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# Environmental Almanac: Public invited to sound off on proposed sale of water

Sun, 05/05/2013 - 7:00am | [Rob Kanter](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

In the past couple of years, I have twice called attention to how wastewater treated by the Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District supports aquatic ecosystems and other wildlife in the streams where it is discharged.

Here is how I characterized the Copper Slough downstream of the UCSD's southwest treatment plant in the summer of 2010: "Great blue herons and mallards are regulars there, as is a pair of belted kingfishers, which nest in the bank nearby and noisily patrol the stream corridor. In the pool below the bridge live masses of some fish that tolerate fairly degraded waters, especially common carp and suckers. But there are fish with higher standards there, too, among them some decent-sized largemouth bass, as well as an occasional snapping turtle."

And just last fall, I wrote this about the Saline Branch: "One measure of how well the UCSD's northeast treatment plant does its job is the diversity of aquatic life that thrives downstream from it. Witness the discovery this year of a fish called the big-eyed chub in the Saline Branch. It's a species that hasn't been found in Champaign County since 1899."

On top of that, as I also pointed out, the Saline Branch downstream of the northeast plant hosts at least 45 different species of fish, which is up from only 30 species in the late 1980s.

My purpose when I wrote those descriptions was to celebrate the progress we have made as a community through the efforts of the UCSD. There was a time when the discharge from our wastewater treatment plants did more harm than good for streams, but the case is now reversed.

Indeed, a reliable flow of treated wastewater is essential for the survival of many of our headwater streams. That's because our urban and agricultural drainage systems move water off of the land so quickly in spring and early summer there is little or nothing left for streams in dry



[2]

**Photo by: Rob Kanter**

Belted kingfisher feeds on fish from the Copper Slough and nests in the bank downstream of the UCSD's southwest treatment plant.

periods.

I bring this up now because trustees of the sanitary district are currently considering a move to divert part of the water discharged from the plants in Champaign and Urbana for sale to the fertilizer plant proposed for Tuscola. (A pipeline would be used to convey water there directly from the UCSD's southwest plant.)

Also in the offing is an arrangement through which the sanitary district would be paid by the operators of the coal mine proposed in nearby Vermillion County for guaranteeing a certain amount of discharge into the Salt Fork River system. (That water would then be available for withdrawal and use at the mine.)

The chief proponent of the sale is Rick Manner, executive director for UCSD. He is sensitive to the importance of discharge from the plants for the ecosystems that depend on it, and when we spoke last week, he assured me any contract to sell the water would guarantee a certain amount to the creek, regardless of the wants of a buyer. He also emphasized that some portion of funds generated by water sales would be dedicated for local in-stream habitat improvement projects.

Others, including people affiliated with the Prairie Rivers Network, have raised important questions about the environmental impacts of the sale since it came to light. One of these is whether it makes sense to base thinking about a sale on bare-minimum flows needed to maintain ecosystems, rather than adopting a more conservative approach.

Conservationists also have asked that the sanitary district consider the broader environmental implications of any sale as well. They see a potential conflict between conservation of the Mahomet Aquifer, which we're already depleting, and the demands of industrial users.

Which way forward? You can learn more about this important issue and make your voice heard on it at a public meeting being convened by the Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District on Wednesday evening. The meeting will take place at 6:30 p.m. in Station W at 1100 E. University Ave., U.

*Environmental Almanac is a service of the University of Illinois School of Earth, Society and Environment, where Rob Kanter is communications coordinator. Environmental Almanac can be heard on WILL-AM 580 at 4:45 and 6:45 p.m. on Thursdays.*

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

**Sid Saltfork** <sup>[4]</sup> wrote on May 05, 2013 at 12:05 pm

The water pipeline to the proposed fertilizer plant in Tuscola is part of the deal to get the fertilizer plant to pick Illinois over Iowa. The proposed fertilizer plant will receive a \$35,000,000.00 tax deal paid by the state's taxpayers which hopefully will result in 150 permanent jobs in the Tuscola area. Illinois, and Iowa are in a bidding war of tax breaks with the corporation owning the proposed fertilizer plant. The cost for each permanent job will be \$233,333.33 of tax money.

Yeah, sure..... the State of Illinois is broke....

**#2** <sup>[5]</sup>

**ilpatriot** <sup>[6]</sup> wrote on May 05, 2013 at 9:05 pm

Question #1. Who pays for the pipeline ?

Question #2. Does UCSD have eminent domain powers outside of the taxing district ?

(I don't want the pipeline going through my property)

Question #3. Who legally owns the water that I bought from the water company and paid UCSD to treat ?

Question #4. If both of these deals go through will I see a reduction in my bill?

Fact. Sometimes fertilizer plants go BOOM!!!! Re: West, Texas

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