WATER 03/19/2017 S. KOCH

Water pollution regulations in the U.S. may change following a recent White House executive order, a shift that could have an impact on river ecology and agricultural practices in River Falls. A section of the Clean Water Act will be reviewed and potentially revised to redefine which water systems can be federally regulated. Sophia Koch (Cook) has the story.

MP3 RUNS: 1:21 O/C: STD

SOPHIA KOCH: THE KINNICKINNIC (KIH-NEE-KIH-NIK) RIVER IS TYPICALLY RELATIVELY FREE OF CONTAMINANTS SUCH AS PHOSPHOROUS, NITRATE AND SEDIMENT. HOWEVER, WHEN A BIG STORM EVENT HITS THE AREA, WATER DOES NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO FILTER THROUGH THE LAYERS OF SANDSTONE THAT SURROUND THE RIVER, AND CONTAMINANTS ARE OFTEN WASHED FROM AGRICULTURAL FIELDS STRAIGHT INTO THE RIVER.

JILL COLEMAN-WASIK: THE THING IS, DURING STORMFLOW, IT’S WAY OUT OF BOUNDS. IT CARRIES SO MUCH PHOSPHOROUS AND SO MUCH SEDIMENT.

SOPHIA KOCH: THAT WAS JILL COLEMAN-WASIK (KOHL-MAN WAH-SICK), AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR FROM THE U-W-RIVER FALLS. PHOSPHOROUS AND NITRATE, SHE SAID, ARE COMMON CONTAMINANTS USED AS FERTILIZERS ON FIELDS. U-W-R-F PROFESSOR KERRY KEEN ADDS THAT THESE CONTAMINANTS CAN HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT.

KERRY KEEN: YOU PUT TOO MUCH NUTRIENTS IN. THAT’S A NUTRIENT. THAT GOES IN, AND THE MICROBES GO CRAZY TRYING TO BREAK THAT DOWN. THE PLANET IS TRYING TO HEAL THAT EXCESS AND PROCESS IT AND USE IT UP. BUT WHEN THEY ARE PROCESSING THAT MATERIAL, THEY ARE RESPIRING BASICALLY, AND USING UP THE OXYGEN IN THE STREAM.

SOPHIA KOCH: INTENSIVE REGULATION, HOWEVER, CAN BE DIFFICULT FOR FARMERS WHO MUST DEAL WITH LAYERS OF BUREAUCRACY ON BOTH THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL. IT IS UNCLEAR, FOR NOW, EXACTLY THE SCOPE OF THE CHANGES THAT THE EXECUTIVE ORDER WILL BRING. HOWEVER, BOTH THE KINNI (KIH-NEE) RIVER AND THE RIVER FALLS AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY STAND TO BE IMPACTED. FOR FALCON NEWS, I’M SOPHIA KOCH (COOK).

Stormwater runoff can often be expensive to farmers, removing fertilizer needed for crops and putting it in the river where it is of no use. Coleman-Wasik says it is often in the best interest of farmers to protect watersheds, whether or not the the law requires them to.

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