



Frequently Asked Questions

Stormwater and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

○ What is stormwater?

Stormwater is rain or melting snow that flows over the ground surface. Stormwater is created when rain or snow falls on roads, driveways, parking lots, rooftops and other paved surfaces that do not allow water to soak into the ground.

As water flows over these surfaces, it picks up pesticides, fertilizers, oils, metals, road salt, sediment, trash, and other pollutants and carries pollution into storm drains.

Most storm drains discharge directly into area lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands. Since most stormwater runoff is not treated before entering waterbodies and wetlands, it is a leading source of water pollution.

○ How does stormwater impact the MPRB system and Minneapolis residents?

Much of the stormwater runoff in Minneapolis ends up discharging into waterbodies managed by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB).

Stormwater is the most significant contributor of pollutants to Minneapolis lakes, streams, creeks and rivers. Stormwater runoff can harm fish and wildlife populations, kill native vegetation and degrade habitat, resulting in unpleasant and unsafe water conditions for recreation.

When water quality at Minneapolis lakes reaches unsafe levels, beaches close. Fewer beach days reduces water-based recreational opportunities for Minneapolis residents and park visitors.

The speed and quantity by which stormwater enters Minneapolis lakes and streams impacts shorelines, causing erosion, and impacts infrastructure, causing damage to bridges and trails. This damage is costly to fix and diminishes recreational use of the park system.

○ Who is responsible for stormwater oversight / management?

The Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) was passed in the 1970s, with an initial focus on addressing the source of water pollution. The sources - often industrial or municipal discharges through wastewater pipes - were addressed rapidly.

In the 1990s, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began to apply the requirements of the CWA to stormwater runoff. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) manages the federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater program that regulates municipal stormwater discharges.

Today, owners and operators of large storm drainage systems, like Minneapolis and MPRB, are required to comply with design, construction, and maintenance requirements set by the MPCA via a permit. This permit is designed to regulate stormwater runoff into local surface waters to reduce the impacts of pollution.

The City of Minneapolis and MPRB are co-signers of the NPDES permit. MPRB is part of the permit since the MPRB owns parts of the storm sewer system that collects stormwater within the 7,059 acres of MPRB-managed parkland and water. There are three variations of ownership and management of stormwater infrastructure inside of Minneapolis parks:

- pipes that carry stormwater collected on parkland only
- pipes that carry water collected within the city of Minneapolis
- pipes that carry both park and city generated water

○ **What are MPRB's responsibilities in the NPDES permit?**

The City of Minneapolis and MPRB use the Stormwater Management Program to meet the requirements of the NPDES permit. The City is identified in the Stormwater Management Program as responsible for managing the storm drain system; the MPRB, as property owner of nearly all shoreline of Minneapolis' 13 lakes and four waterways, is identified as responsible for those shorelines and for lake management. MPRB and City staff collaborate on multiple shared responsibilities of the work, such as creation, assessment, modification and annual reporting of a stormwater management program, pollution prevention and "good housekeeping." Even with this collaboration, the MPRB does not have dedicated funds to maintain and operate stormwater infrastructure on parkland that is not managed by the City.

○ **How are the responsibilities in the NPDES permit funded?**

The work necessary to comply with the NPDES permit is funded through stormwater management utility fees. The City collects these fees from Minneapolis property owners through their utility bills. The monthly fees are based on Equivalent Stormwater Units (ESUs). The 2023 rate for one ESU is \$14.45, and the average single family residential home pays a rate of one ESU/month.

All properties within City limits (with very few exceptions) pay a monthly stormwater management utility fee. The MPRB currently pays about \$450,000 annually in these fees.

The cost for stormwater and water quality related work performed by MPRB staff is funded through the MPRB's General Fund, which also funds park programming, building and playground improvements, trails and other park amenities. The City of Minneapolis currently reimburses the MPRB for monitoring and education work associated with the NPDES permit from its stormwater management utility fees.

In 2023, the City of Minneapolis will collect \$45.2 million in ESU revenue. The City has used those fees and fund balances to fund larger future projects (e.g., the Central City Tunnel Project) and has also bonded other large projects.

○ **What does the City's current reimbursement amount allow the MPRB to do to address stormwater runoff in our waterbodies?**

The City of Minneapolis currently reimburses the MPRB approximately \$700,000 annually for monitoring and education work associated with the NPDES permit. The reimbursement pays for all or some of:

- Stormwater Monitoring Program (100% reimbursed)
- Lake Monitoring Program (75% reimbursed)
- Stormwater Education Program (100% reimbursed)

○ **With dedicated funding, what actions can the MPRB take to address stormwater runoff and water quality?**

MPRB's stormwater system is in critical need of investment to prevent short- and long-term issues and protect Minneapolis lakes and creeks and water-based recreation. Additional funding would allow:

- Management of MPRB's portion of the storm sewer system
- Management of MPRB's stormwater best management practices (BMPs)
- Fund \$2-3 million annually for a range of projects: capital infrastructure, water quality improvements for recreation, and shoreline and streambank stabilization

○ **What can happen if there is no additional investment in the MPRB's stormwater management?**

Without additional investments, MPRB's stormwater infrastructure will continue to fail. Broken pipes can lead to flooded parkland and damaged paths and trails. Poorly managed stormwater can erode soil and create gullies; eroded soils can enter waterbodies and damage habitat. It also can negatively impact recreational use and aesthetics of parkland.

Additionally, MPRB BMPs installed to protect water quality are aging and will fail to capture pollution if they are not properly maintained. Foregoing this work will lead to reduced water clarity, increased algae blooms and increased bacteria in waterbodies, causing more beach closures. Aquatic vegetation and wildlife will also be harmed.

○ **How does the MPRB propose funding additional investments in water quality?**

Stormwater utilities are used throughout the nation to manage stormwater systems and improve water resources. To protect and improve water quality, and to manage stormwater infrastructure, the MPRB dedicated funding.

The MPRB recommends increasing the existing stormwater utility fees that property owners are already paying. These additional funds would be dedicated to managing the MPRB's stormwater system and funding water quality improvement efforts to help to keep our lakes, creeks, and other waterbodies clean and usable for water recreation.

○ **Do residents support the MPRB receiving more funds to protect Minneapolis' lakes, rivers and streams?**

Yes. In a 2022 statistically valid survey of Minneapolis residents, 74% said they would support the MPRB receiving additional fees ranging from .50 to \$2 per household per month.

Questions?

Contact:

Al Bangoura, Superintendent
abangoura@minneapolisparcs.org 612-230-6404

Jennifer Ringold, Deputy Superintendent
jringold@minneapolisparcs.org 612-230-6464