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## DNR rolls out plan for policing groundwater

by Debra Neutkens  
Regional Editor

**SHOREVIEW** — Thirteen months after the Department of Natural Resources kicked off its plan for a north and east Groundwater Management Area, a final draft is ready for review and implementation.

Basically, the plan is a way to improve the permitting process for water appropriations long term, said Paul Putzier, the DNR project manager. "Growing communities are sharing a limited resource. We all need water," noted Putzier. "As cities plan, the Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) will help them understand what the agency is looking for in ways of sustainability. They need to know the water they're depending on will be there."

In January 2014, DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr told stakeholders assembled at the Shoreview Community Center that the agen-

cy's observation wells show groundwater is on steady decline in the metro. The issue was raised with the Legislature, he said, before the White Bear Lake Restoration Association lawsuit, although the lake "put a face of urgency" on the issue.

The association has always maintained that groundwater pumping is the reason for the low lake level.

On Feb. 3, those same stakeholders from communities within the new groundwater management area met again to hear results from months of work outlining objectives and action items in the plan and what it means to local units of government.

What speakers were not going to do at the meeting, Landwehr said upfront, was talk about the White Bear Lake lawsuit settlement.

The head of the DNR said the agency has never embarked on a project like this before.

Groundwater/see page 9A

# Groundwater

Continued from page 1A

What they're learning regarding recent trends is concerning, he added.

"Groundwater use is going up," Landwehr said. "I want to state clearly that we are not facing a crisis at this time but we are in urgent care. This plan will steer us in a more sustainable direction so we can avoid the emergency room."

Sustainability is the key word here. It means managing water to meet the needs of future generations.

The DNR is responsible under state statute for managing public resources to keep them sustainable.

There are five objectives under the groundwater plan, all necessary to assure sustainability within a boundary that includes all of Washington and Ramsey counties, 10 cities in southeastern Anoka County and a portion of Hennepin County east of the Mississippi River. The area includes intensive groundwater users.

Putzier outlined the objectives, which include:

- Groundwater use does not harm aquifers or negatively impact surface water.

The DNR will improve monitoring of groundwater levels and climate within the GWMA to make better-informed permit decisions.

Lake gauges will be added as needed to the existing 139 gauges, and three observation wells will be installed to monitor groundwater. These are in addition to the existing 60 DNR observation wells. Weather stations will also be added as needed to provide precipitation, temperature, dew point and wind speed for better evaporation/transpiration estimates.

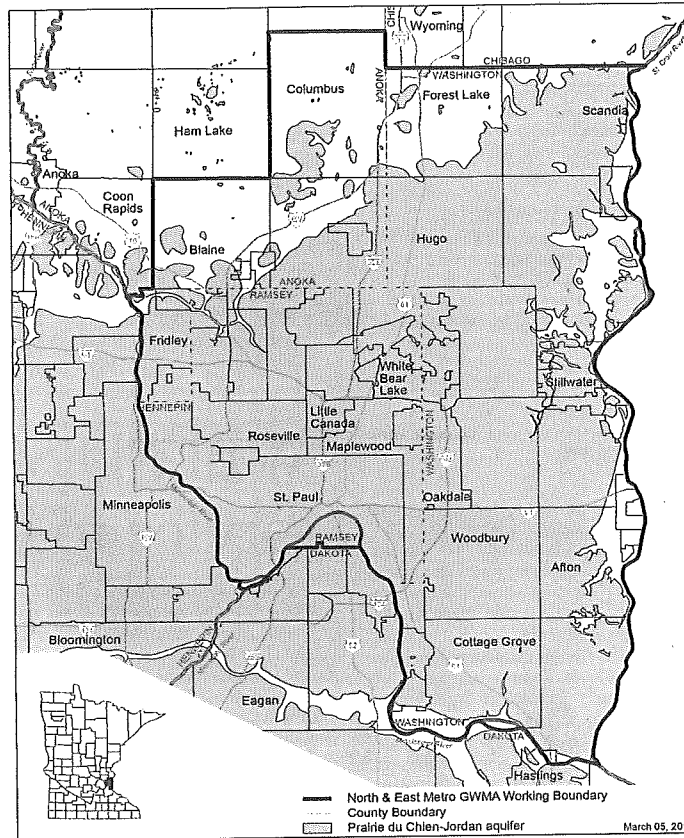
The DNR will also develop and apply sustainability thresholds for aquifers, ecosystems and surface waters in the GWMA. Part of that work will involve modeling with U.S. Geological Survey the annual volume of water withdrawn from White Bear Lake. If the annual volume withdrawn is greater than one-half-foot per acre, then DNR will work with permittees to adjust their permits.

