

DNR rolls out new online water permit application

A newly designed web-based system that simplifies the steps to getting water permits and paying for them online is being rolled out by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The new MNDNR Permitting and Reporting System (MPARS) is part of Gov. Mark Dayton's initiative to streamline state government services.

The new application at www.mndnr.gov/mpars will save an anticipated \$255,000 annually and allows DNR employees to devote more time to technical assistance and field work.

"DNR employees will have 5,000 more hours every year to protect and improve our environment, thanks to this 'Unsession' reform," Dayton said. "I thank Commissioner Tom Landwehr and his staff for making these commonsense changes that will dramatically reduce the time to process more than 10,000 water permit applications each year."

The old paper application process was time consuming and inefficient with department staff spending hours hand-sorting applications and on manual data entry.

"We've tried to make it as easy and as

pain-free as possible for water users while giving us a way to more precisely manage and conserve a precious natural resource," said Landwehr. "We'll be able to better track our water use, identify permit violations and increase compliance."

The department processes more than 10,000 permit applications and transactions each year, including reports on annual water use. Cities, farmers, businesses and landowners that use 1 million gallons of water each year, or more than 10,000 gallons a day, or work in public waters are required to get a water use permit or permit to work in public waters.

Applicants now have access to maps and can track the progress of their applications online. They are also automatically alerted if they don't need a DNR water permit.

Under the new electronic system, customers find out if their application is complete within 15 days of applying. Final decisions are made within five months. On average, permits are issued or denied a month faster than under the manually-intensive, former way of doing business. The system also improves inter-agency coop-

eration on permitting. When applicants enter their information into the MPARS system a report is generated and can be easily forwarded to other permitting agencies.

Inga Foster, environmental project manager for St. Louis County in Duluth, is using the system to apply for permits to work in public waters for culvert and bridge replacement projects. The dashboard view gives her a quick way to check on the status for many different permits. “I like how transparent it is,” she said. Now when project managers come to her and ask where their permit is in the process,

she can quickly tell them.

She’s received 30 permits through MPARS so far and has 30 applications in the works. “It’s difficult when you have 60 different balls in the air to capture what is happening with all those applications at any one moment,” Foster said. “MPARS does that for me.”

The mapping tool enables staff to quickly view 60 different data layers, for trout streams, endangered species and infested waters, to name a few, to determine if a project location is near sensitive natural resources.



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Phone: 952.361.0644 Fax: 952.361.0645

e-mail: golfnorby@earthlink.net web: www.herfortnorby.com