

# 2014 WATER SUCCESS STORY

## Bureau of Water Quality



### The Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) Permit Program Developed New Guidance

By Julia Riley, Wisconsin DNR

The [Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System \(WPDES\)](#) permit program regulates the discharge of pollutants to waters of the state. The program issues and oversees 643 municipal and 339 industrial individual wastewater permits. Key guidance was developed in 2014 to administer the program and various workshops were offered.

#### Phosphorus Implementation Guidance and Workshops

As our understanding of water quality issues increases, so does the need for additional control of pollutants. Over the past few years, new administrative rules for [reducing phosphorus](#) pollution required the development of guidance for staff on how to include these new rule requirements in WPDES permits.

Revisions to Wisconsin's phosphorus implementation guidance were completed in 2014 and the [public comment](#) period for these revisions is occurring in 2015. The guidance explains options for flexibility, the calculation process for [phosphorus limits](#), how tribal and state [outstanding and exceptional resource waters](#) are affected and phosphorus limitations to protect the Great Lakes. DNR staff continue to work with technical experts in the field to gather additional information to improve phosphorus permitting decisions.

In April 2014, DNR held the second statewide phosphorus summit to bring point source discharg-

es, nonpoint source representatives, County Land and Water Conservation Departments, and state and federal agencies together to discuss the progress made regarding phosphorus implementation and continued opportunities for improvement. The DNR also held regional phosphorus workshops in the Lower Fox, Rock River, Sheboygan and Grant-Platt basins to discuss the [nutrient reduction strategy](#) and phosphorus permit compliance options at a more local level.



*Final clarifier — a wastewater treatment process used to settle solids and associated pollutants such as phosphorus. DNR photo.*

A webinar series was conducted December 2013–April 2014, to inform stakeholders about [water quality trading](#) and [adaptive management](#). The DNR continues to support water quality trading and adaptive management projects, including the Fox River Phosphorus Trading Program which is exploring the potential for water quality trading in the Lower Fox Basin. Visit <http://glc.org/projects/water-quality/foxptrade/> (exit DNR) for more information. Feedback from the 2014 webinars was used to craft another water quality trading and adaptive management webinar series starting January 2015. Registration information is available at [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), enter key words “water quality trading” or “adaptive management” in the search bar.

# WPDES Permit Guidance (continued)

## Watershed Permitting Guidance

A [Total Maximum Daily Load \(TMDL\)](#) is an analysis of the various pollutant sources that contribute to an impairment for a given waterbody. During 2013, WPDES staff developed a number of guidance documents intended to help with the implementation of TMDLs, including those mentioned on page 1 related to water quality trading and adaptive management. Guidance related to implementing TMDLs in the WPDES program was also finalized.

Additional guidance was developed in 2014 to introduce the option of meeting pollutant reductions through watershed permitting — a process that may be used to address more than one point source discharge within a given area, in addition to or instead of permitting each permittee on a discharge-by-discharge basis. Watershed permitting may be used in situations where it could help the department and stakeholders spend their resources where they can do the most good for the environment. New guidance documents are available at: [dnr.wi.gov/topic/tmdls/implementation.html](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/tmdls/implementation.html).

In most cases, the goal of watershed permitting is to facilitate the implementation of TMDLs, trading, adaptive management, surface water monitoring strategies, source water protection or other programs. This permitting approach may be especially appropriate in areas with an active watershed organization whose interests could be served or enhanced by watershed permitting. The ultimate objective of using watershed permitting is to enhance the environmental and cost-effectiveness of water quality management by providing more options, projects

and/or greater flexibility in meeting groundwater or surface water quality standards or other watershed goals. Specific project ideas may be sent to Amanda Minks ([Amanda.Minks@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Amanda.Minks@Wisconsin.gov)) or Kari Fleming ([Kari.Fleming@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Kari.Fleming@Wisconsin.gov)).

## Variations Guidance



*Little Lake Wissota after a summer runoff event. A TMDL was eventually developed to reduce sediment and phosphorus pollutants entering the lake. DNR Photo.*

Procedures for providing variances to water quality standards in WPDES permits were also improved in 2014. In some cases, water quality standards may not be readily attainable, often for economic reasons. In situations where the installation of treatment technology to meet water quality standards would cause substantial and widespread social and economic impacts, a variance to water quality standards can be granted for the duration of the permit term. Variance guidance was improved and forms were streamlined in 2014. Variance guidance is available at: [dnr.wi.gov/topic/wastewater/variances.html](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wastewater/variances.html)

All variance approvals go through DNR and U.S. EPA reviews prior to being included in a WPDES permit. The DNR posted information on its website for permittees to use when submitting variance applications and documenting pollutant source reduction efforts. This helped reduce the need for U.S. EPA to request additional information as part of their review. As a result of these improvements, DNR reduced time spent on processing variances during 2014.

*Watershed Permitting guidance was developed by DNR staff Kari Fleming, Amanda Minks, Dave Argall, Kathy Bartilson, Mike Hammers, Mike Vollrath and Bryan Hartsook. Adaptive Management/Water Quality Trading guidance was developed by Amanda Minks, Kevin Kirsch, Andrew Craig, Mike Hammers, Corinne Billings, Amy Callis and Kari Fleming. Lynn Morrison, Tom Muga and Robin Nyffeler worked on the variance guidance with U.S. EPA staff Robie Anson, Dave Pfeiffer and Gary Prichard.*

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