

We Have A Winner!

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East Grand Forks Has Minnesota's Best Tasting Water!

If you ever happen to be travelling to North Dakota along U.S. Highway 2, it would be well worth your while to pull over when you reach the city of East Grand Forks; be sure to bypass the various bottled drinking water offerings in exchange for the opportunity to experience a real quality product—good ole' East Grand Forks water straight from the tap!

Congratulations to the city of East Grand Forks, Minnesota who recently grabbed the title The Best Tasting Water in Minnesota, awarded at the 2022 Minnesota Rural Water Association Technical Conference in St. Cloud in early March. The annual competition's winner is chosen from samples submitted by public water supply systems from across the state of Minnesota and has prevailed through a preliminary round, and then a final judging round.

East Grand Forks is a medium-sized community located in Polk County, Minnesota in Northwest Minnesota. The East Grand Forks water system (a lime softening Class A treatment plant) is part of the East Grand Forks Water and Light Department, which has been providing water and light to citizens of the city since 1909. The number of people served at the current time is approximately 9000 people—a population that has bounced back from the decrease resulting from the devastation to property and residential homes during the 1997 flood event. At the time immediately preceding the flood, the city averaged a daily water production of 1.6 to 1.7 million gallons per day. Due to factors such as new construction building standards, the increased efficiency of water fixtures, and the active conservation of water resources by the system customers, the city currently produces an average of 1.0 million gallons per day.

Producing a top-quality drinking water product in East Grand Forks doesn't come without its unique challenges; the source of drinking water for the city comes from the Red Lake River, as opposed to a well and groundwater aquifer. Since groundwater aquifers supply 75 percent of Minnesota's drinking water, and surface waters account for the other 25 percent, East Grand Forks' water supply system has more in common with Minneapolis-St. Paul—another surface water system—than most other water systems in Minnesota.

The ever-changing characteristics of the waters making up the Red Lake River, such as temperature, turbidity, and chemical parameters—just to name a few—make maintaining consistent quality meeting the federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards a full time endeavor for the East Grand Forks water department personnel

(shown below). A typical day will find the six water system staff making multiple sampling/testing runs in their on-site lab in order to monitor changes in the raw and finished water quality in order to guide treatment optimization.

The city of East Grand Forks is also located within what is known as the Red River Valley basin, which is characterized by rich, fertile soils. Popular commercial agricultural crops such as sugar beets and potatoes are grown in the basin and supply large agricultural processing facilities with their product. Approximately fifty percent of the East Grand Forks' water system's demand comes from these agricultural processing facilities and necessitates a large storage capacity to support the demand required during certain times of the year. The months requiring the largest water demand due to the processing plants' operations just happen to coincide with the spring and summer months when increased surface water runoff and air temperatures influence levels of turbidity, hardness, organics, nitrification or taste and odor issues. This large demand during agricultural harvest and



processing periods is beneficial to the water system because the rapid turnover of the water in the system keeps the water in the quality more consistent.

While the highly qualified and experienced water treatment staff is certainly responsible for the high quality of water that the system produces, Brian Johnson, Water Plant Superintendent, is quick to extend additional credit for their success to the rest of his Water and Light Department coworkers. Staff in the Department carry on water treatment peripheral activities such as distribution system maintenance and repair, business related functions, and informational technological needs. Brian also mentioned the great support provided by the Water and Light Commission for the Water Plant. "We're very fortunate to



have proactive measures for upgrading and replacing sections of main every summer so that troubled areas are removed. The Water and Light Commission puts a high priority to spend the funds necessary to address the issues."

The Minnesota Rural Water Association would, again, like to extend hearty congratulations to the city of East Grand Forks and the Water Plant staff for winning the right to claim the Best Tasting Water in Minnesota! The city will have the opportunity to submit a water sample next year at the time of the National Rural Water Association Rally in Washington D.C. in early 2023 when the National Best Tasting Water competition will be held.

While expressing his great pride in the Water Department staff's dedication and hard work, Water and Light Commission long-time member and current President, Robert "Punky" Beauchamp didn't hesitate, with tongue in cheek, to encourage those from Grand Forks to make their way across the river to get some good-tasting East Grand Forks drinking water. And if they happen to win the National title at the National Rural Water Association's contest next year, who knows what a great opportunity this could be for the city? Maybe they should start their own bottling plant!



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