



A Message from the Mayor

Setting a Course for Cleaner Water

I have received a lot of questions about city and county matters, and I believe elected officials should provide candid answers and offer complete transparency regarding activities and decisions made on your behalf. In my first year as mayor, it is clear that residents are very concerned with the quality and health of our water resources. Prior Lake started out as a predominately lakeside recreation-oriented community with abundant water resources. And we want to remain so.

Our name sake and Spring Lake together cover almost 2,000 acres, but this important chain of lakes is just part of a larger watershed that covers 42 square miles, about 70% of the city. As a result, most of the rain that falls here does one of three things: It flows north to Spring Lake and the Upper and Lower Prior chain on its way to the Minnesota River through the Prior Lake outlet channel; it percolates underground and eventually becomes our drinking water; or, as most of it does, it just evaporates, leaving behind the chemicals and other pollutants it picked up as it runs downstream from farm fields, lawns and roadways.

You may be aware that recently Spring Lake and Upper Prior Lake were determined to be impaired water bodies by the DNR. Your city council has unanimously agreed we must focus on cleaning the lakes. This article discusses the meaning of impaired water and what we are doing about it.

Sources of Impairment

A great deal of monitoring and research, much of it done by citizens and staff members right here in Prior Lake, revolves around tracking water quality and understanding our watershed system, which, in turn allows us to answer critical questions about any impairment in that system. This local research, and the work done by the federal, state and regional agencies and the Prior Lake/Spring Lake Watershed District, is showing that everything we do as home and business owners affects our lakes and water supply.

The southern half of our watershed is generally agricultural or rural-residential, highlighting part of the problem: excess nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen running into lakes like Spring Lake, Upper Prior, Pike Lake and Cleary Lake. These nutrients come from fertilizers, pet waste, leaves and grass clippings, soil erosion and more.

The northern part of the watershed is more suburban with businesses and many more miles of road surface, highlighting the urban pollutants and urban hydrology problems. Road salt, sediments and pollutants on our roadways, driveways, sidewalks, rooftops and other hard surfaces, are picked up by quick moving and abundant storm water runoff and deposited in our wetlands, streams and lake system.

Plans For a Positive Outcome

Studies show we need to remove far more pollutants and sediments to make any significant improvement to our water quality. But we can't remove the pollutants without affordable technological innovation and permanent changes to our everyday habits.

That is why the City of Prior Lake is at the forefront of testing and research to reduce sources of water pollution and increase treatment capacity of our water quality system. And as we test, we also pioneer ways to lower costs.

The city's current, two-year street sweeping study, in partnership with the University of Minnesota, will determine what level of street sweeping is most beneficial to water quality. Preliminary results confirm that aggressive sweeping is very effective in removing tons of particulate matter and phosphorous that ended up in the lakes. The goal is to improve water quality by removing sedimentation, pollutants and nutrients at its source. This study comes at no additional cost to our citizens due to a federal grant.

The city's storm water pond system was designed to capture sediments that would degrade our water quality but does nothing to remove dissolved phosphorus and other pollutants. A never-before-tried sand/iron filter system could increase our ponds efficiency by removing 80% of dissolved nutrients before they get into our wetlands, stream and lakes. In February 2010, two ponds in the city's 135-pond system were retrofit with a sand/iron filter and studied by the University of Minnesota and our two local watershed districts. Early results are promising. And in 2011, another federal grant will build on this local research by adding another 12 ponds to optimize the practice, providing another tool to clean up the lakes and save local taxpayers' money.

The city also won an award for its innovative snow and ice control methods. In the past, salt and sand provided safe, drivable roads during the winter but contributed to sedimentation and polluted water. We stopped using sand and are incrementally reducing and/or removing salt by using specialized plow blades and equipment that applies liquid mixtures with sprayers before, during, and sometimes after a snow storm. The program is showing enormous cost savings without undermining safety and has the potential to reverse chloride levels in our lakes.

Conclusion

It's all about getting the most water quality improvement with the limited public dollar, by promoting an efficient, water-quality outcome-based approach.

Right now much of our street sweeping and pond maintenance activities are paid for with grant dollars. The rest is paid through the water quality utility, which is a storm water charge on your water bill. The money maintains the system of pipes, ponds and water quality treatment practices that improve our impaired system, and, in turn, the value of our homes. And we will continue to push the limits of technology and understanding to provide better water quality.

Your city is also leading the charge in an important, ongoing, collaborative effort with the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed, Scott County and surrounding townships and community organizations to establish an aggressive, 10-year plan to turn Spring Lake, Upper and Lower Prior Lake blue again using state and federal funds.

You can help. This fall, take extra care to clean up landscape and leaf debris and take it to the City compost facility, always clean up and dispose of pet waste, keep your vehicles tuned and leak-free and use smart lawn care practices. According to the watershed district, 60-90% of lawns are over fertilized. Send a soil sample to the U of M soil lab. Their report will tell you how much potassium and nitrogen your yard needs. For more information, visit our Water Resources web Page at www.cityofpriorlake.com/WaterResources.shtml.

We all play a part in water quality, whether it be green, mucky, impaired lakes or crystal clear, pristine water.

Sincerely,

Mayor Mike Myser