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Summer 2021 update on interim phosphorus removal at Winnipeg's north end sewage treatment plant

News
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On May 28, 2021, Manitoba Conservation and Climate provided conditional approval for the City of Winnipeg's interim phosphorus-reduction plan at the North End Water Pollution Control Centre (NEWPCC) – the latest in a series of regulatory and financial approvals required before the city can begin the design and construction process to address the North End plant's phosphorus emissions.

With a contract for the project expected to be awarded this summer, the city currently projects that it will take until late 2023 to implement interim phosphorus reduction at the plant. Winnipeg's water and waste department has made it clear that it does not expect the interim process to succeed at meeting the provincially mandated phosphorus limit of 1 mg/L. Citing limitations of the plant's current infrastructure, city staff say they are instead aiming for a final effluent phosphorus concentration of 2.5 mg/L.

As such, the city remains out of compliance with the North End plant's operating licence, and has yet to put forward a plan to meet the 1 mg/L phosphorus limit before 2032.

Manitoba Conservation and Climate's [approval of the interim phosphorus-reduction plan](#) comes with conditions, among them:

- the submission of a "list of tasks, milestones and proposed completion dates" for interim phosphorus removal by Jun. 28, 2021; and
- a study of options to ensure compliance with the 1 mg/L provincial phosphorus limit as biosolids capacity is increased, to be submitted to the province by Dec. 31, 2021.

This latest study will follow on the heels of two others conducted by the city at the request of the province, in 2019 and 2020 respectively, to assess interim phosphorus-reduction options at the north end plant.

Both previous studies have determined that [the interim phosphorus-reduction solution first proposed by LWF in 2019](#) is technically feasible, flexible and useful in the long-term upgrade plan – but will be limited by NEWPCC's current lack of biosolids capacity.

For this reason, the imminent construction of new biosolids facilities at the North End plant – the city's No. 1 infrastructure priority – offers an important opportunity to address the constraints that have so far prevented Winnipeg from complying with phosphorus limits. Integration of interim phosphorus removal with the design of brand-new biosolids facilities is a no-brainer – a cost-effective, proactive opportunity to ensure phosphorus compliance is achieved as soon as possible alongside urgently needed capacity upgrades.

As environmental regulator, the province has an opportunity – and a responsibility – to direct the City of Winnipeg to meet its phosphorus licence limit as soon as NEWPCC's biosolids capacity is increased. Instead, Manitoba Conservation and Climate is once again waiting for yet another assessment of a proven solution that has worked in multiple cities around Canada's other great lakes.

What's next: We're watching for the public release of the upgraded timeline for interim phosphorus reduction, to be submitted to the province by Jun. 28, 2021. Going forward, progress in reducing NEWPCC's phosphorus load will be tracked against this timeline through quarterly reports produced by the city and posted to the [provincial environmental assessment and licensing registry](#).

We're also waiting for the city's assessment of phosphorus compliance options with upgraded biosolids facilities – due Dec. 31, 2021.

How you can help: LWF remains concerned that the provincial government, as environmental regulator, has not provided Winnipeg with clear direction to achieve phosphorus compliance as soon as biosolids capacity is upgraded.

Over the past two years, citizen advocacy has made it clear that chronic delays in complying with phosphorus limits at the north end sewage treatment plant are unacceptable. **Help us remind provincial politicians of their commitment to protect Lake Winnipeg's water quality. Let them know that they can no longer ignore their responsibilities as environmental regulator.**

Contact information for all MLAs, including Manitoba's [Minister of Conservation and Climate](#), can be found on [the Manitoba government's website](#).

You can call your elected official on the phone, send them an email or mail a letter. Here is an example of an effective message:

"I live in your riding and am reaching out today on an issue that matters deeply to me: the impact of Winnipeg's North End Water Pollution Control Centre (NEWPCC) on the health of Lake Winnipeg.

Excessive phosphorus causes toxic algal blooms. Winnipeg's under-treated sewage is harming Lake Winnipeg, a place which is important to myself, my family and many others.

I understand Manitoba Conservation and Climate has provided conditional approval for an interim phosphorus-reduction plan at NEWPCC. This plan, when implemented, will still not achieve phosphorus compliance at the north end treatment plant.

Proven phosphorus-reduction solutions already exist. As environmental regulator, Manitoba's government must direct the City of Winnipeg to meet its phosphorus licence limit of 1 mg/L as soon as NEWPCC's biosolids capacity is increased.

I am frustrated by continued delays on such an important environmental issue. Manitoba's government has repeatedly committed to improving the health of Lake Winnipeg. As a lake-lover and a voter, I expect my government to act on its commitments. I urge you to use your regulatory authority to ensure phosphorus compliance at the NEWPCC is achieved as soon as possible.

I would appreciate a reply to this email/letter.

Sincerely,

Your name"

Remember to customize your comment as much as possible, and aim to be clear and concise with your message.

As individuals and as a group, citizens have great power to influence change. Thank you to everyone who has joined us in advocating for accelerated phosphorus reduction at NEWPCC.

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