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State Agency Approves Permit for Improved Wastewater Treatment

ST. PAUL - The Citizens' Board of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency approved a wastewater treatment permit for the Alexandria Lake Area Sanitary District on June 27. The District had been seeking a permit for expansion of its plant capacity, together with wastewater treatment improvements including new filters.

District Board Chairman Paul Nelson said, "The new permit will allow the ALASD to proceed with wastewater facility construction that will continue to assure the protection of waters downstream of the ALASD discharge."

The District has been subject to a phosphorus discharge limit of one milligram per liter for decades. Through negotiations with the Agency the District agreed that under the new permit, the phosphorus limit will be reduced 70% to 0.3 milligrams per liter after a transitional period. The District will also be subject to stricter phosphorus mass limits.

The expansion was opposed by the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and some local citizens, who were concerned about the impacts of excess phosphorus on Lakes Winona, Henry, Agnes and Le Homme Dieu. They requested that the Agency not issue the permit until more thorough environmental review had been completed.

By a seven to one vote, the Agency decided not to pursue further environmental review of the expansion because of phosphorus limits that Agency Commissioner Sheryl Corrigan described as among the most stringent the Agency has ever required. The Agency then voted unanimously to approve the issuance of the wastewater treatment permit.

With plant design approval, the District may commence construction to renovate portions of the existing facility and increase plant capacity to meet the demands of local growth. This construction will also allow the facility to treat to a higher level of pollutant removal and efficiency. Construction bids will be awarded in the fall of 2006 with final completion scheduled for the fall of 2008. The stricter phosphorus limit is not expected to impact the proposed construction design or cost.

Total phosphorus levels in Lakes Winona, Agnes and Henry have steadily declined since the facility began operation in 1977. The Agency anticipates completing work on a total maximum daily load study for Lake Winona by 2009 that will likely require phosphorus reductions from a number of point and nonpoint sources. The Agency board members commended the District for its efforts in reducing nutrient loading to the lakes over the past three decades.

Additional details about the plant and the new permit are available on the MPCA Web site at <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/news/data/index.cfm?PN=1>.