

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION**

DATE: December 6, 2019

TO: Chairman Theodore Lipscomb, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Greg High, Director, AE&ES Section, DAS-FM Division

SUBJECT: **From the Director, Architecture, Engineering, and Environmental Services Section, Facilities Management Division, Department of Administrative Services, Providing an Informational Report Regarding An Assessment for Environmental Degradation of a Portion of the Root River Adjacent to the Rock Sports Complex and Ballpark Commons (File No. 19-602)**

BACKGROUND

In response to Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors' request in Resolution 19-602, staff from the Milwaukee County Environmental Services Unit conducted a visual assessment of the condition of the Root River, of that portion adjacent to The Rock Sports Complex in Franklin, for the appearance of environmental degradation. This memorandum summarizes the observations and provides an opinion regarding the need for further analysis. The assessment was performed following a meeting between the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture (DPRC) and the Department of Administrative Services, Architecture, Engineering and Environmental Services Division (DAS AE&ES), on this subject to review the assessment approach.

OBSERVATIONS

On November 4, 2019, Steve Keith and Tim Detzer, environmental engineers with the Environmental Services Unit of DAS AE&ES walked the north bank of the Root River, from a position beginning near the bike trail bridge and ending where the ox bow nears the Root River Parkway. Overall, approximately 2,500 feet of river was visually inspected. This section of the Root River is situated downstream from, and in closest proximity to, the Rock Sports Complex. Figure 1 illustrates the river segment traversed. A segment of the area inspected is owned by Milwaukee County and portions of that are leased to the Rock Sports Complex.

This site assessment was limited to a visual inspection. Staff looked for indicators of degradation, such as discoloration, foaming, or oily sheen on river water, or other evidence of pollution such as solid waste, dead aquatic life, or areas of dead vegetation. Photographs were taken during the walkover (Attachment A). There were few indications of degradation or potential degradation observed during the walkover. These included:

- bottles and cans were lodged within several logjams extending across the river

- a few pieces of solid waste, including a mannequin and board insulation, trapped in the woody blockage
- some small splotches (half-dollar size) of sheen of oily appearance located within a flood fringe area

Cans and bottles may be the result of indiscriminate littering and, due to their ability to be carried by the current, may have come from sources other than the adjacent property. The mannequin is likely something derived from the Hills Have Eyes event located on The Rock complex. The splotches of sheens with oily appearance were relatively small in size and could be a naturally-occurring bacterial sheen (see Attachment B). No petroleum odors were noted during the walkover. Further testing would be needed to determine if the sheen is from a petroleum source or naturally occurring.

Surface runoff from The Rock is largely captured by a storm water detention pond located in the northeastern corner of their property. However, some portion of the site does drain via surface runoff to the river without first going through storm water controls. (This is not a violation of any rule or permit.) During the walkover, one surface water flow into the river was observed, but did not show any indications of pollution.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Staff from Environmental Services contacted the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to learn of any recent reports of violations or pollution releases in the area. Steve Keith spoke with Mr. Gerald DeMers the week of October 21st. Mr. DeMers oversees the compliance monitoring of the former landfill site on The Rock and performs annual inspections there. He was not aware of any recent pollutant releases from the site and suggested contacting a fellow WDNR employee who may have additional knowledge. Steve Keith contacted Mr. John Budzinski of the WDNR on October 24th, who indicated that aside from a complaint regarding the presence of mannequins found in the river, he was not aware of any other reports pertaining to suspected or confirmed releases to the river in that area over the past several years. He also noted that the water pump house, which draws water from the river for snowmaking, does not use petroleum fuel for its motor (i.e., it is electric).

During the time Milwaukee County owned the former landfill site (until 2018), water quality samples were collected in the Root River, upstream and downstream from the site. This was performed on an annual basis since the late 1990's as part of the closed landfill permit and continues under the new ownership. The parameters tested for are intended to be indicative of pollutants in leachate derived from the former landfill to see if leachate was migrating into the river. These results are published yearly in the annual report submitted to the WDNR. Results of those tests have not indicated any adverse impact from landfill leachate on the river.

The WDNR's Bureau of Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS), which logs confirmed cases of pollutant discharges was reviewed and there were no reports listed of violations or pollutant releases in the area.

ANALYSIS


Aside from the presence of trash trapped in river logjams and small areas of sheen, no visual evidence of environmental degradation was observed during the November 4 walkover. A visual inspection, however, has its limitations and does not constitute a comprehensive survey. A more comprehensive analysis could include water quality testing, aquatic ecology assessments, and terrestrial ecology assessments. These analyses would likely require extensive sampling and characterization over extended periods of time and establishing baseline conditions. Any sampling plan intended to definitively determine if degradation was occurring and to identify source(s) of degradation would need to be performed in ways that are defensible and account for many influencing factors, such as highly variable river flow rates and potential for sporadic releases. A limited number of river water samples, for example, might yield false positive or false negative results, without a full understanding of the factors affecting water quality and ecology. Given the lack of evidence indicating degradation, lack of baseline data, and the substantial cost to perform a comprehensive testing program, a more comprehensive assessment does not appear warranted at this time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is for informational purposes. No action required.

Prepared by: Stevan Keith and Tim Detzer, AE&ES, DAS-FM

Approved By:

 12/20/19

Gregory G. High, P.E., Director
AE&ES Section, DAS-FM Division
Department of Administrative Services

Attachments: Attachment A, Photographs
Attachment B, Non-Petroleum Sheen Fact Sheet
Attachment C, Figure 1
Attachment D, File #19-602 Engrossed Resolution

Cc: Chris Abele, County Executive
Raisa Koltun, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board
Teig Whaley-Smith, Director, Department of Administrative Services
Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS
Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS
Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office
Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office