

REGIONAL COUNCIL OF MAYORS

March 14, 2016

PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

WATER: PROTECTING AND PRESERVING THIS MINNESOTA RESOURCE

Although Minnesota is not suffering a shortage of water, like a number of other parts of the country, there are current and future challenges ranging from maintaining clean lakes and rivers to maintaining and replacing aging infrastructure to slowing the continuing decline of the region's aquifers.

"We are not in crisis right now," said Ali Elhassan, manager for supply planning at the Metropolitan Council. "But if we continue as we are, we may be."

The March Regional Council of Mayors' meeting focused on water issues, with presentations from the Metropolitan Council, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the governor's office and the Freshwater Society.

Because of the state's relatively good water supply, Elhassan said, we may see businesses from drought-hit areas of the country relocating or expanding here; the region is expected to add another 1 million people over the next 30 years. But unless the region conserves water now, it may not be able to accommodate additional population and business. "We need to be proactive now," he said.

Rebecca Flood, assistant commissioner of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, said the governor is very concerned about the state's aging water infrastructure. At a series of listening sessions across the state last year, challenges were identified as:

- Aging infrastructure.
- High costs and rates.
- Regulatory flexibility.
- Regulatory certainty.
- Workforce issues (a shortage of people in Greater Minnesota who can operate treatment plants).
- Asset management.
- MPCA water fees.
- Wipes clogging pipes.

Gov. Dayton's \$220 million Clean Water Infrastructure proposal calls for \$167 million in loans for updating wastewater and drinking water infrastructure and 52.7 million for water quality protection; 40 percent of this is for metro-area projects. Flood said there is also grant money available. Most of this money is for outstate communities, but in the region, she said, there may be funds available for drinking water projects.

The governor's has two legislative initiatives this year relating to water:

- Provide regulatory certainty by helping communities confidently invest in infrastructure upgrades. Communities that use state grants to upgrade their systems will be shielded from regulatory changes for the life of the system.
- Ban the terms "flushable" and "sewer-safe" for personal care wipes. These are made from plastics that don't break down, causing backups in municipal wastewater systems. "Toilets are not trash cans," said Flood.

Molly Pederson, senior policy advisor to the governor, said that at the recent Water Summit, with about 900 people attending, a clear theme was that there needs to be better collaboration between the state and local communities. "The biggest complaint we hear when people get to our office is that they called the DNR and were told to contact the MPCA. Then they called the MPCA and were told to call the Met Council, and so on," Pederson said.

She asked mayors to contact her with their ideas about what and how that could be accomplished. "The governor sees this as a partnership moving forward," she said. She said the document from the Water Summit will be released soon; she will send it to the Regional Council of Mayors for distribution to Metro-area mayors.

Urban water is easier to protect than that in agricultural areas, said Steve Woods, executive director of the Freshwater Society, because it's regulated, it covers a relatively small area and because people living in urban areas "have built up a tolerance to government."

But, although the total amount of farmland is about the same as it was 90 years ago, the kinds of crops have changed. Today, more row crops—particularly soybeans—are grown, which means more bare soil that water simply runs off. With grass crops like hay and small grains, or with pasture, water soaks into the ground. The water running off farmland goes into drain tiles, then ditches, then lakes and rivers, creating, Woods said, "a soup of nitrate-laden water."

Woods suggested several questions that mayors should ask their staff about stormwater:

- Should we throw more effort behind the Minnesota Cities Stormwater Coalition? (Given that now the main source of pollution is agricultural land, not cities.)
- Can you show me the long-term trend in our groundwater level?
- Does our water rate cover the basics plus increased coordination, efficiency programs, loss reduction and meter upgrades?
- Will the rates yield enough once efficiencies kick in and we sell less water?

Key facts for cities

- There are 3 million people in the Twin Cities now, with 186 communities and 105 water suppliers.
- In the Metro region, the average per capita water use is 125 gallons per day. Some 74 percent of residents in the area get their water from groundwater.
- Water use in the summer is 2.4 times what it is in the winter; 40 percent of water use for the whole year is used during the summer.
- The groundwater aquifers in the Metro are going down, although not in every community; 55 percent of the observation wells show decreasing water.

