

2008 – 04 Flood Control

Minnesota has 90,000 miles of rivers, streams, and small, natural watercourses, and these watercourses provide enormous benefits, including recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, and economic and ecological functions for the state's citizens (http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/rivers_streams/index.html)

Connected rivers provide habitats that sustain diverse aquatic communities through a network of stream systems in Minnesota's watersheds. Large dams block the migration fish, degrade stream habitat, disrupt food webs, disconnect stream systems, and cause local fauna to be replaced by species more adapted to regulated systems.

Large dams pose a significant safety risk and have a limited lifespan. Worldwide, large dams have rarely provided the expected benefits: "Lack of equity in the distribution of benefits has called into question the value of many dams in meeting water and energy development needs when compared with the alternatives" (from the Report of the World Commission on Dams, 2000, www.dams.org).

Flooding is exacerbated by wetland loss and changes in land use, such as paving, development, ditching and tiling that speed the movement of water out of watersheds. Just as many small changes in the watershed have the cumulative effect of increasing the frequency and severity of flooding, a coordinated series of small water retention projects in a watershed can have the same beneficial impacts on flooding as a large dam, without the environmental damage and with a lower economic cost. Watershed scale management projects take an integrated approach to flood control that is more equitable for stakeholders and more cost effective (National Research Council, New Strategies for America's Watersheds, 1999, http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=6020&page=R1). These projects can be beneficial for farmers as well as wildlife. By holding spring runoff on the land, migrating ducks get feeding and resting areas, while water infiltration is increased, aquifers are recharged, and soil moisture is increased later in the growing season (http://www.undeerc.org/waffle/info/brochures/WaffleBrochurenew8_01.pdf).

Therefore be it resolved that the Izaak Walton League, Minnesota Division, supports integrated, watershed based approaches to flood control. In addition to restoring the natural capacity of a watershed to retain floodwater by restoring wetlands, river channels, and floodplains, these projects may also include numerous strategies on both public and private lands to restore the ability of watersheds to manage flooding. We do not support the construction of large dams on Minnesota's rivers because the risks to human populations, aquatic communities, and wildlife are not outweighed by the potential benefits of flood damage reduction, water supply or hydropower and because reasonable alternatives are available.

Submitted by the Prairie Woods Chapter