

Connecting local water management and state water quality programs

Coordination efforts through the Clean Water Fund

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**Minnesota
Pollution
Control
Agency**

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) are moving toward an approach that uses major watersheds (see figure 1) as the appropriate scale for monitoring and assessing water quality and for developing water management and TMDL implementation plans. The approach can be described in four steps:

Step 1 — Monitor and gather data

MPCA employs an intensive watershed monitoring schedule that will provide comprehensive assessments of all of the 81 major watersheds on a ten-year cycle. This schedule provides intensive monitoring of streams and lakes within each major watershed to determine overall health of the water resources, to identify impaired waters, and to identify those waters in need of additional protection to prevent future impairments. Data from past and current local water monitoring are included in the process. Information on watershed characteristics, like land use, topography, soils, and pollution sources is also gathered in this step. Step 1 can take up to two years to complete.

Step 2 — Assess the data

MPCA staff and its partners conduct a rigorous process to determine whether or not water resources meet water quality standards and designated uses. Waters that do not meet water quality standards are listed as impaired waters. Step 2 takes one year to complete.

Step 3 — Set targets and goals

Based on the watershed assessment, a TMDL study and/or protection strategy is

completed. Existing local water plans and water body studies are incorporated into the planning process. Step 3 will be completed within four years of initiating Step 1.

Step 4 — Implement permits, projects, and practices

Included in this step are all traditional permitting activities*, in addition to programs and actions directed at nonpoint sources. Partnerships with federal, state, and local government and landowners will be necessary to implement these water quality activities. Step 4 is ongoing.

*MPCA will continue routine regulation during all steps of the watershed approach process.

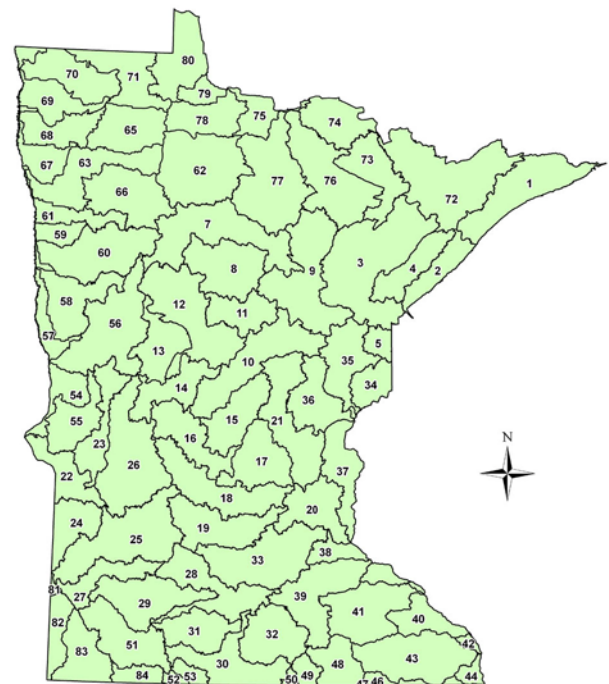
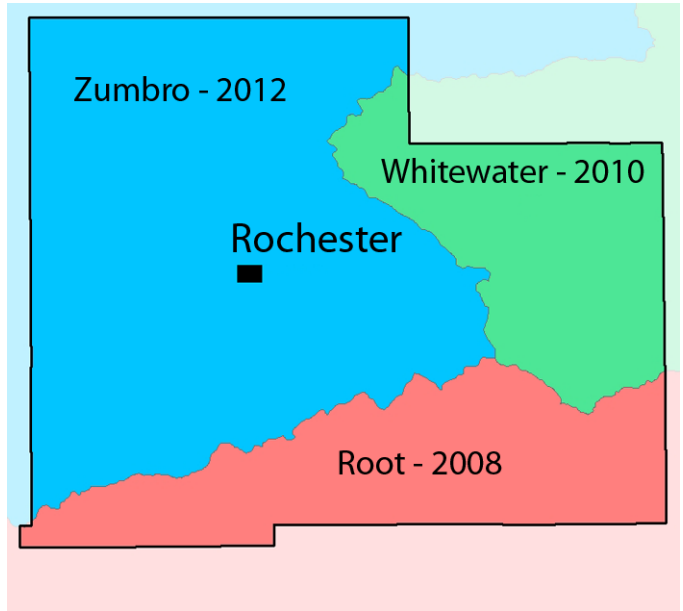


Fig. 1: 81 Major Watersheds

Although it makes sense to manage water resources at the major watershed scale, much of the work to protect and restore water quality is organized on political, rather than watershed boundaries. This includes such activities as land use planning and zoning, along with comprehensive local water planning and implementation. Counties, cities, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) play important water management roles that are not necessarily aligned with major watershed boundaries. Watershed districts and metro watershed management organizations (WMOs) do mimic hydrologic boundaries, but they can be significantly larger or smaller than major watersheds. On-the-ground solutions for nonpoint source pollution therefore require a pragmatic approach that recognizes both types of boundaries -- hydrologic and political.

One challenging aspect of the transition to the watershed approach is to find ways in which newly developed water quality goals and targets (e.g., TMDL allocations) can be incorporated into local management plans without unduly disrupting or overburdening local planning cycles.

there will be some challenges because a local governmental unit may have several major watersheds within its jurisdiction, and local plans address a broader array of issues than just water quality, building the water quality assessment and implementation efforts into local water plans is the best means to achieve results.



