

River Raisin Watershed Council

Protecting, preserving, and enhancing the River Raisin Watershed since 1974

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Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)

Water Resources Division

Submitted electronically via the MiEnviro Portal

RE: Public Comment on Draft NPDES Permit No. MI0060445 — Proposed Wastewater Discharge to the Saline River, Saline Township Data Center

To the Water Resources Division:

The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) submits these comments on draft NPDES Permit No. MI0060445, which would authorize the discharge of approximately 20,000 gallons per day of treated wastewater from the proposed Saline Township data center into the Saline River. RRWC is a non-profit organization established in 1974 under Michigan's Local River Management Act, charged with protecting and improving water quality throughout the 1,059-square-mile River Raisin Watershed. Our mission is to inspire behaviors that promote stewardship, improve water quality, and encourage public participation to protect, preserve and enhance the River Raisin Watershed. Because the Saline River is a tributary of the River Raisin, this discharge falls directly within our watershed of concern, and its cumulative effects flow downstream toward the River Raisin's Area of Concern and, ultimately, western Lake Erie. Having received a grade of C on a recent watershed report card, we recognize areas of improvement and are committed to acting on behalf of the watershed to fulfill the mission of our organization.

We wish to be clear about our posture: RRWC does not oppose economic development in the watershed, and we recognize that the facility proposes a closed-loop cooling system that avoids large consumptive water withdrawals. Our interest is in ensuring that the permitted discharge — and the stormwater and spill-response conditions associated with the site — fully protect the Saline River and the waters downstream of it. To that end, we respectfully ask EGLE to strengthen the draft permit as follows.

Specific requests

- **Impose a strict, numeric phosphorus limit.** The River Raisin is a priority watershed under Michigan's Domestic Action Plan for the western Lake Erie Basin, which targets a 40% reduction in phosphorus loading. Any new point-source discharge to a Raisin tributary should carry an enforceable numeric total phosphorus effluent limit (both concentration- and mass-based), set no less stringently than the most protective limit applied to comparable dischargers. Also, the USGS Saline River gauging station at Austin Road often registers ~5 CFS flow rate in baseflow conditions. That river segment has little dilution capacity during extended dry periods. Consider a more restrictive standard.
- **Set enforceable total nitrogen limits and monitoring.** Nitrogen contributes to downstream nutrient enrichment and harmful algal blooms. We ask that the permit include total nitrogen monitoring and, where warranted by the receiving water's condition, numeric limits.
- **Evaluate the Saline River's low-flow assimilative capacity.** The Saline River is a small stream with limited dilution capacity, particularly during summer low-flow periods when a 20,000 gpd discharge represents a larger proportion of streamflow. We request that EGLE document the assimilative-capacity and dilution

analysis used to derive the limits, and consider seasonal or flow-based limits to protect aquatic life during critical low-flow conditions.

- **Include thermal (temperature) limits.** Treated effluent and runoff from extensive impervious surfaces can raise stream temperatures and harm cold- and cool-water aquatic communities. We ask that the permit contain temperature limits and monitoring sufficient to protect the designated aquatic-life uses of the Saline River.
- **Require Whole Effluent Toxicity (WET) testing.** Given public concern about chemicals reaching the river, periodic acute and chronic WET testing should be an explicit permit condition to confirm the discharge is not toxic to aquatic organisms.
- **Mandate robust monitoring, reporting, and public transparency.** The most frequently voiced community concern is not the permit on paper but whether compliance will actually be verified. We ask for a monitoring frequency commensurate with a new discharge, publicly accessible Discharge Monitoring Reports, and clearly stated enforcement triggers. RRWC offers its volunteer Adopt-A-Stream and water-quality monitoring capacity as an independent, cooperative check on in-stream conditions above and below the outfall.
- **Apply Michigan's antidegradation policy.** Because this is a new discharge to a previously undischarged reach, we ask EGLE to confirm that a full antidegradation review has been conducted and that the least-degrading practicable alternatives have been evaluated.
- **Make spill and coolant-handling safeguards enforceable.** We support the requirement that spilled coolant be removed from the site and never discharged to waterways. We ask that secondary containment, a spill-prevention and response plan, and leak-detection for the cooling system be written as enforceable permit conditions rather than voluntary commitments.
- **Require a bond.** We support the inclusion of a required bond of sufficient quantity, length, and transferability for long-term maintenance and operations to be assured.
- **Hold a public hearing.** Given the significant public interest in this proposal, RRWC requests that EGLE convene a public hearing so that watershed residents and stakeholders can be heard on the record.

RRWC appreciates EGLE's work to protect Michigan's waters and welcomes the opportunity to serve as a constructive partner in monitoring this discharge over time. We would be glad to share our subwatershed water-quality data and to coordinate on downstream monitoring should the permit be issued. Thank you for considering these comments.

Respectfully submitted,



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