



**Midwest Environmental  
ADVOCATES**  
*pro bono publico*



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Environmental Groups Call on MMSD to Consider Return of Wastewater Responsibilities to the Public**

Milwaukee, WI – Yesterday, Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers, Midwest Environmental Advocates, Sierra Club Great Waters Group, and Alliance for the Great Lakes wrote to the Commissioners of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District ("MMSD") to express their concern over continued privatization of the municipal wastewater treatment system. Currently, wastewater services for the City of Milwaukee are contracted out to United Water. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, MMSD will decide whether to turn that contract over to Veolia Water North America or return wastewater treatment responsibilities to the District.

"We support the return of wastewater treatment to the District because contracting out services cannot adequately protect public health and the environment," said Cheryl Nenn, Riverkeeper for Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers. "Our rivers and Lake Michigan have been subjected to enormous amounts of pollution from sewer overflows, many of them preventable." Karen Schapiro, of Midwest Environmental Advocates, added, "The current contract in place does not penalize the contractors for this pollution, and fails to provide incentive for proper equipment maintenance and upgrades, which could reduce or prevent these overflows."

Rosemary Wehnes, of the Sierra Club's Great Waters Group, emphasized the public access and accountability benefits of returning the wastewater responsibilities to the District. "Contracting

out wastewater services provides almost no transparency and weakens public accountability. A private company is not held to the same public accountability as a municipal district such as MMSD.”

The letter asks MMSD Commissioners to consider returning the operation and maintenance to a public system, and also encourages that, should another private contractor be selected, that the contract be revised to eliminate incentives that reward inadequate treatment of sewage and pollution of our waterways, and to provide stronger tools for enforcement and more public accountability.

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### **FAST FACTS**

- The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District is a state-chartered government agency that provides wastewater treatment services to 28 municipalities in southeast Wisconsin. For the past 10 years, they have contracted operation and maintenance responsibilities to United Water Services.
- In 1994, the “Deep Tunnel” was brought online to address the problems of sewage overflows in Milwaukee, storing sewage during rainstorms when it was expected that treatment plants would be overwhelmed. The 19-mile long tunnel cost nearly \$2 billion dollars, yet overflows still occur.
- Since 1995, over a billion gallons of sanitary sewage has been dumped in Milwaukee-area rivers and Lake Michigan.
- Friends of Milwaukee’s Rivers’ (FMR) is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting water quality and wildlife habitat and advocating for sound land use in the Milwaukee River Basin. FMR is a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, an international coalition dedicated to protecting and restoring our world’s waterways, and is the licensed Riverkeeper® for Milwaukee.
- Great Waters Group is a Sierra Club member group of the John Muir Chapter that serves club members in Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, & Waukesha counties. Sierra Club groups are run by their members who volunteer to promote environmental sustainability by taking action on local issues and educating others to understand the issues and opportunities available to make informed decisions that will better protect our shared environment.
- Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc. (MEA) is Wisconsin’s only non-profit environmental law center dedicated to environmental justice and the protection of the public’s right to clean air, clean water, clean government, and responsible land use.
- Alliance for the Great Lakes is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving and restoring the world's largest freshwater resource using policy, education and local efforts, ensuring a healthy Great Lakes and clean water for generations of people and wildlife.