"We think pumping's effect on surface water features will influence many permit decisions," Putzier said. "It will affect you," he told those in the room, "because it will change some of the ways we do business. We're not proposing immediate changes to existing permits. We are not setting new water use limits on individual cities. We will measure success on sustainability."

- Groundwater use complies with water conservation requirements.

Municipal systems must include conservation goals in their water supply plans. Statute required public water suppliers to implement demand reduction measures by Jan. 1, 2015. The measures are intended to reduce water use and must include a conservation rate structure or program and will be included in the next round of water supply plans. New, 10-year water supply plans will be due beginning in 2016.

The data required in the water supply plan includes residential per-capita de-



**The North and East Metro GWMA boundary, outlined in bold, sits above the Prairie du Chien/Jordan aquifer. This version was revised to include parts of Hennepin County.**

mand. The goal is 75 gallons per household per day, which is the seven-county metro area average for municipal systems in 2002. This number was selected by a committee represented by DNR, the Met Council and Minnesota Section of the American Water Works Association.

According to the draft report, 45 percent of municipal suppliers exceeded the residential use goal of 75 gallons per capita from 2008 to 2012.

DNR staff has confirmed conservation rate structures are in place in 21 out of 30 municipalities in the GWMA. Both the city of White Bear Lake and White Bear Township are listed as "not confirmed."

- Groundwater use does not degrade water quality.

Movement of manmade contaminant plumes is a concern. According to Putzier, 10 percent of the north and east metro groundwater use is for pollution containment. The Department of Health has designated five special well and boring construction areas in the GWMA where groundwater contamination is a risk. There are also concerns over perfluorochemicals detected in groundwater in areas of southern Washington County.

- Groundwater use does not increase water use conflicts and well interference.

- All users have the necessary permits.

Water users exceeding 10,000 gallons per day and/or 1 million gallons per year require a water appropriation permit.

According to the report, in 2012, 16 groundwater permits exceeded their appropriations by more than 10 percent. That represents 6 percent of the permits in the GWMA. In general, compliance is high in the north and east metro GWMA.

Putzier said the DNR plans to look at every permit in the GWMA over the next five years with respect to these objectives. There are about 250 permits to extract groundwater within the boundary. Again, permits will be adjusted to achieve sustainability, if necessary.

The Metropolitan Council projects municipal water use will increase 20

## If you go:

A public information meeting will be held on the new groundwater management area from 6-9 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 18 at Century College East Campus, 3300 Century Ave. N. Lincoln Mall conference room.

percent by 2030, it was noted in the report. The highest demand is expected to come from Woodbury, Hugo, Cottage Grove, Blaine and Forest Lake. Projected water demands through 2040 are being updated.

A 21-member advisory team met monthly with DNR staff for more than a year to develop the plan. White Bear Lake Mayor Jo Emerson and Lake Conservation District Chairman Jane Harper were on the panel, as was Bryan Bear, Hugo city administrator, and Bill Short, White Bear Township clerk/treasurer. Jim Markoe, White Bear Lake Homeowners Association, and Greg McNeely, White Bear Lake Restoration Association, joined in December as part of the lawsuit settlement.

The plan does not set limits on any individual city's water use, Putzier noted, but describes actions the agency will take to improve management of groundwater permits.

"The plan does not address whether cities should get their municipal water from surface waters or groundwater," he said. "It does commit DNR to more effective participation in water supply planning."

Rep. Linda Runbeck told the commissioner she appreciated the clarification that the GWMA plan is separate from the lawsuit agreement.

"But it does occur to me, we could implement the GWMA and still not have an impact on White Bear Lake," Runbeck said. "What are the chances that is a possibility?"

Landwehr told Runbeck "that is a great question I will artfully dodge."

"Our contention all along is groundwater withdrawals have not negatively affected White Bear Lake; are not the driving factor," the commissioner said. "Getting sustainability in the north and east metro is a worthy goal to avoid conflicts among other users. It may or may not affect White Bear Lake. That is not the intention. We will proceed with the plan because that's what we need to do to ensure sustainable domestic supply."

The 70-plus page DNR draft plan is expected to be in place by June. The plan is available for review at [www.dnr.state.mn.us/gwmp/areas.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/gwmp/areas.html). Public comments can be submitted through March 31 to [NEMetroGWMA.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:NEMetroGWMA.dnr@state.mn.us).