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OUR VIEW: WATER QUALITY

River cleanup relies on agriculture's efforts

Environmental regulators are rightly getting tougher on Minnesota River pollution, and meeting environmental standards will require residents, businesses and farmers to make difficult changes to their way of life.

A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency report released last week made a significant but perhaps not shocking conclusion that sediment in the Minnesota River and the Greater Blue Earth River must be reduced by 50 percent to meet environmental standards.

Why it matters

Federal environmental law will require a 50 percent reduction in sediment entering the Minnesota River.

And much of that reduction must come from agriculture as it makes up 80 percent of the land in the 10 million acre Minnesota River basin. But runoff pollution from farmland is considered a "nonpoint" source of pollution, and therefore not subject to specific federal or state pollution regulation.

Thus farmer participation in reducing runoff is mostly voluntary and therefore can be problematic. While some farmers have been taking significant action to reduce runoff from their fields, their efforts are not enough. There is still far too much sediment flowing into the rivers.

The solutions are known. Runoff can be greatly reduced with more cover crops. Planting cover crops in the fall after harvest would go a long way to reducing sediment and nutrients flowing into rivers during the heavy spring melting period in Minnesota.

Cover crops also enrich the soil with nitrogen with the benefit of reducing costs. Cover crops act as a natural way to slow runoff and enhance absorption of even heavy rainfall.

The risks of using cover crops include possible soil disease and pests, but USDA experts suggest those risks can be managed by being vigilant and using the appropriate cover crop for the appropriate land type. The benefits of cover crops outweigh the risks.

Farmers say cover crops are difficult to manage in Minnesota because the short growing season makes it difficult to plant them in the fall. That sounds like a hurdle but not a roadblock.

And cost should not be a factor. In most cases cover crops can be planted for \$3 to \$5 per acre, and the Blue Earth County Soil and Water Conservation District will pay 50 percent to 75 percent of the cost of putting in cover crops.

Yet, less than 10 percent of farmers in Blue Earth County plant cover crops, according to estimates by the soil conservation district.

Cities, businesses and residents need to do their part. That means cities must require developers to build adequate holding ponds, and reduce surface runoff with rain gardens or other strategies. Residents need to limit their use of pesticides that can end up in rivers. Counties may need to restrict further the building of homes along rivers where erosion is sure to occur.

The recent report will be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency as part of the mandate for states to come up with water quality plans. The public will be able to comment on the plan and suggest changes.

But the facts are clear. The Minnesota River, the Blue Earth River and their tributaries are getting worse. Weather patterns have been proven to be more extreme with heavier rainfalls. That spells disaster for the Minnesota River if we don't act with some urgency.

We urge farmers to work with their soil conservation district to plant cover crops. These are simple and relatively inexpensive steps to improve river water quality. To do nothing is to risk the land and the water.

More Information

To find out about cover crops contact:

Blue Earth County Soil and Water Conservation District

Phone: 345-4744

Website: <http://blueearthswcd.org/>

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The Free Press

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First Amendment threats thwarted

MNSPJ and others fought for the public's right to know

After completing a year as the president of the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists, I find First Amendment freedoms remain under fire from numerous directions in Minnesota and elsewhere.

My year as president started with a bang last August when MNSPJ and the Committee to Defend the First Amendment found ourselves holding a press conference to challenge a city of Minneapolis investigation against those who leaked and published an embarrassing report on the use of a deadly drug.

Our groups petitioned the city of Minneapolis and Mayor Jacob Frye to end an ill-advised investigation into the leaking of a report on the dangerous drug ketamine that was being given to people without their knowledge in police actions and emergencies.

A great story by Andy Mannix of the Star Tribune uncovered the mess.

The result of our petition was the investigation into the leaker was quietly dropped.

In November, MNSPJ challenged the public officials blocking reporters from their Twitter accounts. We filed a request with the Minnesota Data Practices Office asking if this blocking violates the Data Practices Act or

other First Amendment rights. From our reading it did.

The Data Practices office agreed to "negotiate" or "communicate" our concerns to the chief violator in this case, Minneapolis city councilor Alondra Cano.

In March, we issued a statement calling on all public officials to cease and desist from blocking reporters on social media. Our case was made stronger when a federal appeals court case in June ruled President Donald Trump violated First Amendment freedoms by blocking people from what he said was a personal Twitter account.

The city of Minneapolis in response to our petition approved a new policy for employees and councilmembers in using social media that direct them to city-maintained accounts for city business and prohibits them from blocking people. But Cano told the Star Tribune she was not planning to unblock reporters from her "personal" Twitter account saying the new city policy did not apply.

In October, MNSPJ challenged the secrecy policy of St. Louis County as it denied the Star Tribune access to requested emails for commissioner and congressional candidate Pete Stauber. St. Louis County continued its denials in spite of a ruling from the Data Practices office that said the emails were public. A judge finally overturned the county after a DFL lawsuit.

In March, MNSPJ joined with other media partners in challenging

proposed severe restrictions by a judge on viewing of the public records in open court of the murder trial of Mohamed Noor, the Minneapolis police officer convicted of killing a woman attempting to report a crime. The judge eventually ruled in favor of disclosure noting she had to follow the law like everyone else, even though she didn't like it.

