



STATE OF WISCONSIN

Legislative Audit Bureau

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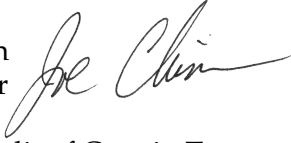
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Joe Chrisman
State Auditor

DATE: April 6, 2015

TO: Senator Robert Cowles and
Representative Samantha Kerkman, Co-chairpersons
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

FROM: Joe Chrisman
State Auditor 

SUBJECT: Proposed Audit of Certain Types of Permits Issued through the
Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System—Background Information

At your request, we have gathered some background information the Joint Legislative Audit Committee may find useful in considering an audit of certain types of permits issued to regulate wastewater. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for oversight of wastewater regulation in Wisconsin.

DNR regulates many operations that discharge wastewater to surface water or groundwater through the Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permit program. WPDES permits contain monitoring requirements, reporting requirements, and compliance schedules that are specific to the type of facility or activity being regulated. These include municipal wastewater treatment; industrial wastewater discharges from paper mills, steam electric power generating facilities, and other industries; production facilities and manure application at large farms; and activities that produce storm water runoff, such as construction and industrial sites.

Through the WPDES permit program, DNR issues both individual and general permits. Individual WPDES permits are issued by DNR to municipal and industrial facilities discharging to surface water or groundwater. DNR has issued such permits to more than 600 municipal and 300 industrial facilities. Of these, 88 are considered to be major municipal facilities because they have a design flow of 1.0 million gallons per day or more, and 42 are considered to be major industrial facilities—primarily paper mills and steam electric power generating facilities—because of their potential environmental impact. In addition, DNR has issued WPDES permits to more than 200 large farms, which are known as concentrated animal feeding operations. Individual WPDES permits are required for dairy farms with more than 5,720 animal units and for all non-dairy farms with more than 1,000 animal units.

General WPDES permits are issued by DNR to groups of facilities that include over 20 types of point source discharges, such as pesticide discharges for control of aquatic plants, algae, and bacteria; land application of industrial sludge; and swimming pool facilities. Although DNR has issued general WPDES permits to some large farms, individual WPDES permits can also be required.

An audit of wastewater regulation through DNR's issuance of individual WPDES permits for municipal facilities, industrial facilities, and large farms could analyze:

- the overall permitting process;
- the timeliness of DNR's WPDES permit issuance;
- trends in revenues, expenditures, and staffing for permitting activities;
- DNR's compliance with statutory and administrative rule requirements;
- compliance with permit requirements; and
- the consistency and appropriateness of DNR's enforcement actions.

I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any additional questions regarding this request, please contact me.

JC/PS/bm

cc: Senator Mary Lazich	Representative John Macco
Senator Alberta Darling	Representative John Nygren
Senator Kathleen Vinehout	Representative Melissa Sargent
Senator Janet Bewley	Representative Terese Berceau

Cathy Stepp, Secretary
Department of Natural Resources