

## EDA joins effort to improve Poplar River

Rhonda Silence

Although board members of the Cook County – Grand Marais Economic Development Authority (EDA) expressed frustration over the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)'s impaired waters standards, they agreed to help the Poplar River Management Board (PRMB) try to remove the Poplar River from the list. The river was named to the MPCA impaired waters list in 2004.

Tom Rider and Scott Harrison, representing the PRMB, shared information about the formation of the group, which formed in August 2005. Rider explained that the MPCA's concern was due to turbidity in the river, caused by sediment—much of it from natural causes. Rider presented Power Point charts of information gathered by PRMB technical advisors, which included Cook County Soil & Water Conservation District, UMD's Natural Resources Research Institute, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the US Forest Service, and North American Wetland Engineering. One chart stated that 24% of the turbidity in the river is believed to be caused by manmade activities, 9% by mixed (natural and manmade), and 67% by natural features of the river.

EDA Chair Mike Littfin said he finds it frustrating that a government entity like the MPCA can declare a river "impaired" when the cause is primarily natural. Littfin said he was skiing at Lutsen Mountains just a few days earlier. "At the bottom of Ball Run, you can see how the river was cutting away at the bank 100 years ago. The gullies there were washed out at some point and ended up in Lake Superior. Are we wasting our time fighting natural erosion?"

Rider said that is an on-going discussion between members of the PRMB and MPCA. "Their standard is unachievable for this river during high flow events. The river is fine in low flow seasons," he said.

EDA Board Member and County Commissioner Bruce Martinson said the PRMB should continue to do what it can to reduce turbidity in the river, while working with MPCA to create more reasonable standards.

Scott Harrison agreed. He said, "We have a black eye. There has been a lot of negative P.R. about the Poplar River. We want to correct that."

To do that, Harrison said the PRMB needs financial assistance. He said to continue its work with scientific and technical advisors, such as North American Wetland Engineering, a budget had been developed of \$27,000 per year for five years. The PRMB proposes that the 12 property

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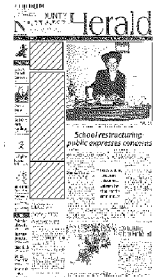
owners or groups in the Poplar River watershed share the annual expense based on a tier system, with Lutsen Mountains and Caribou Highlands paying the highest proportion.

EDA Board Member Tim Kennedy said that the EDA's property, Superior National at Lutsen golf course, is impacted by the impaired waters designation. "This affects the quality of the experience we can provide as well. We have a pretty tight budget, but I think this is in the EDA's best interest," said Kennedy.

EDA Board Member Mark Sandbo made a motion to pledge \$2,000 per year for five years to the PRMB to support its goal to preserve and restore Poplar River water quality. Board Chair Littfin seconded and it carried unanimously.

Rider also updated the EDA on funds remaining following the repair of a major erosion area dubbed the megaslump. The PRMB received a Clean Water Legacy Lakes & Rivers Fund grant of \$300,000 to complete the megaslump work. The project cost was lower than expected at \$147,000, so \$127,000 of the funds were used on another erosion control project, the repair of a gully at Mystery Mountain on Lutsen Mountains property. According to a memo to the county board from Rebecca Wiinanen of Cook County Soil & Water, the Soil & Water board, staff, and engineers determined that sending the money back to the state was not necessary "since many high-priority, sediment-reduction projects in the watershed were ready to build."

Rider said another \$23,000 is available, and how to use the funds will be discussed at the February PRMB meeting. EDA Board Member



## PRMB property owner funding sought:

Lutsen Mountains*	\$12,000
Caribou Highlands*	\$6,000
EDA	\$2,000
Heritage Owners Assn.	\$1,000
Charles Skinner Sr.	\$1,000
SMD	\$1,000
Lutsen Resort	\$1,000
George Nelson	\$1,000
Mountain Inn	\$500
Lutsen Log Lodges	\$500
Poplar River Condo Assn.	\$500
Paul Quinn	\$500

*\* If, or when, expenditures exceed \$27,000, the excess amount will be paid by Lutsen Mountains and Caribou Highlands.*

Jim Hall, who represents the EDA at the PRMB meetings, said some of the money might go to projects at the golf course.

Hall asked Superior National groundskeeper Mike Davies what he thought of the PRMB proposal. Davies acknowledged that the EDA is in a tight budget period, but added, "This is important. Since the megaslump repair, the river seemed to be clearer. I don't have data to back it up, but it seems like it is clearer."