

Comments to the LMRWD from River Watch, Program of Friends of the Minnesota Valley

Hello, my name is Tom Crawford, Program Director for Friends of the Minnesota Valley River Watch. My organization is dedicated to preparing future scientists and stewards with the skills and knowledge they need to become clean water advocates.

My organization has three recommendations for the Lower Minnesota River Watershed:

1. The LMRWD takes on responsibility as the legal advocate for the well-being of the downstream communities on the county, and state levels.
2. Further expand funding for educational programs related to the hydrology of the Lower Minnesota River and its tributaries.
3. Become the primary advocate for reducing the negative effects of chloride on the Minnesota River, with a specific focus on getting local organizations into the Smart Salting training by the MPCA.

Recommendation 1

Problem: The Minnesota River is considered impaired on a number of water quality metrics including sediment and nitrate. These problems compound the further downstream you travel. All of the communities along the Minnesota River are connected and those downstream are highly impacted by water management practices of communities upstream. Currently there is no entity responsible for representing the welfare and interests of the Minnesota River's downstream communities as they bear the brunt of upstream water management practices that exacerbate damages from pollution and flooding (widespread public and private agricultural drainage for example).

Solution: The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District is positioned to take on the role as legal advocate (or responsible government unit) to work towards mitigating or eliminating the negative impacts on our downstream communities that are clearly caused by the water management practices of upstream entities.

Outcome: The Lower MN River Watershed District works with upstream watershed districts to eliminate and mitigate the downstream impacts of their water management plans, policies, and current practices. If there is a lack of cooperation, litigation may become necessary to ensure the health and well-being of downstream communities are not being ignored and written off.

Recommendation 2

Problem: Within the Minnesota River Valley, there are a number of wonderful conservation organizations focused on the current and future health of Minnesota's waters. There is not, currently, a well funded entity with a focus on educating the LMRWD's students on the importance of water science and conservation. The LMRWD has taken important steps to improve this problem in the short term, however, I would like to see an even greater investment in education in the Lower Minnesota River Region, since water is the most important resource on our planet and it will take the collective awareness and skills of all people in the region to ensure the safety and sustainability of our water resources.\

Solution: This problem can be approached in a few ways. A decentralized model would have the LMRWD's allocate more money towards funding existing educational programs in the region. A centralized model would have the LMRWD expand its own education and outreach programs to include full time educators that can cover the region's schools and grow awareness through community events based around water recreation, changes in the river basin, water science demonstrations, science camps etc.

Outcome: The ideal outcome is that all students in the region experience at least one event hosted by the LMRWD that highlights some combination of water science, river history, personal action, ongoing clean water efforts, careers in the water sector, or possible solutions to problems facing the Minnesota River. We, as a species, rely on water, and we need a strong push to become riverside communities invested in the health of our river.