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GREAT LAKES WATER AUTHORITY ACHIEVES SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE WITH TERMINATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE CONSENT ORDER TIED TO ITS NATIONAL POLLUTANT DISCHARGE ELIMINATION SYSTEM (NPDES) PERMIT

Termination marks first time in 45 years that GLWA/DWSD have been without Federal Consent Decree or State Administrative Consent Order oversight of its Wastewater Treatment Facilities

DETROIT – The Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) announced today that due to the continued high level of performance of its Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF), the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) has terminated the Administrative Consent Order (ACO) it imposed more than a decade ago due to frequent non-compliance of the utility’s National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit. NPDES permit compliance has greatly improved since that time with enhancement of the utility’s solids processing and disposal abilities. There have been no solids processing or disposal violations since 2014.

This marks the first time in 45 years that GLWA and its predecessor organization, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) have been without either a Federal Consent decree or State Administrative Consent Order requiring extraordinary oversight of its wastewater treatment facilities. The federal consent decree over the utility ended in 2013.

“The termination of this ACO is a significant milestone for GLWA, DWSD, and the city of Detroit. We should all be extremely proud of the progress we have made as stewards of the system and what we have accomplished,” said Suzanne R. Coffey, Interim Chief Executive Officer, GLWA. “This really is validation of the exceptional work done by team members over the last decade to greatly improve NPDES permit compliance and water quality and illustrates the State’s confidence in GLWA.”

The following actions, taken by GLWA/DWSD, contributed to improvements in solids processing and, ultimately, they helped lead to the termination of the ACO:

- Elimination of solids recycling;
- Infrastructure/equipment upgrades at the WRRF, including the replacement of 22 dewatering units, and the upgrading of eight multiple hearth furnace incinerators to meet the Environmental Protection Agency’s new air emissions standards;

- Construction of the Biosolids Dryer Facility, which went into production in 2016, and converts 70 percent of the solids from the WRRF into “Class-A Exceptional Quality” fertilizer pellets. The land application of the fertilizer pellets made from GLWA solids is strictly regulated, and meets all state and federal land application guidelines;
- Launch of the Rouge River Outfall Disinfection Facility (RRO), which ensures that every drop of water discharged into the Rouge River from the WRRF is entirely screened, treated, and disinfected;
- Implementation of a comprehensive Asset Management Program across GLWA to help assess the condition of its assets, ensure that they are properly maintained and are reliable;
- Continued retention and recruitment of a highly skilled workforce dedicated to ensuring water quality.

“As the owner of the WRRF and a co-permit holder for NPDES, DWSD appreciates the efforts of past city employees and now the GLWA leadership and employees who have made this milestone possible,” said Gary Brown, Director, DWSD. “Most importantly, the burden of 45 years of extraordinary federal/state oversight is now lifted off employees and our community. The public can have the confidence that the WRRF is operating with health and safety of our system and rivers as the utmost priority and with a proven track record of compliance.”

It is important to note that GLWA’s WRRF has been the recipient of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies’ (NACWA) Peak Performance Award in 2013, 2014, 2019 and 2020. The NACWA Peak Performance Awards recognizes wastewater treatment facilities for excellence in permit compliance.

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About the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA)

The Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) is the provider-of-choice for drinking water services to nearly 40 percent, and efficient and effective wastewater services to nearly 30 percent, of Michigan’s population. With the Great Lakes as source water, GLWA is uniquely positioned to provide those it serves with water of unquestionable quality. GLWA also has the capacity to extend its services beyond its 88 member partner communities. As part of its commitment to water affordability, the Authority offers a Water Residential Assistance Program to assist low-income households in participating member communities throughout the system. GLWA’s board includes one representative each from Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties, two representatives from the city of Detroit, and one appointed by the Michigan governor to represent member partner communities outside of the tri-county area.