In the case of Olmsted County, the MPCA will be working with local partners to monitor and assess three separate watersheds over the span of the 10 year local water planning cycle (see figure 3). These watersheds are in different stages of their four-year processes of water quality assessment and TMDL development.

Even though completing TMDLs on a major watershed basis will significantly reduce the number of potential TMDLs, local governments cannot be expected to unreasonably adjust their planning schedules.

Therefore, MPCA, BWSR, and others intend to work with local governments to:

- Incorporate the findings from the water quality assessment into local programs and projects to protect unimpaired waters, and
- Integrate the findings and translate the restoration goals from the TMDL studies into the local water planning process and related land use programs.

Our agencies will advocate for incorporation of both restoration and protection findings and goals into the

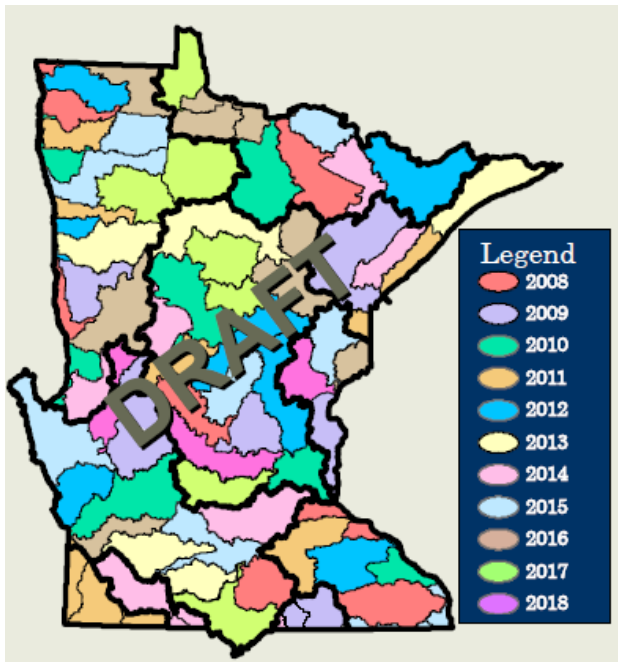


Fig. 2: Current monitoring schedule

Connecting local and state programs

It is important to connect local water management programs and activities, watershed assessments, and TMDL plans because each informs the others. Although

Local governments are often within multiple major watersheds

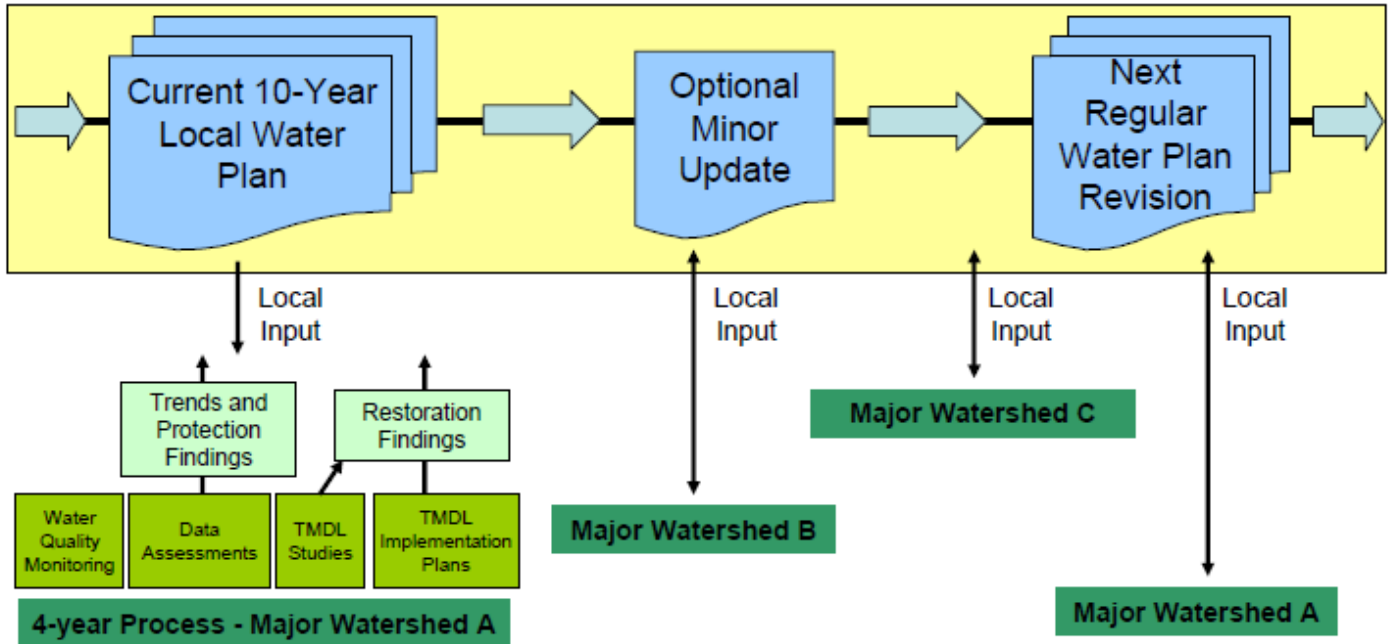


Fig. 4: Partnering with local governments

plans and allow local governments to concentrate on implementing measures to improve water quality. Figure 4 illustrates the connection between the processes and how the MPCA and BWSR envision water quality information, public and agency input to flow between them.

Future adjustments to state programs will be developed to further enhance the state's local water management connection. MPCA and BSWR will continue to inform and update local partners in water planning as the major watershed approach progresses further.

Contact information

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