At the end of the trial, the judge proposed restricting trial information further, but again, relented when challenged by media organizations.

MNSPJ was part of another media coalition that fought for the release of the Jacob Wetterling investigative file, which was finally released last September. Attorneys for the Wetterlings attempted to call into question Minnesota law that has long required investigative files be public once a case is closed.

In less than one year there were half a dozen significant threats to First Amendment freedoms in Minnesota and dozens more that didn't rise to the level of a legal response.

From my 30 years as a journalist, I know there are hundreds of challenges newspapers large and small make every year for public records from public bodies who don't think the public has a right to know.

There will likely be no shortage of threats to First Amendment freedoms going forward. We can only hope there will be no shortage of journalists challenging those threats.

Joe Spear is the editor of The Free Press. Contact him at 344-6382 or at jspear@mankatofreepress.com. Follow on Twitter @jfspear.

Trump foreign policy is about ego

Benjamin Netanyahu said in 1992 that Iran was three to five years away from a nuclear weapon. That was 27 years ago, and Iran still has not tested nukes. But hyping the Iran threat has become a cottage industry for the Israel lobby, which could lead to miscalculation and war.

As John Mearsheimer wrote in The New York Times, "Although there has not yet been a significant military clash, the United States has effectively declared war on Iran." The Stuxnet computer worm that destroyed hundreds of Iran's nuclear-related centrifuges was an act of cyberwar.

Despite this background, Iran signed the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (China, United States, United Kingdom, France and Russia) plus Germany and the EU, agreeing not to pursue nuclear weapons for 10 years.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the other participants agreed that Iran was observing the agreement. Iran continues to support terrorism abroad, but it has not invaded another country for 100 years. It also assisted the U.S. counterterrorism effort after 9/11, offering information on al Qaeda members fleeing Afghanistan. The U.S. and Israel, in contrast, have attacked nine Muslim countries.

Trump nonetheless abrogated the nuclear agreement and re-imposed sanctions, which according to the BBC, he did principally to spite Obama.

In response, Iran exceeded the 300 kilogram uranium stockpile limit imposed by the JCPOA.

It also announced that it would further enrich uranium, and would restart its Arak reactor, probably to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

Iran has not built a bomb up to now, possibly because of fear that Sunni states like Saudi Arabia would follow suit. Also, any nuclear attack on a U.S. ally would provoke overwhelming retaliation, which makes a nuclear weapon more status symbol than usable weapon.

Meanwhile, to defend Israel, the U.S. provides some \$4 billion in assistance every year, more than \$10 million per day, which frees Israel to offer the universal health care and heavily subsidized college education that the U.S. can't afford.

Trump's policy towards North Korea is as incoherent as his Iran policy. He vowed over 30 months ago to solve the North Korea nuclear problem. His stated goal was complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization.

The only results of Trump's photo ops with Kim Jong-un have been broken promises on missile testing and North Korea's nuclear stockpile. North Korea hasn't given up a single nuclear weapon, nor even provided an inventory of what weapons they have; it has conducted missile tests, which threaten allies, as recently as July 24. American and South Korean intelligence agencies believe North Korea continues to produce uranium.

What Trump has done is to legitimize Kim Jong-un on the international stage and to embarrass himself with his imbecilic statements about "falling in love" with the Korean mass-murderer.

The reality is that North Korea is very unlikely to denuclearize, as previous agreements have shown:

- 1985: North Korea signed the Nuclear NonProliferation Treaty, fore-swearing nuclear weapons.

- 1992: North Korea signed an agreement to halt its nuclear program, and not to "possess nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities."

- 1994: North Korea signed the Agreed Framework to halt its nuclear program.

- 1999: North Korea signed an agreement to end missile tests.

- 2005: North Korea signed another agreement to halt its nuclear program.

- 2007: North Korea signed an agreement to halt its nuclear program for the fourth time.

North Korea has violated every one of those agreements. Concurrently, the North has never stopped its military provocations against the South, including sinking ROKS Cheonan on March 26, 2010, killing 46, and has a history of sending sabotage teams into South Korea.

It's unlikely Trump knows this history of failure; his real agenda is self-promotion, not substance. Unlike most leaders, who make decisions based on national interests, Trump makes decisions based on personal interests and whoever flatters him.

It's no surprise that he has no foreign policy accomplishments; he threatened KJU with fire and fury, and got nothing but photo ops for his brinksmanship. Predictably, he recommended KJU for a Nobel Peace Prize and then lobbied Japan to nominate him.

Typical of Trump's egocentric approach, he did a cosmetic renegotiation of NAFTA and claimed a personal triumph, although Congress refuses to approve it.

After he withdrew from TPP, a trading partnership that had excluded China, the other nations invited China to join, another Trump "victory." He rejected the Paris Climate Accord because he apparently confuses climate change with daily weather changes.

He is now talking about negotiating a virtual rewrite of the JCPOA with Iran but with his name on it.

Narcissism as policy.
Tom Maertens served as White House National Security Council director.



JOE SPEAR
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TOM MAERTENS
My View