DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Great Lakes- St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact

Water Conservation and Efficiency Program Annual Assessment



State of Minnesota, November 23, 2026

Lead agency and contacts

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Ecological and Water Resources Division (EWR) is the lead agency responsible for Minnesota's water quantity management and water conservation and efficiency programs. The primary contact is DNR Assistant Commissioner Katie Smith (email: katie.smith@state.mn.us, phone: 651-342-9227). Additional contacts are:

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Status of Minnesota's water conservation and efficiency goals and objectives consistent with Basin-wide goals and objectives

Compact § 4.2.2 calls for each state to develop goals and objectives. Minnesota has adopted the Compact's goals and the Council's objectives, satisfying this aspect of Compact § 4.2.2.

Water conservation goals in Compact Section 4.2.1 have been adopted in Minnesota Statutes section 103G.801. These goals include:

1. Ensuring improvement of the waters and water-dependent natural resources.
2. Protecting and restoring the hydrologic and ecosystem integrity of the Basin.
3. Retaining the quantity of surface water and groundwater in the Basin.
4. Ensuring sustainable use of waters of the Basin.
5. Promoting the efficiency of use and reducing losses and waste of water.

Water conservation objectives in Compact Section 4.2.1 have been adopted in Minnesota policy. These objectives include:

1. Guiding programs toward long-term sustainable water use.
2. Adopting and implementing supply and demand management to promote efficient use and conservation of water resources.
3. Improving monitoring and standardizing data reporting among state and provincial water conservation and efficiency programs.
4. Developing science, technology and research.
5. Developing educational programs and information-sharing for all water users.

Minnesota emphasizes water conservation through its current regulatory authority and in strategic planning. The laws cited and programs described below provide a framework for sustainable water management that promotes efficient use of the state's water resources. Statewide programs that monitor and protect water resources are managed by several Minnesota agencies, including the DNR, the Pollution Control Agency, the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture, and the Board of Water and Soil Resources. The Metropolitan Council also plays a role in water resources management within the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The DNR applies an adaptive approach to its water management, so that expanding scientific knowledge and improvements in technology lead to improvements in natural resource use and protection.

Legal basis for program

Citations to implementing laws, regulations and policies.

The statutes and rules listed below are available at http://www.leg.state.mn.us

Primary

- *Minnesota Statutes*, chapter 103A. Water Policy and Information
- *Minnesota Statutes*, chapter 103G. Waters of the State (primary regulatory statute)
- *Minnesota Statutes*, chapter 103G.271 Appropriation and Use of Water
- *Minnesota Statutes*, section 103G.801, Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact
- *Minnesota Rules*, parts 6115.0600 – parts 6115.0600 – 6115.0810. Water Appropriations and Use Permits and Use Management Plans

Related

- *Minnesota Statutes*, section 103B. Water Planning and Project Implementation
- *Minnesota Statutes*, section 103F. Protection of Water Resources
- *Minnesota Statutes*, chapter 103H. Groundwater Protection
- *Minnesota Statutes*, chapter 103I. Wells, Borings and Underground Uses
- *Minnesota Statutes*, section 116B.01 Environmental Rights
- *Minnesota Statutes*, chapter 116D. Environmental Policy

