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DNR Is Predicting Rapid Improvement In Water Quality

Overall water quality in Wisconsin is improving gradually, but rapid improvement is expected within the next decade, the State Natural Resources Department says.

New federal and state programs will aid in obtaining that goal, the DNR said.

In its 300-page annual water quality report to Congress, the DNR said all but 305 miles of Wisconsin's 3,360 miles of major rivers already meet national water quality standards that must be attained by 1983.

Of the 703 major industrial wastewater dischargers in the state, 411 appear to be meeting effluent limitations set for 1977, the DNR said.

Municipalities are projected to spend $651 million on sewage treatment plant construction between now and 1980, and the pulp and paper industry is expected to spend $153 million during that period.

The DNR said polluted runoff from farms and cities is becoming more obvious as industrial and municipal discharges are cleaned up. An estimated 7.2 million acres of Wisconsin's 12.2 million acres of cropland have dominant erosion problems.

Trace amounts of toxic chemicals in fish are still a problem, the most recent being high concentrations of polychlorinated biphenyls PCBS noted in fish from Lake Michigan, Lake Pepin and the Upper Fox River.

The report said cleaning up discharges from municipal sewage treatment plants is likely to be as difficult and expensive as industrial pollution control, although Wisconsin has been ahead of most other states in this field.

Of 550 treatment plants discharging to surface waters, 212 have been improved during the last five years and 90 meet 1977 state and federal effluent limits.

A final solution for these problems will depend on "acceptance of higher costs, self-discipline and conservatism in uses of water," the DNR concluded.

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