

January 12, 2024

Debra Shore
Regional Administrator and
Great Lakes National Program Manager
U.S. EPA Region 5
77 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Ms. Shore:

In response to your letter dated November 3, 2023, please find attached Minnesota's collaborative plan to address nitrate contamination in aquifers in southeast Minnesota and ensure that residents (both community water system customers and private well users) have drinking water that meets the Safe Drinking Water Act standard for nitrate. As agencies committed to protecting human health and the environment, and ensuring a thriving agricultural economy, we're committed to working with you to address nitrate pollution in southeast Minnesota.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture are addressing the requests in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) letter in three phases:

- **Phase I: Immediate Response** (January-June 2024) focuses on education and outreach and providing alternate water for vulnerable populations. Phase I work can be done leveraging existing funding.
- **Phase II: Public Health Intervention** (July 2024 forward) focuses on identifying impacted residences, free private well testing and mitigation, and providing public access to the plan's progress and outputs. Phase II work depends on additional funding.
- **Phase III: Long-Term Nitrate Strategies** (long-term) includes reviewing and updating existing strategies, plans, and rules to reduce nitrate inputs into the drinking water aquifers. Aspects of Phase III are currently underway while additional funding is required to fully support and accelerate this work.

As you are aware, an essential condition for healthy people and a healthy economy is equitable access to safe and sufficient drinking water. While most Minnesotans can be confident of the safety of their drinking water, those who rely on private wells have considerably fewer protections and are responsible for testing and treatment. Based on the occurrence of contaminants in Minnesota and the potential burden of morbidity and mortality, MDH recommends that private well owners test for five contaminants: coliform bacteria, nitrate, arsenic, manganese, and lead.

The development of our public health intervention workplan has been guided by several principles. Participation in both the testing and mitigation aspects is voluntary. We will continue to promote testing for all five MDH-recommended contaminants to ensure that private well

water is safe. There should be a range of options for addressing nitrate levels above 10 milligrams per liter and a decision-support tool that considers costs and benefits among other factors. By working through and with the existing TAP-IN Collaborative comprised of local public health and Soil and Water Conservation Districts, local capacity to address drinking water concern will be enhanced and the solutions appropriate to those local contexts.

As mentioned in our previous letter, we appreciate your agency's insight and understanding of nitrate in groundwater in southeast Minnesota and the history of agency efforts to reduce nitrate inputs. Even as we are currently seeking additional state resources to enhance and expand our efforts, we would request that we work together with you to find additional sources of federal funding to support this work. We look forward to refining the proposed strategies and advancing this work in partnership with EPA, tribal partners, other state and local partners, with stakeholders and the petitioners.

Sincerely,

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Attachment: Work Plan: Addressing Nitrate in Southeast Minnesota