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Wisconsin's water quality improves

MADISON, Wis. (UPI) — Overall water quality in Wisconsin is improving gradually, according to the state Department of Natural Resources.

The DNR said rapid improvement was likely within the next decade as new federal and state programs begin to take effect, but much more work to clean up waters remains to be done.

Most Waterways Meet Standards

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

Of the 703 major industrial wastewater dischargers in the state, 411 appeared to be meeting effluent limits set for 1977.

Financial projections showed that municipalities would be spending $651 million in sewage treatment plant construction between now and 1980, and that the pulp and paper industry would spend $153 million on pollution control in the same period.

Farm, City Runoffs Remain Problems

The DNR said polluted runoff from farms and cities remained a serious problem. It was estimated that 7.2 million of Wisconsin's 12.2 million acres of cropland have erosion problems which contribute silt and fertilizer to streams.

Urban stormwater enters streams after every rain, carrying pollutants from lawns, streets and construction sites. Abatment in this area is "many years and dollars away," the DNR said.

Trace amounts of toxic chemicals in fish still were a problem and "no sooner are *some of these substances* brought under control than others arise to take their place," the agency said.

State Banned DDT Use

Since the statewide ban on DDT, concentrations of it in Lake Michigan fish have declined. But recently, high concentrations of PCBs have been found in fish from Lake Michigan, Lake Pepin and part of the upper Fox River.

Cleaning discharges from municipal sewage treatment plants was likely to be as difficult and expensive as industrial pollution control, the DNR said. So far, Wisconsin has been ahead of most other states in this field.

All sanitary sewers in the state lead to some kind of treatment plant, and 98 per cent of the population with sewers is served by secondary treatment of sewage.

The sewage plants need frequent modernization, however.

Of the state's 550 treatment plants that discharge to surface waters, 212 have been improved or rebuilt the past five years.

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