning Facts

Council leads regional water protection effort

Good, plentiful water is perhaps this region's greatest natural resource. It is the foundation of the region's economy and an essential part of the region's quality of life.

But the quality of some of the region's lakes, streams and rivers is threatened by pollution. Pollution of area waters comes from both specific (point) sources, like an industrial pipe, and from diffuse (nonpoint) sources, like stormwater runoff from agricultural land and urban parking lots.

A variety of federal, state, regional and local agencies are working to prevent and clean up pollution of the region's waterways. The Metropolitan Council plays several roles in these efforts.

Under state law, the Council is required to prepare a comprehensive development guide for the seven-county metropolitan area. The Water Resources Management Policy Plan is one chapter of that guide. The plan details policies and strategies for:

- Stewardship of the region's water supply.
- Providing wastewater services to the region.
- Protecting the quality of area water resources.

The Council's water quality protection work is the focus of this fact sheet

Watersheds are planning focus

The Council focuses on watersheds in its efforts to help reduce both point- and nonpoint-source pollution. The Council has undertaken significant watershed and river modeling projects to better manage water quality and provide local agencies guidance as they develop plans for water resource management.

For example, the Council led a cooperative effort to develop a water-quality model of the lower 40 miles of the Minnesota River. The river is plagued by low oxygen and high turbidity (suspended particles). Five agencies joined the Council as sponsors, and many local partners were involved. The goal was to build an assessment tool for water quality in the metro-area reach of the river. In the future, the model will be used to set appropriate pollutant limits for discharges from point sources. The Council has also completed water-quality models for Credit River and Sand, Bevens and Carver creeks.

Under state law, the Council reviews and comments on the watershed plans prepared by watershed management organizations (WMOs) as well as local water management plans prepared by local units of government as a component of their local comprehensive plans. The Council also provides guidance and technical assistance to counties, cities, and towns on issues relating to water resources.

Council monitors water quality

The federal Clean Water Act requires the State of Minnesota to monitor the water quality of the lakes, rivers and streams and then to assess the condition of these water bodies.

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State law requires the Council to assess water quality in the seven-county metro area, particularly for waters that have been or have a high potential to be impacted by urban and agricultural stormwater runoff, also known as nonpoint source pollution.

The Council has undertaken significant watershed and river modeling projects to better manage water quality and provide local agencies guidance as they develop plans to protect local waters.



The Metropolitan Council supports an extensive network of water quality monitoring stations on the region's rivers, streams and lakes.

The Council promotes best practices concerning the control and prevention of water pollution.

that have been or have a high potential to be impacted by nonpoint-source pollution. The Council supports an extensive network of water quality monitoring stations on the region's rivers, streams and lakes. This data is used to:

- Determine compliance with water quality standards.
- Determine the extent of nonpoint-source pollution.
- Assist with the development of Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plans.
- Measure progress toward achieving water quality standards as best management practices (BMPs) are implemented.

Once the water bodies are assessed, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) must prepare a list of water bodies not meeting state water quality standards and not meeting their designated beneficial use (such as aquatic life, recreation and drinking water). This list becomes the official impaired waters list.

The result of a TMDL study is a written plan that analyzes the problem and determines how water quality standards can be met in the future. The TMDL study establishes the maximum amount of a pollutant that a lake, river stream or wetland can receive and still meet water quality standards for the designated use.

Council promotes best management practices

The Council conducts research and promotes best practices concerning the control and prevention of water pollution. The Council published an Urban Small Sites BMP Manual to assist municipalities and WMOs in the region to guide development and redevelopment. The manual includes detailed information on 40 BMPs that are aimed at managing stormwater pollution for small urban sites in a cold- climate setting. The goal of the manual is to support the principles of accommodating growth while preserving the environment.

For more information

To learn more, go to the [water planning page](#) on the Council's website.

Related fact sheets include

[Environmental Services](#)

[Inflow and Infiltration](#)

[Wastewater Services](#)

[Water Supply Planning](#)