A memo by the South Nation River Conservation Authority says several municipalities about to increase their discharge of waste water into the river will give rise to "very costly measures to protect water quality".

Water quality co-ordinator, Mary-Ann Wilson, proposes that the bill be shared by farmers and landowners, even though they don't contribute to the increased pollution.

Fifteen municipalities, South Nation Authority will pass cost of polluting river from villages on to farmers

Ault Foods and Nestle have lagoons that effect the river. South Nation spokesperson, Leslie Vanclief, said in a telephone interview that "population expansion has led to more discharge".

In the memo, Wilson reasons that phosphorous levels in the South Nation River already exceed provincial guidelines for the protection of fish. But since 93 per cent of the total phosphorous in the river comes from sources other than the 15 lagoons, it would be more cost effective to pass some of the increased cost to farmers and landowners.

The Authority is funded by municipalities. What the memo doesn't say is that a significant part of the phosphorous run-off comes from natural sources such as soil erosion on river banks.

For most of the year, the river sleeps like a drugged pussy cat. But for a brief week or so each spring turns into a raging tiger, overflowing its banks. During this period many of the lagoons spew excessive phosphorous into the river.

While farmers in the 3700 square kilometre river basin, stretching from Elizabeth Township in Leeds County to Plantagenet, are going to have to pay they apparently are not to blame. The only regional study completed, says Vanclief, showed herbicide levels far below the federal guidelines.

Conducted in 1991-1992 on the Payne River, the study reflected a "typical" farm area, said Vanclief.

Hard pressed to financially survive, the Authority has had provincial funding cut by 70 per cent, with more cuts coming in the new year.
South Nation says pay farmers

The December edition of the Farmer's Forum somehow confused a big issue in an article discussing pollution of the South Nation River watershed.

Both the headline and the article in your December issue claimed that South Nation Conservation (SNC) plans to bill farmers for pollution caused by municipal wastewater discharge.

The opposite is true. SNC suggests that municipalities pay farmers to implement water quality improvement measures and to help increase wastewater discharge potential.

Several of the 16 municipalities with wastewater lagoons in the watershed are applying to increase their discharges. In order to meet provincial requirements for phosphorus loadings, very costly technology is required. This expansion may be unaffordable for municipalities since provincial funding is now unavailable.

But grants for non-point sources (farms) pollution improvements can lower costs for taxpayers and villages; and result in much greater water quality improvements.

This practice is used in New York State where cities pay farmers to protect their surface water quality supply. In Ontario, paying farmers is still only in the concept stage for wastewater management, and requires approval from the Ministry of Environment and Energy, and the public.

Studies show that over 93 per cent of the phosphorus in the river is from non-point sources. Moreover, it costs 10 times less to remove phosphorus from non-point sources than from point sources such as lagoons. Non-point sources include agricultural runoff, stormwater runoff, streambank erosion and septic systems.

The Forum article stated that "it would be more cost-effective to pass the cost to farmers and landowners". In fact, it is much cheaper for taxpayers to pay farmers and landowners to address non-point sources than to pay for lagoon improvements. It would also achieve greater water quality improvements.

Any program to fund non-point sources would be voluntary and provide financial incentives. This scenario would still require that the municipality meet minimum discharge standards.

Mary-Ann Wilson, Water Quality Coordinator, South Nation River Conservation
Plan to pay farmers to clean up could start a dangerous trend

The South Nation River wants to pay farmers for implementing water quality improvements on their farms. The reason simply put is that municipalities have put themselves into an expensive bind. While they want the taxes from new housing and industrial development, they don’t want the cost of increased phosphorous discharge into the river system. Evidently, they’re on the brink of having to acquire expensive technology.

If farmers pollute less, then municipalities reason, under the guidelines, they’ll be allowed to pollute more at a lower cost. For municipalities that’s a good solution, especially since they cause only seven per cent of the phosphorous that goes into the river system. The rest comes from landowners and natural causes.

The only study on farm pollution, done in 1991 and 1992 on the nearby Payne River, showed herbicide levels well below federal guidelines. In other words, farmers are not excessive polluters.

It’s a win-win situation, as group facilitators are fond of saying. Municipalities save money and farmers get paid to put in pollution controls.

But maybe farm organizations should heed the words of Gordon Garlough, Dundas Federation of Agriculture president before jumping on the bandwagon.

“I find it dangerous that one industry buys its (right to) pollution from another,” he told Farmers’ Forum. Is that industry also selling its right to expansion? He says he would like to see this whole plan set out in detail. As he sees it now, “The farm community should look after its problems and the municipalities theirs.”
Municipalities could possibly be getting away with murder

by Sean McKibbon
Chiefain Staff Reporter

A new water quality program might be letting municipalities get away with environmental murder, says Gordon Garlough, vice president of the Dundas Federation of Agriculture.

