

Samples show need for water treatment

By JASMINE LINABARY/Bigfork Eagle | Posted: Thursday, March 4, 2010 12:00 am

Preliminary data from stormwater samples confirm that the Bigfork Stormwater Project is in fact needed, officials report.

Lab results were back from the first stormwater sample event for the Bigfork project and reported to the Bigfork Stormwater Advisory Committee last week.

Bigfork Water and Sewer District took the samples Jan. 13 during heavy snowmelt at three outfalls into Bigfork Bay on Grand Drive, River Street and Bridge Street.

Mike Koopal, executive director of the Whitefish Lake Institute and a member of the committee, reported that even this preliminary data demonstrate the need for the project.

"This preliminary data indicates that the Bigfork Stormwater Project is a valid pursuit to protect water quality, both for human contact exposure and the ecology of Bigfork Bay and Flathead Lake," Koopal wrote in a report to the committee.

The problem causers in this sample were sediments in the discharge, which the lab values suggest was a "chocolate milk color" and exacerbates phosphorus problems. Koopal reported "alarmingly high" levels of turbidity and total suspended solids.

Additionally, the amount of phosphorus, copper and zinc in the samples all exceeded benchmarks by at least two or three outfalls.

In the preliminary analysis, River Street was found to be the highest polluter, but these values were not weighed for stormwater volume, Koopal reported.

The sewer district has not been able to take a second sample yet, but manager Julie Spencer said she's monitoring conditions for the next event.

"Further sampling is planned throughout the spring, but this preliminary data supplies BSAC with information that they can now use as they start considering which potential design approach would be best to clean up the stormwater before it goes into the bay," Koopal wrote.

Flathead County is currently negotiating a contract for final design engineering for the stormwater project with 48 North Civil Engineering Services.

That contract should be on the Flathead County Commissioners' agenda some time in mid-March.

Research during final design engineering on the project will help determine what treatment system will be used on Grand Drive as one of the first installments.