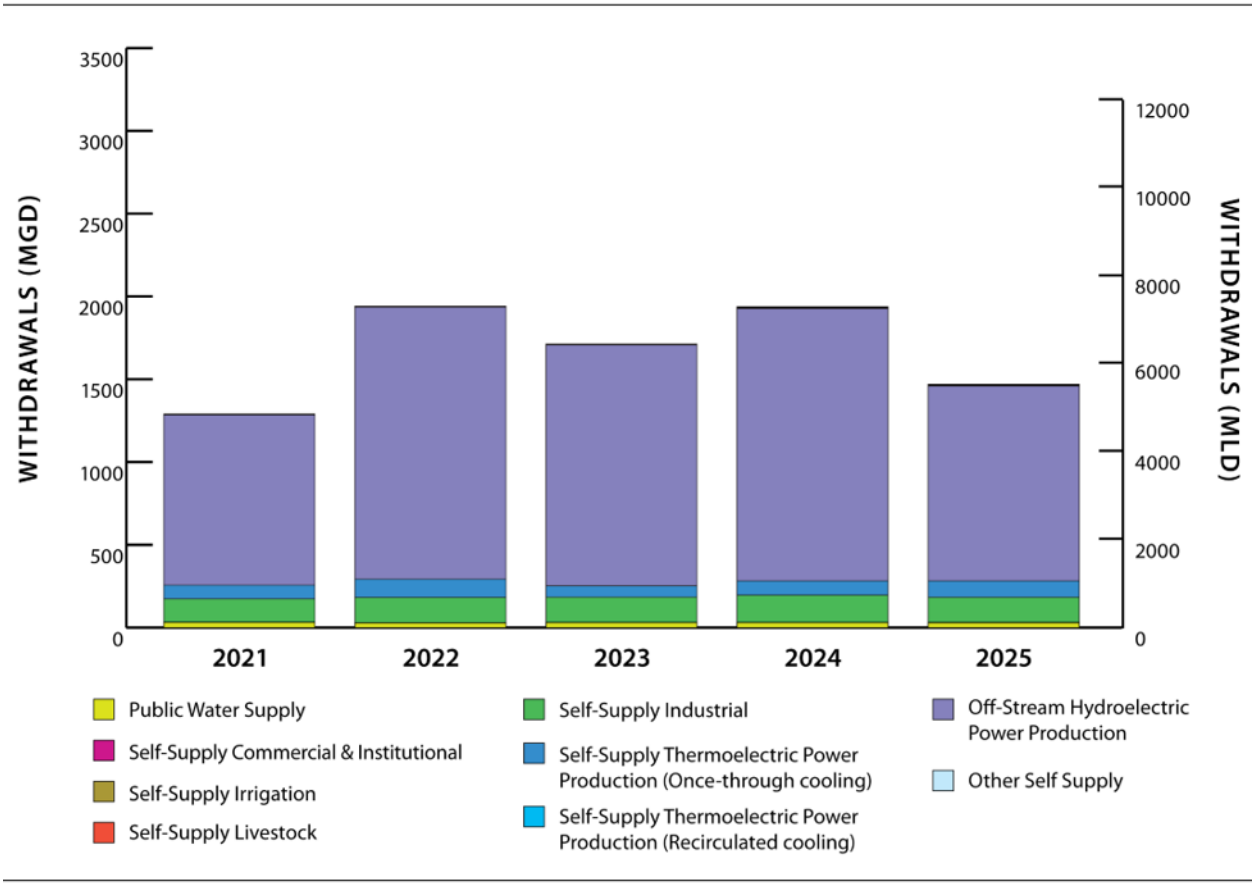
Summary of program elements, both mandatory and voluntary

Since 2015, the DNR has had a water conservation consultant, tasked with developing and implementing the statewide water conservation program consistent with laws, the Great Lakes Compact, policies and management objectives. Minnesota's water conservation program is integrated with permitting and planning requirements.

State of water use and efficiency in Minnesota's Lake Superior Basin

- At the time of this report, there are 141 active water appropriations in Minnesota's Lake Superior Basin (5 more than at the time of the 2025 report).
- All facilities complied with requirement to report water use.
- Total water withdrawals from the Basin (excluding in-stream hydroelectric water use) were 1,469 MGD in 2025. This represented a 24% decrease from 2024 water use (1,939 MGD).
    - 1,176 MGD was used for off-stream hydroelectric power production, the sector with greatest withdrawals.
        - This sector accounted for 85% of Minnesota's total withdrawal.
        - This is a 28% decrease in withdrawals from 2024 (1,644 MGD), due to normal fluctuations.
    - 100 MGD was used for thermoelectric power production (once-through cooling).
        - This was a 13% increase from the 87 MGD used in 2024.
        - The increase is largely due to additional production at one energy-generating facility.
    - 151 MGD was used for self-supply industrial activities, a decrease of 2.5% from 2024 (155 MGD).
- Consumptive use was 20 MGD.

    - This was the same consumptive use as 2024.
    - 15 MGD of this was for industrial purposes.
- Total interbasin diversions were 11 MGD and were exclusively for self-supply industrial activities.
- The makeup of the total withdrawals were:
    - Over 96% from surface water in the Basin other than Lake Superior (mainly due to off-stream hydroelectric power production along the St. Louis River).
    - Just under 4% directly from Lake Superior.
    - Less than 0.1% from groundwater.



Minnesota water withdrawals by sector over the past five years (excluding in-stream hydroelectric water use).

Many efforts are underway in all levels of government, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, business and industrial sectors, and at the grassroots level to guide Minnesota toward long-term sustainable water use. As shown below, Minnesota's program is consistent with the regional objectives in the promotion of environmentally sound and economically feasible water conservation measures.

Minnesota's work toward Compact objectives

Compact's water conservation and efficiency objectives	Summary of Minnesota's 2026 efforts
1. Guide programs toward long-term sustainable water use.	• Encouraged water appropriators to report water conservation efforts in addition their mandatory use reporting • Developed water supply plan templates to address demand reduction and water efficiency needs, explore scenarios for efficiency and demand reduction to meet the needs of future growth, and encourage water suppliers to plan and budget for future actions • Began working on compliance assistance strategies for public water suppliers serving over 1,000 people • Continued to promote and ensure sustainable use as part of water appropriation permit application and amendment reviews

