



**MINNESOTA**  
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY BOARD

**Date:** 5/1/2019

**To:** Environmental Quality Board Members

**From:** EQB Staff

**RE:** Summary of Public Input on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Request for a Generic Environmental Impact Statement.

The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) held a public meeting on March 25, 2019 in Red Wing to gain public input on a proposal to initiate a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) to study nitrate-contaminated water in the karst region of southeast Minnesota. At the meeting, Board Members and the public participated in small group discussions about the opportunities and challenges associated with completing a GEIS.

Each group was asked the following questions:

- Name, where you live, connection to issue, and value that motivates you to be here tonight.
- What opportunities do you see in doing a GEIS? For example, what information would you like to see be included in the GEIS and how would you use that information?
- What concerns do you have about doing a GEIS? And are there ways to address those concerns?
- Given everything that you have heard tonight – from EQB, MPCA, and your neighbors at the table – do you recommend that the EQB Board support the GEIS?

A survey was also available on the EQB website from March 15, 2019 through April 7, 2019, so individuals not able to attend in person could provide feedback on the same questions. This memo provides a summary of both the comments heard at the in-person discussions and comments submitted via the online survey. This memo is being provided to EQB Board Members who will decide whether or not to order a GEIS. This Board decision will be scheduled for a future EQB meeting. Meeting information and agendas are available on the EQB website at <https://www.eqb.state.mn.us/>

The accompanying tables include detailed comments that were summarized by note takers from the in person meeting, and the comments submitted via the online survey. The tables are organized by question and broken into sections by theme. Below is a summary of the overall themes that emerged.

### **Overall themes**

#### *Public and stakeholder outreach, engagement, and participation*

- Citizens want their concerns to be taken seriously
- Increase communication with the public, make sure it is in clear and understandable language suitable for all audiences

- Make sure all interested citizens and stakeholders get the chance to participate and are heard

#### *Collaboration*

- Make sure state agencies are working together and working with local governments

#### *Action and solutions*

- GEIS should include an action plan reduce nitrate in wells and aquifers
- Concerned that the GEIS may not lead to action or may be outdated by the time it is complete
- Focus on implementing solutions now instead of completing the GEIS

#### *Emphasize science over politics*

- The GEIS should focus on science based solutions, not politically based solutions
- Minimize bias and don't overemphasize the perspective of one stakeholder group over another

#### *Trust*

- Some citizens do not trust state agencies
- Transparency is necessary and helps build trust
- The GEIS process should be fair, predictable, and include all stakeholders

#### *Data and information needs*

- Use existing data instead of collecting new data
- Combine existing data
- Use the GEIS as an opportunity to collect baseline data on nitrates in the region
- Look at long-term water quality trends in the region
- Provide more accurate mapping of the karst features in the region

#### *Data and information on nitrates*

- Evaluate and monitor all sources of nitrates
- Evaluate how land use and soil health relate to nitrate levels
- Identify if current nitrate levels are a result of legacy practices

#### *Data and information on other contaminants*

- The GEIS should look at other contaminants in addition to nitrate (bacteria, pesticides, chlorides, phosphorus, etc.)

#### *Regulation*

- There are already too many regulations, more could negatively impact farmers
- Current regulations are not protective enough of water quality and the environment
- Enforce existing regulations

#### *Environmental Review*

- Complete EISs for large feedlots

- Don't want to change the existing EAW/EIS process

#### *Water quality and environmental protection*

- Current practices are harming public health and will impact future generations
- Water quality is important to everyone
- Nitrates in the water have been a problem for decades and something needs to be done now

#### *Well information*

- Continue well testing
- Evaluate information about wells – how they are constructed, depth, if they are up to code, and see how that information relates to levels of nitrate contamination

#### *Agricultural practices*

- Need solutions that balance ability to produce inexpensive food while protecting the environment
- Farmers are implementing BMPs and adjusting to new recent regulations
- More information is needed about application of pesticides and fertilizer (including manure management)
- Concern about practices on larger farms and how they contribute to nitrogen levels

#### *Feedlot moratorium*

- Place a moratorium on new feedlots while the GEIS is underway

#### *Climate change*

- How is climate change impacting the region?
- How will increased flooding affect nitrate levels?

