



Date: 05/20/2020

To: EQB Members and Collaborators

From: EQB Staff

Environmental Quality Board Spring 2020 Project Updates

In September 2019, the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) approved a biennial work plan focused on supporting “coordinated, effective, and meaningful action on climate mitigation and adaptation in Minnesota.” That theme was featured at our Environmental Congress last December, when Minnesotans gathered to discuss how climate change is impacting our state and to share ideas for solutions.

Now, in these times of social distancing, COVID-19 has brought unique challenges to our communities and institutions. Despite this, EQB’s work is charging ahead. We have a number of exciting projects underway that we look forward to discussing with Minnesotans in the coming months. Highlights from these projects are included in the memo below.

We wish you all a safe and healthy spring!

Sincerely,

EQB Staff

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Please note that all dates are tentative and may be subject to change

2020 State Water Plan: Climate Change and Sustainable Water Management

Project Overview

The purpose of the EQB 2020 State Water Plan is to present a clear vision for water action in the coming decade in the context of climate change. The report will include priority recommended strategies to protect water resources and infrastructure based on recent research, other water planning efforts, and input gathered from Minnesotans. EQB staff are working with an interagency team on the development of the plan.



Progress-to-date

The interagency team and EQB staff:

- Conducted interviews, focus groups, and a survey of Minnesota water professionals to gain perspective on water management in the context of climate change.
- Developed an outline, focus areas, and strategies consistent with guidance and feedback from interagency water leaders.
- Collaborated with University of Minnesota including their Institute on the Environment to incorporate robust scientific data into the Water Plan.

Next Steps

- Complete first draft of the Water Plan
- Develop maps and data to support context and strategies
- Present overview of Water Plan to the Board for discussion in June 2020
- Revise the Water Plan during July 2020
- Present revised Water Plan to the Board in August 2020

Key Dates

- June – Presentation and discussion of Water Plan first draft
- August – Presentation of complete revised draft Water Plan to the Board
- September – EQB to approve Water Plan
- September 15, 2020 – Plan due to MN Legislature

Integrating Climate Change into Environmental Review

Project Overview

The Environmental Review Climate Technical Team is drafting recommendations for incorporating information related to climate change into Minnesota's Environmental Review (ER) Program. Strategies for developing the recommendations were approved during the January Environmental Review Implementation Subcommittee (ERIS) meeting. Additional information on the strategies is located on the [ERIS webpage](#).

Progress-to-date

The ER Climate Technical Team is drafting preliminary recommendations for updates to the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) form. The recommendations would require submission of additional information related to greenhouse gas quantification, mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency.

Next Steps

- Create Draft Guidance that aligns with the new EAW form requirements
- Assess mandatory EAW and Environmental Impact Statement categories
- Assess EAW Decision Criteria

Key Dates

- Fall 2020 – ERIS review of Climate Integration recommendations
- Fall 2020 – Board approval of Climate Integration recommendations

Other Environmental Review Program improvement initiatives underway

EQB staff are creating an *Environmental Review Program Data Management Plan* that will ensure consistency and accuracy of data collection for monitoring and reporting effectiveness of the ER Program. The Data Plan will be presented to ERIS for final approval.

Solar on Closed Landfills Study

Project Overview

Minnesota’s Closed Landfill Program (CLP) sites hold potential for solar photovoltaic development and could be an asset for meeting the state’s greenhouse gas reduction goals. Currently, there is not sufficient information about which CLP sites are viable for solar development, what barriers exist, and what actions are needed to address those barriers. The Legislature appropriated funds to EQB to investigate these questions and develop a final report to present recommendations for policy and program changes that could facilitate solar energy development on CLP sites.



Solar farm built on a landfill in Rehoboth, MA.

EQB is contracting with a technical consultant, Barr Engineering, and an interagency team including Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Metropolitan Council, and the Departments of Administration and Commerce to complete this work.

Progress-to-date

The interagency team and contractor:

- Conducted focus groups and interviews with stakeholders to better understand opportunities and barriers for solar development.
- Are consulting with the US Environmental Protection Agency’s RE-Powering America’s Land program to learn from others states.
- Are building the framework for a GIS analysis, and investigating potential pathways for releasing bond restrictions from landfill parcels to facilitate solar development.

Next Steps

- Develop a methodology for GIS analysis of landfills
- Work with National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) to conduct a feasibility study on a MN landfill
- Identify top landfills for solar development

Key Dates

- September 15, 2020 – Contractor’s assessment report due
- Fall 2020 – Board review of project
- December 1, 2020 – Final report due to legislature

Pollinator Protection Coordination

Project Overview

As directed by Executive Order 19-28, EQB convenes the Interagency Pollinator Protection Team (IPPT) to develop strategies and measure progress toward the outcome of healthy and diverse pollinators in the State. As part of this effort, EQB coordinates the IPPT to develop an annual report on the status of pollinators in Minnesota. EQB also develops a civic engagement process to ensure public participation in pollinator policy and program development, and build cross-sector partnerships and relationships.

Progress-to-date

- IPPT evaluated and discussed the 2019 pollinator report and determined 2020 metrics.
- IPPT reached out to external stakeholders for feedback on the 2019 annual pollinator report.
- Determined IPPT civic engagement focus areas: imperiled pollinators, pesticide education, and diversity and inclusion.
- Created a survey for the IPPT to inventory pollinator-related civic engagement programs and initiatives in their agencies.

