Frac sand mine self-regulation fail; Senior DNR 'enforcers' can tsk-tsk again

By James Rowen
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There's been a spill into the St. Croix River of sediment and sand from a mine in Northwest Wisconsin serving the booming energy fracking industry.

Conservation officials first learned of the leak on April 22, when a hiker reported seeing cream-colored water in a creek flowing to the St. Croix River. DNR investigators used a plane to survey the area four days later.

They traced the murky water back to a 72-acre sand mining facility operated by Maple Grove-based Tiller Corporation, where they located a leak in one of the facility's holding ponds. The company was notified and agreed to repair the pond immediately, according to DNR officials and Tiller Corporation's land use affairs director Mike Caron.

Caron said he doesn't know how mine employees failed to notice the leak.

"I don't have an answer for that question," he said. "We've asked our people to do their inspections. Somehow this one got missed by them."

If spreading human waste near Jefferson County drinking water wells resulted in only tickets for the polluter at the behest of our freshly-corporatized Wisconsin DNR, I can't imagine this incident will produce much of a regulatory response.

Reason #1: A senior DNR official this winter said he didn't see the need for any new regulations covering silica, a major fracking sand component, even though the number of frac sand mines has exploded in recent years to 60+.

Reason #2: Remember, this "chamber of commerce" iteration of our DNR wants the businesses it 'regulates' to be "self-regulators," a top DNR official recently said.

Even though the state constitution says Wisconsin's waters belong to everyone and the DNR is obliged to act to protect them in the public interest.

Doesn't seem like this self-regulation is doing Wisconsin water quality any favors.