



## Water Quality Concerns

The Lower Mississippi River Basin abounds with beautiful bluffs, springs, caves and dozens of streams capable of supporting trout, small mouth bass and other popular game fish species. It is a strong recreational magnet for tourists and residents alike as a growing population seeks high-quality outdoor experience. However, decades of monitoring show that both ground water and surface water are being polluted as a result of human activities in both rural and urban areas. Water quality standards for nitrate nitrogen and fecal coliform bacteria are widely exceeded, while sediment from soil erosion damages fish and wildlife habitat from small trout brooks to the mighty Mississippi.

## Why a Basin Alliance?

To an ever-increasing extent, water quality protection and improvement efforts in Minnesota and up and down the Mississippi River are being organized by drainage basin. Public and private funding sources are showing a growing preference for working through basin initiatives rather than supporting a host of separate, uncoordinated efforts.

The reason is simple. To achieve measurable water quality improvements, all significant contributors to water quality problems within the drainage basin need to contribute to the solution. This poses a challenge to local, state and federal agencies responsible for land and water resource management. Rather than working strictly within political boundaries (counties, cities, and states), basin management requires coordinating with other agencies across political boundaries within the hydrologic boundaries of a basin. A basin organization can help to facilitate this coordination.

## Origins of BALMM

The Basin Alliance for the Lower Mississippi in Minnesota (BALMM) was formed in October 1999 to coordinate efforts to protect and improve water quality in the Lower Mississippi River Basin. Alliance members include Soil and Water Conservation District managers and county water planners together with a host of regional, state and federal agencies and organizations. These members decided to coordinate their efforts through an informal, ad-hoc alliance rather than forming an additional unit of regional government.

## Purpose of BALMM

The purpose of BALMM is to create an organized, unified effort in the Lower Mississippi River Basin that will:

1. Make the case to the public, elected officials and funding sources for giving priority attention to water quality restoration and protection in southeastern Minnesota;
2. Establish ongoing coordination of local, state, tribal and federal agencies to plan and implement water quality protection and restoration activities that are economically and environmentally sustainable and reflect local and downstream priorities.

## Accomplishments

Within its first year, BALMM developed the Lower Mississippi River Basin Plan Scoping Document which includes measurable, pollutant-specific water quality goals along with 10 strategies for achieving them. These strategies are being implemented through existing organizations. For example, the nine-county Southeast Minnesota Water Resources Board has secured a federal grant to implement the BALMM feedlot strategy, and the Area 7 Minnesota Association of SWCDs is taking the lead on soil conservation strategy implementation.

## BALMM Strategies

BALMM members put a strong emphasis on implementing land use practices to improve or protect water quality. These strategies include three approaches to managing broad areas – Watershed Management, Aquifer Protection, and Flood Plain Management — along with seven specific land-use strategies that can be implemented as part of one or more of these comprehensive area strategies. These are:

**Perennial Vegetation** Increase acreage of well-managed hay and pastureland, vegetative buffer strips, woodlands, etc. This will increase infiltration and reduce surface runoff following rain and snow melt events.

**Wetland Protection and Restoration** Work with willing landowners to restore wetland functions in critical parts of the landscape.

**Soil Conservation on Row-Crop Land** Promote conservation tillage, contour farming and install needed structures to keep erosion at or below the replacement rate of soil erosion.

**Urban and Rural-Residential Land Management** Reduce impacts from urban stormwater and wastewater, while managing urban development.

**Nutrient and Pesticide Management** Promote optimal use of fertilizer and chemicals to minimize runoff and leaching from farm fields and urban land.

**Animal Feedlot Management** Support implementation of new state feedlot rules to reduce feedlot runoff and improve manure management.

**Aggregate Mining Activities Management** Coordinate permitting and environmental review to minimize potential impacts on ground water and surface water while maintaining local supplies at reasonable cost.

# BALMM Members

Area 7 Minnesota Soil and Water Conservation Districts Association, Bluffland Environmental Watch, Cannon River Watershed Partnership, Dakota County/SWCD, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Prairie Island Indian Community, Southeast Minnesota Water Resources Board, St. Mary's University Resource Studies Center, University of Minnesota Extension, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Whitewater River Watershed Project

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