

# FRESHWATER

## 2024 Legislative Focus – Nitrate in drinking water

### Background

High levels of [nitrate in drinking water](#) continue to be a serious issue across Minnesota, especially in the southeastern part of the state where karst topography makes groundwater particularly vulnerable to land use.

Potentially dangerous to people and aquatic ecosystems, nitrate pollution from agricultural fertilizer and manure prompted several conservation groups to petition the EPA for federal intervention in southeastern Minnesota under the Safe Drinking Water Act. State agencies have developed a [work plan](#) to address the issue; however, legislative action will likely be necessary to **provide safe drinking water to Minnesotans now** and to **protect aquifers for the long term**.

### Freshwater supports legislative action to increase testing, protect private wells, and prevent nitrate pollution, including:

- Implementing a stronger multi-agency statewide program for community education, private well testing, and well water treatment/mitigation.
- Expanding conservation easement programs to reduce nitrogen application.
  - Governor's bonding proposal includes \$10 million for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
- Expanding best management strategies for landowners, including regenerative agriculture and perennial crops, to reduce nitrogen loading and prevent excess nitrogen from moving into groundwater.
  - Accelerating practices outlined in the [Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program](#) (less than 6 percent of Minnesota cropland is certified).
  - Providing edge-of-field monitoring and local assistance to farmers such as the [Root River Field to Stream Partnership](#) and [Olmsted County Soil Health Program](#).
- Encouraging nitrogen load reduction for sensitive groundwater areas.
- Improving oversight of manure management, storage and application.



*As snow melts in spring, nitrate seeps into groundwater from large expanses of bare corn and soybean fields. Widespread adoption of cover crops, regenerative practices, perennial crops and reduced fertilizer application is critically needed to protect water quality across much of rural Minnesota.*

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Freshwater is a nonprofit organization working to inspire and empower people to value and preserve water.