"The idea is that instead of spending money on treating their own sewage, the municipalities spend a roughly equivalent amount of money on other programs," Garlough said.

Lawrence and Ottawa branches of the Ontario Institute of Agrologists, the symposium will feature Garlough along with local farmer Denis St. Pierre and South Nation Conservation Director of Operations Mary Ann Wilson.

He says that municipalities are some of the largest producers of phosphate pollution through their sewage systems. He says it is more expensive for them to reduce their output of phosphates because the chemical is contained in traces in a relatively large volume of waste matter. The phosphates build up over time he says, but are tough to get at.
Phosphorous program not “sinister scheme”

By Tom Van Dusen
AgriNews Staff Writer

The Total Phosphorous Management Program is not some kind of “sinister scheme” aimed at trying to get farmers to pay for municipal pollution control.

That’s how MOEE representative Conrad DeBarros introduced his presentation to about 20 agricultural community representatives gathered at South Nation Conservation offices in Berwick June 12.

DeBarros felt the comment was needed to counteract suspicion among Eastern farmers. He said, “We live and work in this environment so obviously we have an interest.”

The program is a trial approach to dealing with the serious phosphorous overload in the South Nation River watershed which will allow municipalities to participate in reasonably priced non-point source pollution reduction instead of installing more costly lagoon infrastructure.

The Village of Casselman, which has been pushing for three years to get MOEE’s permission to expand its sewage lagoons. The essential difference which allows flexibility with phosphorous is that it’s a nuisance rather than a toxic substance.

Obviously excited about the concept, DeBarros said it represented a chance for “true water quality enhancement” in the watershed.

Some spin-offs from the program would include reduction of sediment, a decrease in organic matter, enhanced erosion control and an overall improvement in habitat, he said.

The phosphorous load in the South Nation has been measured at five times the recommended provincial guideline. It’s not known what percentage is from natural sources such as streambank erosion.

As explained by SNC staffers Mary-Ann Wilson and Leslie Vanclief, the authority has been involved for the past four years in 50-50 shared phosphorous-abatement projects with the farming community. The projects tackle barnyard runoff, manure storage, milkhouse wastewater disposal and cattle crossings.

Wilson, the SNC’s director of operations, suggested the authority is well positioned to administer the Total Phosphorous Management Program as an extension of what it already does. The level of funding to farmers is expected to be higher under the new program.

Wilson called for formation of a special SNC committee to oversee distribution of funds and decide upon specific projects under the program. The proposal will be discussed at a future meeting.

SNC chair Denis Perrault said the program has the potential for forging productive rural-urban partnerships.
South Nation chairman says sorry

BERWICK — The South Nation Conservation (SNC) has cried mea culpa and told Farmers’ Forum he was sorry for the conflict with farmers living along the river from east of Brockville to Plantagenet.

east of Ottawa. The SNC was at fault for not encouraging farmers to join the committee to manage the phosphorus offsetting program, said SNC general manager Dennis O’Grady.

“One of the biggest mistakes we made was not involving farmers from day one.”

The conservation’s latest move to encourage farmer involvement on the committee is hoped to ease its two-and-a-half year stormy relations with farmers over phosphorus run-in Dundas for channelization.

Explaining the stormy relationship, he said: “We got caught in the crossfire” between the Ministry of Environment (MOE) and farmers.

While admitting that he doesn’t know in the long run if the phosphorous offsetting program will work, he said the program is good for the rural community and farmers. Parmalat, the giant milk proc-
Landowner Survey: 5 Years Later

- Would you recommend that other watersheds undertake a similar program?
  - Nine in ten have already recommended the program to a friend or neighbour
- Program continues to run smoothly
Key Step 1

Full stop:

• Cancelled all trading projects until ag issues resolved
• Asked Provincial Ag. Ministry to take charge of the agenda
• Farm organizations approved future steps
  • 100 farm organizations in 8 counties, English/French
  • Provincial Organizations spoke on their behalf in most instances
Key Step 2

Signed agreement of roles and responsibilities for Farmers, SNC, Province

• Farmers not responsible for point sources not meeting P reduction targets
• 4:1 offset
• Agreement on all inclusive cost per kg. of P
  – Water quality monitoring
  – Annual reports on program
  – Monitoring
  – Evaluation
  – Staffing
Key Step 3: Norm Tinkler

Ability to Adapt:

- Farmers do all site visits and recommend grants for farmers
- Clean Water Committee
  - farmer dominated
  - makes all funding decisions
- Farmer - farmer communication
  - program succeeded because of farmers, their common language, and their relationships
- Process is less important
  - Making it easier to adapt
Science Was Not An Issue

- Review of 80 primary research papers
- Regulators approved P reduction formulae
- Kept the technology simple, or in-house
- Program was advertized as “grants for BMP’s”