2. Adopt and implement supply and demand management to promote efficient use and conservation of water resources.	• Local Water Supply Planning Data updates:
	  • Launched new water supply planning template to allow easier access to submitted plan data, allowing the DNR to revisit the proposed actions for conservation
	  • Included questions designed to prompt conservation plans that are actionable and include measures that appropriators will be able to implement to achieve demand reduction
	• Presented at multiple conferences and meetings about local water supply planning, the importance of conservation, and implementing a successful demand reduction program
	• Began hiring regional compliance hydrologists to improve compliance and boost technical assistance work

3. Improve monitoring and standardize data reporting within water conservation and efficiency programs.	• Completed ninth year of water conservation and efficiency reporting for cities serving over 1,000 people • Continued assessing opportunities to improve conservation data collection, management and analysis, including a legislative proposal to standardize language for reporting water losses • Continued soliciting feedback from stakeholders regarding improvements to the current Water Conservation Reporting System • Continued work to improve data portability between state agencies • Continued providing robust monitoring reports
4. Develop science, technology and research.	• 2025 Minnesota Technical Assistance Program intern program sponsored 10 young professionals to work on water conservation or wastewater loading reduction projects in various industries, resulting in suggestions that would reduce use by 141 MGY if implemented • Continued research and implementation of activities related to water quality, quantity, and availability through grants from Minnesota's Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota

	• Lake Index of Biological Integrity Assessment Tool rates lakes to help managers target protection and restoration efforts
5. Develop education programs and information-sharing for all water users.	• Educated Minnesotans through Nature-Based Shoreline Protection demonstration sites on how to protect shorelines from coastal erosion • "We Are Water," a multiagency traveling exhibit, continued touring the state • Began developing a water conservation communications plan • Sustainable Damage Playbook for Local Officials outlines responsibilities and resources after a natural disaster • Water Equity and Climate Resilience learning toolkit available for utility leaders • Educational programming offered through Project WET

Description of Minnesota's conservation and efficiency program implementation timeline and status

Minnesota continues to explore opportunities to expand our water conservation efforts, empower and inspire people to save water, and seek new ways to conserve water in all sectors of society. Water conservation in Minnesota is built on a holistic foundation of knowledge about comprehensive water use. The DNR partners with other organizations to promote sustainable water use and provide clear information about how much water we have, how much water is used, and how to safeguard surface and groundwater availability.

The state has water conservation measures that are currently in place and integrated into the water appropriations permit program. Ten-year water supply plans submitted between 2016-2019 include requirements for water conservation, monitoring and management standards for public water suppliers serving more than 1,000 people. Since 2015, the state has required public water suppliers serving over 1,000 people to implement demand reduction measures including either a conservation rate structure or a uniform rate structure that encourages conservation. The newly developed updated water supply plan template includes a greater focus on planning for investment in conservation and efficiency strategies as well as allowing for better goal tracking through accessible data.

Minnesota water conservation and efficiency program strategies

Strategies for municipal water suppliers serving over 1,000 people

- Expand water loss control training
- Encourage improved metering and advanced metering infrastructure (AMI)
- Investigate time-based rates during peak demand periods
- Support additional building codes and irrigation ordinances that promote demand reduction
- Promote education and behavioral water conservation strategies

Strategies for the commercial, industrial and institutional sector

- Advocate for advance metering and additional sub-metering
- Encourage technology upgrades to most water-efficient technology

- Support building and water management improvements to capture water efficiency opportunities
- Encourage adoption of commercial building water BMPs and benchmarking
- Work with partners to expand and improve water efficiency and water reuse options
- Encourage integration of water storage and demand response where practical
- Encourage early coordination by potential new large water users to ensure sustainable site selection and design that supports conservation

Strategies for smaller public water suppliers

- Participate in the Water Conservation Reporting System
- Expand Water Loss Control education and outreach
- Provide water conservation educational resources
- Revise the Statewide Drought Plan to better prepare and assist small communities

Strategies for agriculture, irrigation and other sectors

- Participate in the Water Conservation Reporting System
- Promote agricultural water efficiency best practices
- Promote golf course, sod production, and other irrigation efficiency practices and water reuse
- Encourage technology upgrades to most water-efficient technology
- Revise the Statewide Drought Plan to better prepare and assist the agricultural sector
- Proactively engage with Tribal Nations regarding water appropriation permit applications from non-Tribal entities within reservation boundaries

Strategies for local planning, collaboration and action

- Coordinate and promote water efficiency, including showcasing best practices
- Continue defining thresholds for areas experiencing natural resource impacts from water appropriation
- Leverage sources of funding for implementation
- Resilience Planning, Adaptation Training, and increased understanding of the implications of the Water-Energy Nexus and climate change
- Advance local water conservation planning and implementation
- Pursue near-term actions at the local level through rebate programs, etc.

Minnesota has developed and implemented a water conservation and efficiency program consistent with and in support of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Conservation and Efficiency Objectives. Minnesota is now improving the program, increasing accountability for water appropriators, and developing additional voluntary efforts and assistance options for public water suppliers.