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# Treated-water sale to Tuscola plant on table

Fri, 04/05/2013 - 7:00am | [Patrick Wade](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

URBANA — Urbana & Champaign Sanitary District officials will be considering a deal to pump treated wastewater directly to a fertilizer facility looking to locate near Tuscola instead of into local streams.

Illinois and Iowa are in a bidding war for the fertilizer production facility, Cronus Chemical. State Rep. Adam Brown, R-Decatur, said he is working on an incentive package to lure the company to Illinois.

At a minimum, the \$1.2 billion project would require between 1,200 and 1,500 construction jobs, and the Cronus plant would provide about 250 permanent full-time employees.

"This would be a huge investment for our community," Brown said.

He said details of the incentive package are being held confidential during negotiations, but that it would provide a number of property tax abatements and other tax exemptions to Cronus Chemical.

"I can say it's competitive with Iowa's proposal, which is about \$35 million," Brown said.

Where the Urbana & Champaign Sanitary District comes in is that the fertilizer producer would need about 6.4 million gallons of water per day in its manufacturing process. Instead of drawing clean drinking water, a consultant for Cronus Chemical has asked the sanitary district for a direct flow of treated wastewater.

The sanitary district operates two sewage treatment plants — one in Champaign and one in Urbana. The Champaign plant discharges about 6 million gallons of treated wastewater per day into the Copper Slough, and the Urbana plant sends about 15 million gallons per day into the Saline Branch, according to a memo distributed by sanitary district Executive Director Rick Manner at a sanitary district board meeting Thursday.

Cronus' request could be fulfilled by a direct pipeline from either sanitary district plant, although the plant in southwest Champaign is more likely to be the preferred option, according to the memo.

That would, however, significantly reduce the flow of water into either — potentially both — the Copper Slough and the Saline Branch.

Traci Barkley, a water resources scientist with the Prairie Rivers Network, told sanitary district board members on Thursday that her agency thinks the plan is a bad idea. Water is becoming more scarce and people are drawing drinking water from the Mahomet Aquifer faster than it is being recharged, she said.

Water tables are dropping, she added, and without flows from wastewater treatment plants, the health of the area's streams and rivers would be much worse.

"We're concerned that UCSD can become part of the problem, not part of the solution," Barkley said.

Sanitary board President Diana Lenik assured Barkley that board members have only just begun to hear about the proposal and that they have yet to be swayed one way or another.

"This is so early on that we're really just getting information," Lenik said.

More information sharing between the district and the public could be forthcoming.

"We would certainly be open to a hearing, as long as it's done in an organized way," Lenik said.

The Cronus proposal is one of two wastewater deals the sanitary district is considering.

Manner said the district has been in discussions with Sunrise Coal LLC about its proposed Vermilion County mine to guarantee a flow from its Urbana plant into the Saline Branch. Sunrise officials have said they need 325,000 to 540,000 gallons per day for their proposed Bulldog coal mine.

Manner said the district is sensitive to the fact that, although the flow of water that it discharges to the creeks is a somewhat unnatural one, aquatic species and canoers have come to expect it to be there. He said the flow from the Urbana plant has been there for 90 years and for 50 years from the Champaign plant.

"Is that a good thing, because we are getting good use out of the water or bad because it's no longer going in the creek?" Manner said. "Overall, I think it's a good thing, because it's getting reuse out of the water."

But at the same time, he said, the district also realizes the Salt Fork river habitat contains endangered mussels and fish.

"So we are quite sensitive to the idea that we do owe some water to the Salt Fork and Saline Branch due to the habitat," Manner said. "And there is a legacy of us discharging there and some value to that baseline that we provide."

He added that the Copper Slough is more like an agricultural ditch, which does not have as much of a significant aquatic habitat downstream.

#1 <sup>[2]</sup>

ilpatriot <sup>[3]</sup> wrote on April 06, 2013 at 5:04 am

Excuse me? "He added that the Copper Slough is more like an agricultural ditch, which does

not have as much of a significant aquatic habitat downstream." .

