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New adaptive management strategy for Lake Winona result of collaborative effort

ALASD, MPCA and Legislature worked together to develop cost-effective strategy that aims to improve water quality in area lakes

ST. PAUL—The nearly \$1.5 billion bonding bill passed by the Minnesota Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Mark Dayton this spring included \$600,000 for the Alexandria Lake Area Sanitary District (ALASD) to help develop and implement an innovative, flexible approach to addressing water quality concerns in Lake Winona and Lake Agnes. In the next step of the project, ALASD and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) held a meeting Monday where they reached an initial agreement on how to proceed.

“This is a prime example of what can be achieved when groups set aside their differences and work toward a common goal,” said Roger Thalman, chair of ALASD. “We are grateful for everyone who helped make this project a reality. Our area legislators — Sen. Westrom, Sen Ingebrigtsen, Rep. Anderson and Rep. Franson — were instrumental in getting state funding, while the MPCA provided vital support for the legislation and continues to work with us to make sure the project comes to light.”

Prior to developing this new adaptive management and treatment strategy, ALASD was facing an estimated \$14 million in infrastructure upgrades to comply with state water quality standards pertaining to phosphorous in Lake Winona. Scientists and engineers hired by the district expressed concern that even if the district were to spend millions to renovate its water treatment facility, the existing carp infestation would still prevent the standards from being met. Under the new plan, the district hopes to achieve state water quality goals and meet permit requirements by eliminating the carp and reducing phosphorus levels — for a fraction of the cost.

“We are hopeful that this is a win-win solution that will achieve state water quality goals and save millions in taxpayers’ dollars,” Thalman said.

Although funding is approved and an initial agreement has been reached between MPCA and ALASD, there are still technical and logistical issues that must be worked out before the adaptive management strategy can be implemented. However, ALASD and MPCA agree there is a

pathway toward setting the plan in motion and achieving the shared goal of improving water quality in Lake Winona and Lake Agnes.

“We are all excited about this project,” said Assistant MPCA Commissioner Shannon Lotthammer. “The MPCA has been working closely with the district to develop a cost-effective strategy to keep the lakes clean and safe, and we look forward to continue to work together to bring it into fruition.”

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