



# North Shore Management Board

## Wastewater Forum Report

### **Background**

The North Shore Management Board (NSMB) held a Wastewater Forum on May 10<sup>th</sup> in Beaver Bay, MN. The forum was part of the Regional Priority Projects which resulted from the North Shore Management Plan Update which was completed in 2004. The Regional Priority Projects were funded by a grant from Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program.

The 2004 North Shore Management Plan update identified several future issues including proper wastewater management that needed to be addressed to protect the character and health of Lake Superior and its shore lands. Wastewater systems are important in maintaining public health and protecting water supplies. Systems that are failing must be corrected in order to prevent groundwater and surface water pollution.

The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, with a grant from Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program, led a study to determine the state of wastewater management on the North Shore and the potential for increased cooperation among local government units, sanitary districts, and residents in the future. A technical advisory committee and stakeholder workgroup met a number of times in 2005 to discuss these issues. One of the major recommendations to come out of this plan was to facilitate presentations by TAC members or outside experts pertaining to wastewater systems, management, and planning. The forum was developed to educate government officials and staff that have a stake in wastewater issues or water quality. The general public along the North Shore was also invited to attend.

### **Summary**

There were several topics covered but the overlying theme to the Forum was managing individual onsite sewer systems. Government managed onsite systems is a growing trend in Minnesota and can be an effective way to maintain high water quality and to ensure that septic systems are properly operating.

The Forum provided four speakers that all had different experiences with wastewater:

- Sara Christopherson- University of Minnesota Onsite Sewage Treatment Program
- Barb McCarthy- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- Gary Walters- Former Crow Wing County Commissioner
- Ron Swenson- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

*This project was funded in part under the Coastal Zone Management Act, by NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management in conjunction with Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program and by local units of government of the North Shore of Lake Superior*





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Sara Christopherson with the Onsite Sewage Treatment Program is involved with professional training, research, homeowner operation and maintenance, and small community wastewater solutions. Christopherson described what management of onsite systems is and different ways of how it can be done. She explained that properly managed onsite systems can be just as effective as municipal treatment systems. Several examples were given of different management types around the country. Each example has its own elements with differing inspection timeframes, management entities, reporting and record keeping, taxing, fees, and public education. Christopherson went into detail about the Otter Tail Water Management District, which has been successful for 20 years.

Barb McCarthy with the MPCA gave an overview of the proposed new septic system rules from the State of Minnesota. The current standards that are in place have been effective but additional guidance and training is necessary as well as addressing issues with local implementation. Changes include changes to ISTS, MSTS, LGU, and Professional Licensing. McCarthy described other changes other than these rules which include increased enforcement, inventoried wastewater needs, and the new straight-pipe law that inflicts penalties on violators.

Gary Walters and Ron Swenson were both very involved with the Crow Wing County onsite management program. They spoke about initiating the process and identified how they got the interest of residents and elected officials. The most interest came from the residents who realized that it was a cost saving in the long run. This discussion sparked many questions and gave the attendees good reasons why managing onsite works in some areas.

The NSMB invited many groups to the Wastewater Forum including:

- North Shore Management Board Technical Advisory Committee Members
- County Water Planners
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Sanitary District Officials
- ISTS Professionals
- Town Board Members

These groups were especially targeted because wastewater is their area of expertise and discussion on managing wastewater naturally begins with them.

### **Discussion Points**

After the presentations were given a panel discussion and question-and-answer period were held. This was a valuable part of the forum in that it was a time for the attendees time to get questions answered and to ask more specific questions about wastewater



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management. Also the group discussed the North Shore and how more efforts like this could be utilized.

1. Are there any further questions regarding managed onsites, sanitary district formation, new rules, issues we've discussed to this point?
2. Do you feel that onsite management is an option for North Shore wastewater treatment?  
"If you can get elected officials to understand the problem and care enough to do anything."  
"The boundaries will have to be defined."  
"When it comes to developments, who's watching to make sure things are done right, who's responsible?"
3. What are the benefits/concerns you have associated with onsite management?
  1. Enforcement issues "All the information collected from a site assessment should go to the County and the county should enforce 7080 and their ordinance if appropriate."
  2. Holding tank issues
  3. Other  
"The cost of inspections and site assessments is an issue, how do we fund this initial investigation?"  
"Income is an issue. Is there any County support available, funding for low income people for site assessments and repairs, upgrades, and replacements?"
4. Is onsite management politically possible?
  1. Development pressure
  2. Local resident pressure
5. Who should take the lead in wastewater management along the North Shore?  
"We need to do something." "We should start small."
  1. A regional North Shore wastewater district? "We need to keep our options open."
  2. The counties? "Too big."
  3. Some wastewater sub-districts located/focused around sensitive areas?  
"Focus on areas with high densities."
  4. Sanitary Districts? "Maybe we should start a pilot project within an existing Sanitary District and see how it goes."  
"An organized system like a Sanitary District is a good collection point for information and action."



