*This is the second is a series of monthly columns by local water experts. These columns on local rivers and land use are a collaboration between the League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region and other environmental groups in Anoka County. To learn more about the League of Women Voters, check out our website at* [*www.lwvumrr.org*](http://www.lwvumrr.org) *.*

Anoka County Water Resources Report

Like most of Minnesota, Anoka County is blessed with extensive water resources. Our nation’s river, the mighty Mississippi, forms the southern border of Anoka County, stretching for more than 20 miles from Elk River to Minneapolis. The Rum River, starting at Lake Mille Lacs, passes through Anoka County before meeting the Mississippi at Anoka. Two regionally-important watersheds transect the county from east to west – Coon Creek and Rice Creek – entering the Mississippi in Coon Rapids and Fridley, respectively. Folks up in Linwood Township are actually part of the St. Croix drainage, via the Sunrise River. Our wetlands resources, although greater in pre-settlement times, are still extensive. Groundwater underlies all our land, providing drinking water for 94% our citizens.

As rich as our county is in water resources, we have had our problems. Waste disposal practices from the 1940’s through 1980’s have caused groundwater contamination that is still being cleaned up. Population growth in our cities has led to increasing groundwater use, resulting in groundwater depletion in some areas that affects surface water resources – the declining water levels in While Bear Lake in neighboring Ramsey County are an example. And the fact that the City of Minneapolis draws its drinking water from the Mississippi lends importance to how the cities bordering the river manage stormwater runoff.

The soon-to-be-released Anoka County Water Resources Report, prepared by the Anoka County Public Health and Environmental Services Department (PHES), details the work underway to address these problems. The report highlights work by not just the County but also cities, watershed groups, the State of Minnesota, and others. It also includes a discussion of recent developments in water in Anoka County

Our local governments in Anoka County have been forward-thinking in dealing with water problems. In 2016, the Geologic Atlas of Anoka County was completed, with funding from both the state and our local governments. The Geologic Atlas details the varied groundwater resources of our county and provides critical information for our cities as they plan development. Our cities participate in coordinative committees and task forces to deal with issues like groundwater sustainability in specific areas of the County.

Examples:

* Removal of the barrels from the old Waste Disposal Engineering Landfill in Andover. Although the landfill had been closed for decades, the old barrel site was still a source of ground water contamination that was also impacting Coon Creek. More than two thousand barrels were removed from the site in the winter of 2019-20, along with large amounts of contaminated soil. All the wastes were sent to remote facilities for further treatment; the clean up will reduce risk from this site.
* Concerns about the sustainability of water supplies in the eastern part of Anoka County, driven in part by the drop of water level in White Bear Lake, lead to the development of the North and East Metro Groundwater Management Area, which included the cities of Blaine, Centerville, Circle Pines, Columbia Heights, Columbus, Fridley, Hilltop, Lexington, Lino Lakes, and Spring Lake Park in Anoka County. Cities and townships in this area participated with the MN DNR in developing a plan to address the issues that were identified. This work wraps up later in 2020, although monitoring will continue to make sure future problems don’t arise.
* Five cities in the county (Columbus, Coon Rapids, East Bethel, Ramsey, and St. Francis) continue to monitor ground and surface water levels to ensure that groundwater withdrawals for city supply are not impacting surface water and groundwater sustainability. All cities are encouraged to incorporate conservation measures into their water supply planning. The City of Ramsey specifically has encountered limits to its use of local groundwater. Recently, the City constructed additional wells in the only available bedrock aquifer, the Franconia-Ironton-Galesville. Because this is a limited supply, the City has investigated and prepared preliminary plans to draw and process drinking water from the Mississippi River if additional cities could be found to help share costs of a treatment plant.
* Runoff from roads and rooftops is called stormwater, and can carry many contaminants into our lakes, rivers and streams. Our cities have taken the challenge of dealing with runoff seriously, implementing many types of treatment to ensure that the water is improved in quality before being discharged. An example stormwater treatment device can be seen in Anoka at the Rum River boat landing off 2nd Avenue.

The Anoka County Water Resources Report is compiled by the PHES and will be published on their website, as well as on the Know the Flow website (<https://knowtheflow.us/>). The report is updated every five years.

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*Gretchen Sabel is a citizen member of the Anoka County Water Resources Management Task Force. Members of the Task Force include representatives from municipalities, watershed management organizations, State and County agencies, industry, and groups like League of Women Voters, as well as private citizens. The Task Force provides community participation in the preparation of this report. More information on the Task Force is at* <https://knowtheflow.us/directory-of-water-related-agencies-in-anoka-county/#AnokaCountyWaterResourceManagementTaskForce>

PICTURES –WDE BARREL CLEANUP, RAMSEY WATER TOWER, STORMWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM IN ANOKA

(Four articles in the Anoka County Union.)

<https://www.hometownsource.com/abc_newspapers/news/local/plans-to-remove-waste-pit-from-closed-andover-landfill/article_7fb15c72-8d26-5119-b32e-36f359c0d4fd.html>,

<https://www.hometownsource.com/abc_newspapers/community/andover-residents-learn-about-landfill-project/article_e090753c-dac3-11e7-95f0-8b6295d8bed8.html>,

<https://www.hometownsource.com/abc_newspapers/free/last-minute-bill-funds-andover-landfill-cleanup/article_2866a474-46a9-11e9-98a6-d3ceb99ac004.html>

<https://www.hometownsource.com/abc_newspapers/community/andover/gov-walz-marks-cleanup-of-peggy-s-pit-in-andover/article_4c487e5e-af12-11e9-ad94-4fd5ea919891.html>