Next Steps

- Gather information and data on metrics for the annual report; begin drafting report
- Use survey results to begin building a strategic engagement approach
- Continue building cross-sector relationships and partnerships

Key Dates

- Fall 2020 – IPPT presents 2020 pollinator annual report for review and approval
- December 1, 2020 – pollinator annual report deadline for publication



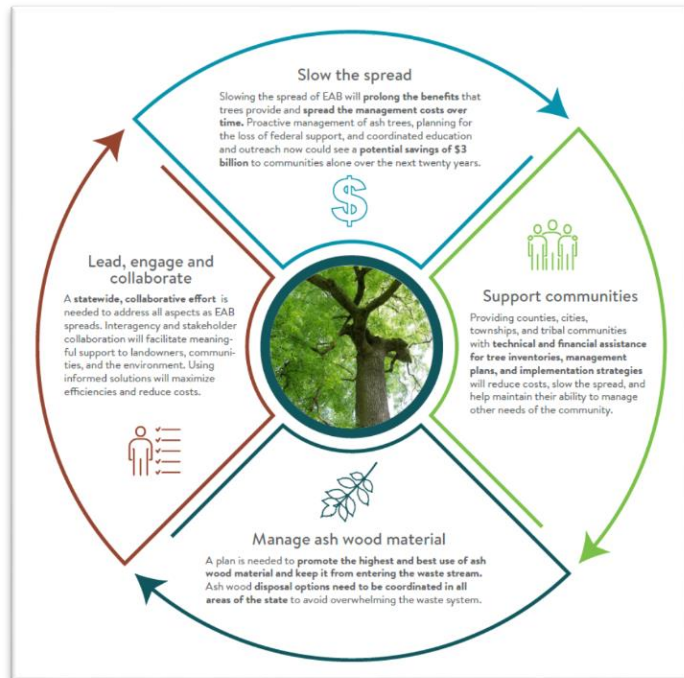
Emerald Ash Borer Coordination

Project Overview

Environmental Quality Board staff led an interagency team to coordinate efforts among state agencies to address the spread of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) in Minnesota. The team was tasked with identifying the impacts of EAB, developing recommendations, discussing state agency roles and responsibilities, and providing information to state leaders and the public on the status of EAB in Minnesota.

Progress-to-date

In 2018, the EQB convened an interagency EAB team consisting of staff from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Metropolitan Council, and Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health, and Natural Resources. In 2019, the team produced a report that described the benefits of ash trees, concerns associated with their loss, and four key recommendations: 1) slow the spread, 2) support communities, 3) manage ash wood material, and 4) lead, engage, and collaborate. In response to Board feedback, the team also developed detailed action recommendations that identified necessary resources, timelines, and lead agencies. Additionally, a fifth key recommendation to transition ash forests was added. Agency staff presented these to the Board in April 2020.



Next Steps

- Lead agencies prioritize and implement the recommended actions
- Lead agencies continue interagency and stakeholder collaboration to advance EAB actions

Key Dates

- No dates identified at this time; the Board may request periodic progress updates on this issue

GreenStep Cities Coordination

Project Overview

The GreenStep program is a voluntary challenge, assistance, and recognition program to help cities, tribal nations, and schools/school districts reach their sustainability goals. EQB staff co-directs the GreenStep Cities program and leads the effort to expand the GreenStep Tribal Nation program beyond the pilot phase. To date, the program has been administered through a partnership between Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, EQB, Department of Commerce, the Great Plains Institute, the University of Minnesota Clean Energy Resource Teams, the League of Minnesota Cities, and three additional non-profits. To support communities, the GreenStep program provides technical assistance and guidance for local action on resilience, climate, and clean energy. EQB staff sits on the Steering Committees for both GreenStep Cities/Tribal Nations and GreenStep Schools programs.



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Progress-to-date

In 2020, The GreenStep Cities program celebrates 10 years with 141 communities involved, representing nearly half of Minnesota's population. The GreenStep Cities staff and partners are currently undergoing a strategic planning effort with communities and partners to determine the pathway forward for the next 10 years of the program. The GreenStep Tribal Nations program is in its fifth year as a pilot program and now has four tribal communities participating. The GreenStep Schools program launched this year and has garnered interest from schools and school districts, communities, non-profits, and businesses.

Next Steps

- Continue GreenStep Cities Strategic Planning Effort
- Conduct GreenStep Schools participation drive
- Expand GreenStep Tribal Nations program

Key Dates

- Fall 2020 – Board input on GreenStep strategic planning

404 Assumption Study

Project Objectives:

The Clean Water Act (CWA) provides states and tribal nations the option of assuming administration of CWA section 404 permit program, which regulates the discharge of dredge or fill material into waters of the United States. In 2019, the MN legislature directed the EQB to “begin to develop and assemble the material required to have the state of Minnesota assume [administration] of section 404 permitting program.” Further, by February 1, 2021, the board must submit a report on the additional funding necessary to secure Section 404 assumption and the additional funding needed to fully implement the state-assumed program to the legislature. This is an opportunity for improved permitting timelines, reduced costs for permit applicants, improved resource management, and increased regulatory consistency.

Progress-to-date

In September of 2019, EQB entered into an interagency agreement with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to manage and implement the project, including subcontracts with the Department of Natural Resources and the Pollution Control Agency. In addition, BWSR has obtained a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to supplement the 2019 legislative funding for preparing the State’s 404 assumption application materials. The state agencies developed a work plan, began researching federal requirements, and coordinated with the EPA.

Next Steps

- Continue coordinating with EPA on all aspects of program development
- Identify potential statute and rule changes
- Complete program structure development
- Upon completion of the items above, determine long-term staffing and funding requirements

Key Dates:

- February 1, 2021 – Distribute report to legislature
- End of year 2021 – Informal target for application completion under EPA grant