

M·N·R·G



Midwest Natural
Resources Group



Background

The Minnesota River drainage basin represents 19 percent of the land mass of Minnesota, and includes small portions of South Dakota and Iowa. It begins near the South Dakota/Minnesota border and flows 333 miles through the riverbed of Glacial River Warren to join the Mississippi River in St. Paul. Three dams in the upper river create extensive headwater lakes, important wildlife management and public hunting areas, and a productive sport fishery. The lower 238 miles of river are free flowing and without significant modifications. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains a nine foot channel in the lower 15 miles of the river for navigational purposes.

More than 90 percent of prairie wetlands in Minnesota have been drained, and many streams have been channelized and dammed. This speeds removal of water and sediments from the land, which in turn, destroys fish spawning sites and limits oxygen available to aquatic life. Cultivation up to the river's edge causes slumping and erosion of river banks. Runoff from livestock feedlots and inadequately treated sewage often contains disease-associated bacteria that pose health risks.

Phosphorus and nitrogen are the two most important nutrients causing problems; both enhance excessive production of aquatic plants and algae. Nitrogen, in the form of ammonia, may accumulate in sediment and become toxic to aquatic organisms. High nitrate levels in drinking water may be dangerous to human health.

Activities

The U.S. Geological Survey has assisted Clean Water Partnership Phase I diagnostic assessments in nine major Minnesota River sub-basins. The assessments, undertaken by local government partnerships, are used to identify priority water quality problems and direct best management practices to specific land areas where further treatment is needed. The assessments are primarily directed at non-point source pollutants.

In 2000, the Natural Resources Conservation Service entered into cooperative agreements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Minnesota Waterfowl Association, and with Ducks Unlimited to expand delivery of the Wetlands Reserve Program. To date, there are 126 easements (7,155 acres) enrolled in the program within the Minnesota River Watershed.

Partners

National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

For More Information

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On-The-Ground Projects

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

- Land acquisition
- Lead Agencies: Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Area

- Land cover classification system
- Lead Agencies: National Park Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Great River Greening, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District and Friends of the Mississippi River