Clean Water Fund - Assistance for Well Sealing Activities

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<th>Fiscal Impact ($000s)</th>
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<th>FY 2015</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
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Summary
This proposal seeks to help protect public health and the environment by continuing support to help Minnesotans seal estimated 500,000 unused, unsealed wells and borings. Well sealing can be very expensive for a private well owner to undertake, which is an obstacle to ensuring that wells are sealed properly. These funds will provide a 50 percent cost share.

Background
Unused wells, sometimes called “abandoned” wells, can pose a serious threat to groundwater quality by allowing contaminants to travel deep into the ground, bypassing the natural protection usually provided by layers of clay, silt, and other geologic materials. Although Minnesota leads the nation in sealing unused wells, sealing more than 250,000 wells in the past 25 years, an estimated 500,000 unused wells remain unsealed.

Minnesota law requires an unused well or boring be properly sealed by a state-licensed well contractor. Sealing costs can range from $500 to seal a small, simple well, to tens of thousands of dollars to seal large-diameter, deep wells. Costs also increase for wells that require significant work to clean out, remove pumping equipment, and perforate well casings to ensure a thorough sealing.

A total of $500,000 was allocated from the Clean Water Fund for well sealing in fiscal years 2011-2012. The funds are being used to seal an estimated 225 private wells and 30 public water supply wells.

Proposal
This proposal is to provide funds to help Minnesotans seal unused wells and borings. The funds will be used to provide a 50 percent cost share for sealing public and private wells and borings.

Two administrative mechanisms will be employed:

1. Owners of public wells (including cities and other local governments, and persons who own wells serving mobile home parks, apartment buildings, condominium associations, motels, restaurants, etc.) will apply directly to MDH for cost-share grants.
2. Owners of private wells will apply to cooperating local governments, often Soil and Water Conservation Districts, which will receive grants from the Board of Water Resources.

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and Soil Resources (BWSR). MDH will pass funds to BWSR for their grant program.

MDH and BWSR both have established grant programs to serve the populations described.

In all cases, formal criteria will be used to rank candidate wells and borings according to the degree of risk they pose for groundwater contamination and public health. Criteria will include whether the well/boring is in a Wellhead Protection Area, interconnects aquifers, is in an area of known groundwater contamination, and contains human caused contaminants. Cost sharing will be limited to 50 percent of total sealing costs.