The Copper Slough flows into the Kaskaskia river

. The Kaskaskia rises in east central Illinois in several farm ditches along the west side of Champaign [4]. The headwaters of the river is just north of Interstate 74 [5], where it is marked with a sign. The river flows south across rural Champaign [6] and Douglas [7] counties, then southwest across southern Illinois, past Vandalia [8]. It joins the Mississippi from the north approximately 10 miles (16 km) northwest of Chester [9] and 40 miles (64 km) south-southeast of St. Louis, Missouri [10]. The watershed of the river encompasses approximately 5,746 square miles (14,880 km<sup>2</sup>), approximately 10.2% of the state of Illinois.(wikipedia).

#2 [11]

Rick Manner [12] wrote on April 08, 2013 at 11:04 am

Dear ilpatriot and others,

I would love to talk to anybody who is interested. This is a complicated issue that can't really be addressed in emails via the Gazette. Please contact me at [rfmanner@u-csd.com](mailto:rfmanner@u-csd.com) [13] to talk further.

Regarding the comment about the rates: You are 100% correct that if Cronus is paying for the treated wastewater, the ratepayer should **and will** pay less than they would otherwise. As a governmental body, UCSD does not profit from our work. So you will get that benefit.

While I would like to assure you that if Cronus signs a contract and this goes forward UCSD rates would go down 15% next Tuesday, unfortunately the costs and benefits will take years to fully form. So the change in rates will more likely be a decrease in a few years or a smaller increase in rates than you would have seen otherwise.

Regarding my comment that the Copper Slough is more like an agricultural ditch downstream: Please recognize that I am referring to the Copper Slough and in particular the one mile of the creek that is downstream of our discharge. This is the mile that starts at Rising Road, continuing westward, before it reaches the main stem of the Kaskaskia. Also, this comment was made to contrast the higher quality that we immediately see in the Saline Branch of the Salt Fork. This is the other creek where UCSD discharges. The Saline is shaded, has more meanders, and has a better mix of aquatic life as a result.

As you accurately point out, downstream the Kaskaskia River is a real river with real quality. The reference that you quote actually agrees with both of us - "the Kaskaskia River rises (from)... several farm ditches..." So the Kaskaskia is a river. The Copper Slough is one of the farm ditches that feeds the river. At the point where it is in the Kaskaskia River, any flow from UCSD is less significant because it is one of several sources arriving in one of those farm ditches.

I would also like to point out that upstream of UCSD's discharge the Copper Slough itself is a more significant and interesting stream. In particular as you go further upstream, it has more meanders and shade cover making it an attractive urbanized creek. Here again, the flow from UCSD has a minor impact because our flow is not in that part of the Slough. The minor

impact we do have is in the form of providing a route for fish to travel.

In contrast with those parts, the one mile stretch that is west of Rising, that is solely the Copper Slough is where I have not seen as much use or significant aquatic habitat. Outside of Champaign the Copper Slough is channelized and straightened. It has very steep slopes and very little shade. It is an agricultural ditch maintained by the Fountainhead Drainage District for that purpose and they and the Slough itself does that job very well. There are fish in the creek and I have seen a few folks fishing, but there is not nearly the same level of use in that one mile between UCSD's discharge and the main stem of the Kaskaskia and what we see in the Saline.

Also, please note that those baseline uses will be maintained in both creeks. Even if some of the flow from UCSD's Southwest Plant is sold to Cronus, we are not talking about removing all of the flow that we currently discharge, only some of it. There will always be a baseline flow.

In addition, there will be changes to the sewer system that are necessary for other reasons that will lessen the reduction in flow in the Copper Slough. Bondville is now connected to the sewers. Even in these tough times Savoy is still growing and providing additional flow, and there are other changes.

As the article summarizes accurately, but I may have not expressed eloquently, I believe there is enough water to accomplish these many purposes simultaneously. That is why I believe the project is a good thing. I have spent the last 30 years of my life working on environmental issues in my job and in my hobbies. I think it is important enough to spend my life doing this - I don't intend to undo that good.

Again, it is complicated and I would be happy to talk further to whoever is interested.

Rick Manner

Executive Director, UCSD

[rfmanner@u-csd.com](mailto:rfmanner@u-csd.com) <sup>[13]</sup>

**#3** <sup>[14]</sup>

[ilpatriot](#) <sup>[3]</sup> wrote on April 06, 2013 at 5:04 am

I just thought of something else. Who legally owns the treated water? I bought the water from the water company, I paid UCSD to treat the waste water. I want my water back. If they do sell the treated water we should see a reduced rate on our bill. Or not.

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