- Water infrastructure built in the 1970s and 1980s was paid for largely (95 percent) with federal funds; the state paid 2.5 percent and local governments paid the rest. The state and federal funding is no longer available, and many local governments cannot afford needed upgrades.
- The cost of water to residential users varies widely across the state, from monthly bills of \$20 to bills of \$175.
- So-called “flushable” wipes may make it through the plumbing of a home, but they end up clogging and damaging municipal wastewater systems, at considerable and increasing cost to communities.
- Wastewater treatment has largely been a success in the Twin Cities; 90 percent of Metro area lakes are as good or better in water transparency than they were 30 years ago.
- Although cities have, for the most part, done a good job at keeping pollutants out of surface water, many of their water treatment plants have to take out more nitrates because of runoff from farmland.

Ideas for cities

- Reducing water use by 20 percent can make a big difference.
- Reducing per capita use from 125 gallons per day to 90 gallons per day would allow for growth in both population and businesses, without increasing water use.
- Cutting back summer water usage from 2.4 times winter usage to 1.6 times winter usage would hit the goals of 20 percent reduction and per capital use of 90 gallons per day.
- The Met Council has a stormwater grant program, effective since March 14. The Met Council will award grants on a competitive basis to Metro watershed management organizations or watershed districts.
<http://www.metrocouncil.org/Wastewater-Water/Funding-Finance/Finance-Pubs/Stormwater-Grant-Application-2016.aspx>
- The Met Council’s online toolbox provides ways for both individuals and communities to conserve water. <http://www.metrocouncil.org/Wastewater-Water/Planning/Water-Supply-Planning/Guidance-Planning-Tools/Water-Conservation/Toolbox.aspx>
- Communities can look at their water pricing strategies to make sure they are able to fund appropriate maintenance as well as ongoing service. A rate study can also help keep rates steady, which is better for attracting development.
- Coordination among communities and, importantly, among the array of state, regional and local entities would help communities and businesses navigate what is now often a confusing and frustrating system.
- Water doesn’t fall within community boundaries; communities should look for opportunities to work together. It can save both water and money.
- Design of both buildings and water systems can save water. Even redesigning sprinkler systems can significantly help reduce the amount of water used during the summer.
- The Master Water Steward program of the Freshwater Society <http://masterwaterstewards.org/become-a-master-water-steward/> trains people so that they can talk with residents of an area before a city’s public works department does a project. Currently, Master Water Stewards have helped with 60 projects in the Metro area, saving more than 1 million gallons of water per year.

- The Freshwater Society has a variety of publications <http://freshwater.org/publications/> on water, conservation and water quality. At the end of March, the Freshwater Society is releasing a report for local officials.

For more information

- [Ali Elhassan presentation](#)
- [Steve Woods presentation](#)
- [Rebecca Flood presentation](#)
- [Video](#) about stormwater reuse at the Saints stadium

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT/UPDATES

Mayors Stan Karwoski of Oakdale and Sandra Krebsbach of Mendota Heights attended a conference on entrepreneurship in February, and Karwoski met with Venture Lake, a small think tank that he said seemed interested in learning how cities can help support entrepreneurs. Krebsbach said one concern is increasing entrepreneurship in the eastern Metro; currently most are in the western Metro.

COMING UP

The next meeting of the Regional Council of Mayors will be Monday, April xx, 11:30am at Dorsey & Whitney. A follow-up on water issues will be included in the agenda.

ATTENDEES

Mayors

Jim Adams	City of Crystal
Bob Crawford	City of Elko New Market
Jerry Faust	City of St. Anthony
Mary Giuliani Stephens	City of Woodbury
Debbie Goettel	City of Richfield
Ken Hedberg	City of Prior Lake
Kathi Hemken	City of New Hope
Jim Hovland	City of Edina
Marvin Johnson	City of Independence
Stan Karwoski	City of Oakdale
Elizabeth Kautz	City of Burnsville
Sandra Krebsbach	City of Mendota Heights
Denny Laufenburger	City of Chanhassen

Peter Lindstrom	City of Falcon Heights
Scott Lund	City of Fridley
Mike Maguire	City of Eagan
Sandy Martin	City of Shoreview
Lili McMillan	City of Orono
Tim McNeil	City of Dayton
Mark Steffenson	City of Maple Grove
Ken Willcox	City of Wayzata
Janet Williams	City of Savage
Gene Winstead	City of Bloomington

Guests

Mike Brown, Greater MSP; Mark Casey, City of St. Anthony; Ali Elhassan, Met Council; Michaela Ericson, City of Centerville; Rebecca Flood, MPCA; Stacie Kvilvang, Ehlers; Jennifer O'Rourke, Met Council; Sam Paske, Met Council; Elizabeth Ryan, Family Housing Fund; Jamie Verbrugge, City of Bloomington; Peter Wagenius, City of Minneapolis; Steve Woods, Freshwater Society.

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