

Citizen Update

A Step Forward for Protecting Water Resources

We are facing a critical water crisis that demands immediate and comprehensive action. Water is sacred and belongs to everyone, yet Minnesota's current system fails to protect this vital resource for all. Despite decreasing overall water availability, the permitting process for large users has remained mostly unchanged, resulting in significant challenges for small farmers, wild ricers, leech harvesters, and minnow producers.

In May 2023, the Reservation Business Committee (RBC) took a pivotal step by passing an ordinance that requires large water users within five miles of the reservation to obtain a permit from the White Earth Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Today, the RBC has expanded our efforts, directing the White Earth DNR to take further action.

New Measures Passed by RBC

Increase Enforcement of New Water Source Permitting

We recognize that new wells and pumps pose significant risks to our water supply. To ensure that existing problems are not compounded, the RBC directs the White Earth DNR to enforce the WEN ordinance requiring a tribal permit for new wells or pumps, invest in ongoing scientific research, and engage more actively in state processes for high-capacity water permits.

Expand White Earth DNR Regulatory Enforcement Capacity

Effective protection of our water resources requires enhanced monitoring, analysis, and enforcement. The RBC directs the White Earth DNR to increase these capacities and seek funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to support expanded water management efforts.

Expand Scientific Research

To ensure a fair and equitable water permitting process, the RBC directs the White Earth DNR to increase investment in research and analysis, develop projects on aquifers and groundwater flow, and produce a final report and recommendations by 2026. As this research continues, enforcement of the May 2023 water ordinance regulations will be suspended for existing permitted water sources.

Expand to Regional Approach

Water issues extend beyond our immediate area, requiring a broader regional focus. The RBC has eliminated the five-mile radius limitation and directed White Earth DNR to establish the White Earth Regional Water Taskforce in collaboration with various agencies and stakeholders, including the Red River Basin Commission, the Mississippi River Headwaters Basin Commission, Minnesota DNR, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This task force will focus on the seven-county region around the White Earth Reservation to identify needs, conduct research, and develop regulatory solutions.

Expand Focus to Include Water Quality

Protecting water sources requires attention to both quantity and quality. The RBC directs the White Earth DNR to work with the Regional Taskforce to expand research on water quality, develop new recommendations for water quality protection measures, and collaborate with stakeholders to develop water testing clinics.

We are committed to protecting our sacred water resources and ensuring their availability and quality for all. These measures represent a comprehensive approach to addressing the water crisis and safeguarding our community's future.