COON CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT
Request for Board Action

MEETING DATE: March 9, 2015
AGENDA NUMBER: 18
ITEM: DRAFT North & East Metro Groundwater Management Area Plan

POLICY IMPACT: Discussion
FISCAL IMPACT: Budgeted

REQUEST
Review and approve comments on DRAFT DNR North & East Metro Groundwater Management Area Plan.

BACKGROUND
Groundwater is vital to many aspects of Minnesota’s economy and ecology. Many Minnesota communities rely on groundwater for their drinking water supply.

DNR is responsible for ensuring that the use of groundwater is sustainable and protects ecosystems, does not degrade water quality, and does not limit the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Unfortunately, groundwater is not an unlimited resource. In specific areas of the state, groundwater is at risk of overuse and/or contamination. The DNR has identified the north and east Twin Cities Metropolitan area as a place where use of groundwater may not be sustainable if demand trends continue.

To ensure sustainable use of groundwater in this area, the DNR is proposing to establish the North and East Metro Groundwater Management Area. The purpose of the Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) Plan is to guide DNR actions within the GWMA over the next five years.

DNR is seeking stakeholder feedback on the Draft Plan.

ISSUES/CONCERNS
1. How clearly does the draft plan explain the following?
   a) That DNR is responsible for ensuring the sustainable use of groundwater:
      The draft plan and the presentations have done a good job at emphasizing sustainability of ground water.

   b) That the purpose of the plan is to guide DNR actions in the N&E Metro GWMA:
      The plan could use a little more clarity and certainly emphasis on this point.
c) **What are DNR’s proposed actions in the N&E Metro GWMA:**
The Draft plan is NOT sufficiently clear on DNR’s intended actions. The actions identified in section 5, while well intended, more specificity is needed to narrow the potential interpretations of actions that will have profound and serious consequences on groundwater related natural resources and the beneficial uses provided by groundwater.

d) **What is the definition of sustainable use of groundwater in the N&E Metro GWMA**
It does in concept. The devil is always in the details and there are too few of those.

e) **What are the risks to sustainable use of groundwater in the N&E Metro GWMA**
The plan is NOT sufficiently clear on the risks and consequences of unsustainable ground water use, particularly in the area of conflicts. A table that addressed the risks to beneficial uses and surficial groundwater-dependent natural resources and a graphic(s) showing the consequences of either short term or long term declines in groundwater could be helpful.

f) **What are the groundwater uses in the N&E Metro GWMA**
This description is too general. A table would be helpful that summarizes the complete accounting or provides references to available supporting analysis and reports.

2. **How well do the proposed DNR actions address the risks to sustainable use of groundwater in the N&E Metro GWMA?**
Not well. There is insufficient detail to give adequate direction or guidance to DNR staff, potential collaborators, or stakeholders to constructively address or engage the risks.

3. **Which proposed actions in the draft plan do you think are most important?**
Objective 1, Action 2: Develop and supply sustainability thresholds.

4. **Are there specific actions you think DNR should not include in the plan?**
Objective IV, Action 4: Increasing education and awareness about resolving usage conflicts. This is too broad and not of much practical use.

DNR should get involved in the solution and become familiar with the audiences in this area and the specific level of knowledge and the information and concepts that are needed to constructively address the problems and conflicts that occur here.
5. **Do you think there any important actions missing from the draft plan?**  
   **YES.** Quite a few actions are missing.

   The majority of proposed actions call for fairly specific studies and monitoring. This leaves the more important details and guidance (principals and priorities for decision-making) unaddressed. The plan notes that the GWMA is important and filters out as one of the more important areas in the state. The plan notes that the planning effort is being conducted to help guide DNR actions to address and prevent problems within this area.

6. **Have you identified any factual errors in the draft plan?**  
   **YES.** Page 4-19: Water Use Conflicts states that “There are no water use conflicts in the North and East Metro GWMA.”

   There are really quite a few in the area and they are referred to indirectly throughout the plan (eg. water supply to lakes, wetlands and the habitats of endangered and threatened species). All of these would also be covered under “beneficial uses.”

7. **What additional comments or questions do you have about the draft plan?**  
   **General Comments**
   1. Can’t help but notice that the project advisory team did not include anyone from Anoka County. Bad oversight.

   2. Page 2-7 Figure 2-5: Great figure. This information should also be displayed and differentiated by groundwater source.

   3. Page 2-22 Jurisdictions, governance and planning: The discussion of exceptions borders on being strategically vague. Water supply for lakes, wetlands and in stream flows in Anoka County is a beneficial use of groundwater.

   4. Page 5-1 Objective I, Action 1b,c & d: Excellent. My only question is when? With no implementation plan included it is difficult to not be skeptical given all the “good intentions” included in the plan.

   5. Page 5-3 through 5-4: there is a large unevenness in the attention and detail provided to the actions. Some actions (3b for example) include specific timelines. However, for most actions, the reader is left wondering about the scope of the action, how you plan to achieve what is proposed, and when you hope to accomplish these actions.

   In addition, the proposed actions offered in this section seem to want to offer something new or at least different. However, without at least principals priorities or proposals even healthy skepticism about any real change is difficult to maintain, and concern about new overly restrictive policies begin to dominate the discussion.
6. Page 5-5, Objective II Action 1: In order to scope down the present and future conversations about this plan, its scope and implications, the Department needs to define the following:
   a. Conservation requirements
   b. Water supply plan
   c. Water conservation requirements

7. Page 5-5: Objective II 1.d: The Department indicates that it will partner with local agencies basically in “ensuring” “compliance”. This needs more detail. Perhaps provide an enforcement sequence and the roles and goals those the agencies involved at each step.

8. Page 5-5 Objective II 2: The Department wishes to “improve communication” however, actions (a) through (c) need more detail concerning how you will promote lessons (action a), why you are including BMP data and what you are going to do with it (action b), and what kind of assistance you will be providing (action c).

   The whole section is frustrating. I would offer that none of the other centralized BMP data bases (eg. EPA for stormwater BMPs for instance) has been useful to enough to practitioners to justify the cost of their establishment and maintenance. An alternative would be a standing session at a regular gathering such as the water resource conference held at the UM annually or one of the regular City Engineering and Public Works gatherings. This would be less expensive, draw practitioners that have everything to gain and address the “learn from themselves” principle as well as other adult-learner principles.

9. Pages 5-7 through 5-9: There is noticeable less in these sections. Less detail, fewer actions. Given that the focus of the objectives are prevention and compliance, two of the harder objectives to achieve, this is surprising.

10. Lastly, as presented the plan has a decided tilt towards Washington County and White Bear Lake. A plan such as this is SORELY needed for Anoka Sand Plain.

OPTIONS
1. Accept Comments
2. Modify Comments
3. Reject Comments/ Decide not to Comment

RECOMMENDATION
Review, correct and comment
Direct staff to forward comments to DNR