#### *Public health*

- People are concerned about the health impacts of nitrate levels in drinking water
- Use funding to start reducing nitrates to healthy levels
- What are the health risks to those with affected wells?

#### *Cost, funding, and economic impact*

- The GEIS will cost too much
- Not enough funding has been secured to complete the GEIS
- Use money from the Clean Water Fund to start implementing solutions
- New regulations or other changes could have a negative economic impact on farmers

#### *Timeline*

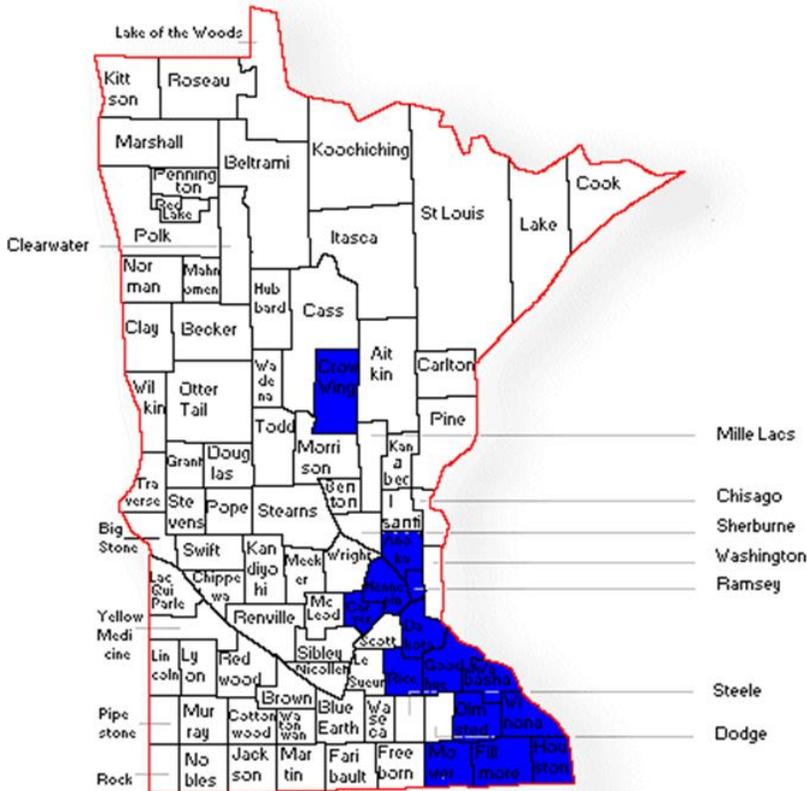
- The GEIS will take too long to complete
- Solutions need to be implemented without delay

#### *Influence of large business interests*

- Concerned that big agricultural interests will have too much influence in the GEIS process
- Concerned about the influence of industry on state agency decisions

### Meeting and Survey Participants

Based on information provided in the sign-in sheet and in the online survey, commenters that participated resided in the following counties: Anoka, Carver, Crow Wing, Dakota, Fillmore, Goodhue, Hennepin, Houston, Mower, Olmstead, Ramsey, Rice, Wabasha, and Winona. See map below. There were also meeting participants from Iowa and Wisconsin.



Attendees and survey respondents also provided the following self-identified affiliations representing a broad range of interests:

- Beef farmer
- Blue Fruit Farm
- Cannon River Watershed Partnership
- Citizen
- City of Red Wing
- Farmer
- Farmer, member Southeast Minnesota Irrigator's Association
- Fillmore farmer
- Fillmore SWCD
- Goodhue SWCD
- Houston County
- Houston Engineering
- Land Stewardship Project
- landowner
- Minnesota AgriGrowth Council
- Minnesota Corn Grower's Association
- Minnesota Milk Producers Association
- Minnesota Well Owners Organization
- Mulhern Dairy

- Next Generation Pork
- Northern Water Alliance
- Olmstead County Commissioner
- Past Watershed Manager Stockton-Rllingstone Minnesota City Watershed
- Red Wing Republican Eagle
- Retired faculty, Dept of Soil Water and Climate, University of Minnesota
- Seven Songs Organic Farm
- Springside Farm
- Toden Farms
- Tree farmer
- Trout Unlimited
- University of Minnesota
- Vita Plus
- Wabasha County Commissioner
- Wabasha SWCD
- Winona County Farm Bureau
- Winona farmer
- Winona Post
- Winona State University