

# **Press Release: Itasca, Koochiching, and North St. Louis County SWCD's to Host Community Conversations Regarding Little Fork and Big Fork River Watershed Health and Public Comment Period**

**From: Itasca SWCD, Kimberly Yankowiak, 218-328-3092**

Since 2013, Itasca and Koochiching SWCDs have held public meetings to present new information and to invite public comment on the status of the Little Fork and Big Fork River Watersheds. This has been a collaborative effort between the Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to work with local officials and citizens to ensure the health of the Little Fork River and Big Fork River Watersheds. During this process the MPCA had hired a contractor, Emmons & Olivier Resources, Inc. (EOR), to assess the data that the MPCA and local partners have gathered and use it to create two guiding documents: The Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Study and Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) Report. These guiding documents are being finalized and will be soliciting public comments soon.

## **What is the TMDL Study?**

A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study must be conducted for each pollutant affecting an impaired water. The study identifies all pollutant sources and determines the amount of reduction needed by each source to restore water quality. State agencies, local organizations and other stakeholders work together using water sampling data, computer modeling and public input to develop TMDLs. The Little Fork River has four segments that have been identified as impaired for excessive sediment concentrations. In the Big Fork River Watershed, Island Lake near Northome has been identified as impaired due to excess nutrients. Both documents are finished and are entering the final public comment period.

## **What is the WRAPS?**

The MPCA, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), & Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) initiated a 10-year WRAPS document to determine the quality of the waters in each watershed in the state and develop a long-range plan for keeping its waters healthy. The WRAPS for each watershed will incorporate the TMDL into the broader context of the overall watershed conditions. With this 10-year cycle coming to an end, the next cycle for Little Fork River watershed will begin in 2018, with Big Fork River slated to begin in 2020.

Now, the final series of community conversation events will occur to review the watershed health and to invite public comment. In April, two repeat events will discuss the TMDL and WRAPS document for each watershed. These events will review the process that has taken place thus far and will describe the public comment process and how to submit official comments.

- **Big Fork River Watershed**; the first will take place in **Bigfork on April 10<sup>th</sup>** at the Bigfork City Hall, 200 Main St. (HWY 38) at 5:00 p.m. The second event will occur in **Big Falls on April 24<sup>th</sup>** at the Big Falls Community Center, 410 2<sup>nd</sup> St. N.W. at 4:30 p.m.
- **Little Fork River Watershed**; the first will take place in **Littlefork on April 11<sup>th</sup>** at the Littlefork Community Building, 220 Main Street, at 5:00 p.m. The second event will occur in **Cook on April 25<sup>th</sup>** at the LaCroix Ranger District, 320 North Highway 53, at 5:00 p.m.

For more information, please contact Kimberly Yankowiak, Itasca SWCD Water Resources Specialist at 218-328-3092 or [kim.yankowiak@itascaswcd.org](mailto:kim.yankowiak@itascaswcd.org) Please do not submit comments directly to this contact.

The success of the Little Fork and Big Fork River WRAPs is built on the collaboration of other state agencies, local governments, the business community, lake associations, and citizens that live and play in the watershed. With the public comment period for both watersheds opening, this is *your* chance to contribute.