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- Reserving Land: Is it a good idea for a government entity to identify and purchase “good” land that has wastewater treatment potential and hold it in reserve for future development?  
“Septic treatment and disposal is also an issue. So is the cost of land. The County often can’t afford property because values are so high. Location is also an issue, public land for treatment should be close to developments, but that’s where land values are the highest.”
  - Development Issues: What role should wastewater treatment have in development? For example, should future development be limited to areas that have good onsite wastewater treatment potential? Will this limit the need for expensive centralized sewer treatment pipes and plants in the future?
6. What information do you need/want in order to make better decisions regarding wastewater treatment?
1. Soils maps? **Yes**
  2. Development trends? **Not mentioned**
  3. Treatment options? **Yes**
  4. Homeowner information? **Yes, and education**
  5. **Clearly identify the problem and then combine wastewater solutions with solutions for other identified problems such as shoreland management, land use, etc.**
  6. **Need system information on a parcel by parcel basis.**
  7. **Need enforcement by the County and the State.**
  8. **Need Background water quality data**
  9. **Need a data base management system (Met Council & Cass County system’s mentioned)**

7. Where do we go from here?

Other general comments made during the discussion period:

1. There needs to be a clear understanding what the differences are between a Compliance Inspection and a Site Assessment.
2. The concept of a “Lifetime Permit” for a septic system needs to be considered.
3. Energy costs associated with each solution needs to be considered while weighing options.
4. There are funding options available to communities that don’t involve the State Revolving Fund, PFA &/or USDA Rural Development. Using an



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alternative source of funding allows you to do different things; there are not all the rules that must be followed with SRF/USDA funding.

5. The Coastal Zone Management Program does have funding available for site assessments and similar projects along the North Shore and they are interested in wastewater issues and how wastewater impacts the water quality of Lake Superior. If there are already Sanitary Districts in place with the ability to charge customers in order to meet the grant's match contribution requirements then that will facilitate the process.

### **Next Steps**

A strong theme throughout the forum was that starting small is likely the best way to initiate progress on solving wastewater issues on the North Shore. The possibility of a pilot project for managing onsites could be a good starting point. Now that a lot of the elected officials along the North Shore are educated about the different options that are available, they can begin to evaluate how a management entity could be successful. The North Shore Management Board will continue to look into ways to solve wastewater issues and promote the protection of the North Shore of Lake Superior. Specifically, the NSMB will work with the Tofte-Schroeder Sanitary Sewer District as they appeared to be the most interested. The NSMB's exact role with that district's efforts will be determined.



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### List of attendees

Bill Congdon	Crane Lake Wastewater Sanitary District
Dave Adams	Crane Lake Wastewater Sanitary District
Bryan Anderson	Arrowhead Regional Development Commission
Phillip Goutermont	Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District
Tim Musick	North Shore Management Board/ Lakewood Township
Heather Roberts	City of Beaver Bay
Pat Collins	DNR- Coastal Program
Jim Linscheid	Lake County Planning Commission
Wayne Seidel	Lake/Cook SWCDs/Extension
Matt Huddleston	Lake County Planning and Zoning
Jeff Crosby	St. Louis County Health
Clinton Little	DNR- Coastal Program
Paul Bergman	Lake County Commissioner
Eric Appelwick	NTS (private)
Pete Weidman	Ayres Associates (private)
Brandon Kohlts	Western Lake Superior Sanitary District
Marv Holt	Resident
Patricia Taylor	Beaver Bay Township
Rick Anderson	Tofte Schroeder Sanitary Sewer District
Jim Weinzierl	Lake County Planning
Joe Skala	Lake County Planning
Don Runnberg	Lake County
Leo Lahti	Beaver Bay
Marcus D. Huss	Beaver Bay
Nancye Belding	Tofte Schroeder Sanitary Sewer District
Thomas Clifford	NSMB/ Lake County
Mark Russell	Beaver Bay
Laurie Brown	UM Extension
Karen Evens	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Linda Weikman	Two Harbors
Dave Stark	Cook County