

# A Farmer's View of TMDLs

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# My Goals for Today

- Present a brief history of TMDLs
- Surface some of the issues that give agriculture “TMDL Heartburn”
- Identify Practical Management Targets “PMTs”
- Discuss opportunities for involvement
- Remind everyone that the ag sector wants to continue improving water quality

# Historic Perspective

- Clean Water Act – established in 1972
  - 1972-1992 Point Sources
    - Industry and Municipalities
  - 1992-2008 Non-Point Sources
    - Designated Use Classification
    - Water Quality Standards
    - Assessment
    - Listing – 303d List of Impaired Waters
    - TMDL Development

# THE TMDL QUIZ

- A. Too Many Darn Lawyers
- B. Talk Much Do Little
- C. Together Minnesotans Developing Legacies
- D. Total Maximum Daily Load

# The TMDL Process

- $TMDL = WLA + LA + RC + MOS$ 
  - TMDL – Total Maximum Daily Load
  - WLA – Waste Load Allocation
  - LA – Load Allocation
  - RC – Reserve Capacity
  - MOS – Margin Of Safety
- TMDL goes to EPA for approval
- TMDL Implementation Plan

# Agriculture's TMDL Heartburn

## Issue #1

- The TMDL process tends to be political
  - Agencies (Governmental and Nongovernmental) are the majority of participants
  - Preconceived positions and/or agendas work against the discovery process
  - Implementation of the wrong remedies would be a waste of resources
  - Have the designated uses and standards for each water body been properly assigned?

# Agriculture's TMDL Heartburn

## Issue #2

- Unrealistic Goals
  - Inadequate accounting for background levels
  - Ignoring the contribution of wildlife to impairments
  - Assuming tilled land is the primary contributor of impairments
  - Proposed actions may have unforeseen negative consequences and/or may not result in the desired improvements

# Farmers Restore and Protect Wetlands in Minnesota

- 480,000 acres of wetlands & associated buffers
  - Estimated to grow to 600,000+ acres by 12/07
  - Two thirds of these enrolled in the last 5 years
  - 1/3 into permanent easements
  - \$18 million out of pocket for CRP wetlands
- MN ranks 3rd in miles of CRP filter and buffer strips along waterways

# Farmers Establish Wildlife Habitat

- The CRP Program across Minnesota
  - 32,000 farms participate
  - Over 1.8 million acres enrolled
- Farmers invest in conservation
  - Over \$70 million out of pocket for CRP
  - Over \$120 million out of pocket for EQIP
  - Continued investments estimated at \$40 million/year

# What is Current Research Revealing

- A large percentage of Suspended Solids is coming from non-surface sources
- The computer models currently being used to predict impacts don't work very well
- Phosphorus, not nitrogen, is the main driver of hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico
- Under certain circumstances e-coli are replicating in surface waters

# PMTs

## “Practical Management Targets”

- Targeted Buffers
- Streambanks and Ditchbanks
- Leveling the Hydrograph
- Tile Drainage

# What Else Can Farmers Do?

- Get involved in the TMDL process
- Support Farm Organizations
- Identify opportunities to apply PMTs
- Consider utilizing emerging technologies

# What we all need

- More cooperation and less complication within the bureaucracy (Local Watershed Districts, MPCA, NRCS, SWCD, FSA, DNR, BWSR, PCA, US F&W, Corps of Engineers, Department of Health, University and Extension...)
- Better cooperation and respect between farm groups, conservation groups, and agencies.
- Patience

# Summary

- TMDLs are a discovery and learning process for all concerned
- TMDLs must be done patiently and correctly if a positive outcome is to be achieved
- There are too many assumptions
- We need more good research
- Agriculture is a willing participant!