

U of Minnesota center releases nation's first long-term framework for statewide water sustainability

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The University of Minnesota's Water Resources Center has authored a first-ever, comprehensive report designed to protect and preserve Minnesota's lakes, rivers and groundwater for the 21st century and beyond. The report is being formally presented to the Minnesota House of Representative's Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Committee today.

The Minnesota Water Sustainability Framework, commissioned by the 2009 Minnesota Legislature, is intended to serve as a legislative roadmap with timelines and benchmarks for future investments in water resources, including the estimated \$86 million a year dedicated for the protection of water as a result of Minnesota's Clean Water, Land and Legacy Act.

The 150-page report is the result of more than 18 months of cross-organizational, interdisciplinary input from more than 250 experts from federal, state, local and tribal governments, private industry, agricultural interests, universities and environmental agencies. The report also includes feedback from more than 5,000 taxpayers who participated in an online survey and statewide listening sessions held in January and February of last year.

In response to its legislative charge, the report addresses a range of water-related issues including drinking water quality, storm water management,

agricultural and industrial water use, surface and groundwater interactions, ecological needs, invasive species and Minnesota's water [infrastructure system](#) -- all within the context of [changing climate](#), demographics and land use and development.

Specific recommendations include:

- A comprehensive survey of Minnesota's ground water resources to understand what's available and how our current withdrawals are impacting the long-term supply;
- An overhaul of the state's water permitting process that would include an electronic database and a method of calculating the [ecological impact](#) of water withdrawals;
- A mandatory statewide plan to decrease nutrient runoff from agricultural sources -- a key to the plan being farmer-led, performance-based Agricultural Management Areas organized along the state's 45 watershed districts that would provide technical resources and incentives;
- Promotion of "green" chemistry through incentives for industry and consumer education and advocacy to prevent future water contamination; Integrated water and land sustainability planning at the watershed level; and
- The restructuring of municipal water pricing to more accurately reflect the ecological, as well as infrastructure, costs of water use.

The project was spearheaded by the Water Resources Center co-director Deborah Swackhamer, a professor in the U of M's School of Public

Health and holder of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute's Charles M. Denny Jr. Chair in Science, Technology and Public Policy.

"The Minnesota Water Sustainability Framework offers Minnesotans a chance to lead the nation in long-term, forward-thinking management of our water resources," says Swackhamer. "More importantly, implementation of the Framework's recommendations will assure the citizens of this state that our abundant water resources will be here for generations upon generations to come. With the Clean Water Fund and current public engagement, we have a rare moment in history to get this right."

The Legislature is expected to vote upon some of the report's recommendations in this legislative session. The report is available at wrc.umn.edu. The [Water](#) Resources Center is affiliated with the University of Minnesota's College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences and University of Minnesota Extension.

Provided by University of Minnesota

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