

DANE COUNTY LAKES & WATERSHED COMMISSION 2023 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

The Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission's charge is to protect and improve water quality and the scenic, economic, recreational, and environmental value of Dane County's water resources. We enjoy boating, fishing and paddling on the 69 lakes and ponds and the 52 rivers and streams. In addition to recreational activities, our waters also support industry and agriculture. Our groundwater resources are critically important for the approximately 550,000 residents who depend on it for drinking water and also replenish our surface waters. The Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission (LWC) recommends the following investments be part of the 2023 Dane County Budget. These investments build on current programs and leverage contributions of partners, including our cities, villages, and towns; the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District; other private sector land and water managers; citizen volunteers; and others.

NEW INITIATIVES FOR 2023

Expanded Beach Health Monitoring, Education and Public Notification. Public Health Madison and Dane County (PHMDC) monitors our lakes and shoreline waters for high levels of pathogenic bacteria (*E. coli* and *Salmonella*) and blue green algae (*Cyanobacteria*) so that beaches can be closed when unsafe levels of these organisms are present. Cyanobacteria produce multiple toxins which are toxic to humans and pets. *E. coli* and *Salmonella* cause intestinal infections which vary from very mild to life threatening. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. Cyanobacteria are naturally present in the water and soil. *E. coli* and *Salmonella* enter our streams and lakes through runoff containing animal waste. These outbreaks occur as a result of heavy rainfall or high temperatures and require more frequent sampling to ensure that the public is properly notified.. ***The LWC recommends that the county purchase one to two PCR machines (approx. \$60,000 each) to reduce sample processing time from one day to several hours. Additional LTEs are needed for expanded sample collection and processing (\$60,000).*** We also recommend that PHMDC enhance their health advisories about water quality risks (directed at the general public and lake users outside of beaches. i.e., anglers and boaters).

Strengthening Stormwater Management Ordinances in Dane County. The National Climate Assessment indicates that flooding and associated damage to infrastructure will continue to increase in the Midwest. UW researchers developed a computer model and superimposed the historic 2008 Lake Delton storm over the county. This model predicted that Lake Mendota would overtop its banks and cause catastrophic damage to property and crops. In response to this research, the LWC and Capital Area Regional Planning Commission convened a joint Stormwater Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) which recommended strengthening stormwater volume control ordinances for new and redeveloped lands and developing a county-wide stormwater volume trading/fee in-lieu program. The LWC recommends ***Allocating \$25,000 for a consultant to prepare an RFP for county-wide stormwater volume trading/fee in-lieu program and Allocating \$100,000 for the development of county-wide stormwater volume trading/fee in-lieu program***

PFAS Testing. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are an emerging human-made contaminant as they are harmful "forever chemicals" that build up in the body and environment over time and have serious health effects. There are no standards for PFAS contamination. However, the state Department of Health Services has recommended a combined groundwater limit of 20 parts per trillion (ppt) for two of the most toxic PFAS variants, PFOS and PFOA. The state Department of Natural Resources expanded the existing advisories limiting consumption of those fish caught in the waters of the Yahara Chain from Starkweather Creek downstream to the Rock River. Because of the high levels of PFAS most recently found to extend through the entire Yahara Chain and elsewhere in the county (from an old landfill near Cross Plains), the LWC recommends continued support for County related PFAS activities such as, but not limited to, funding for increased testing of sediment and fish in Starkweather Creek and other areas where PFAS may be found, continued monitoring of PFAS in areas including Starkweather Creek and development of a mitigation plan for contaminated areas and also allocation of \$3,000 for engaging and educating public communities affected in these areas about fish contamination and levels of PFAS in the waterways. Prioritization will be given to messaging and signage targeting areas that are heavily fished with all public outreach materials provided in multiple languages (English, Spanish, and Hmong). ***As a new effort the LWC recommends the the county sample all wells located in county parks for PFAS. This will provide data to assess how widespread PFAS contamination is throughout the county.***

CONTINUED SUPPORT OF PRIOR ONGOING ISSUES

Flooding of the Yahara Chain of Lakes. The Lakes and Watershed Commission asks that the county continue to address flooding of the the Yahara chain of Lakes by:

1. *Providing the funding needed to operate and maintain the county purchased dredging equipment.*
2. *Continue funding at current levels (\$1,000,000) Aquatic Plant Cutting in the Yahara River Chain-of-Lakes. This effort increases water flow, which in turn allows better management of lake levels, especially during high water events. Additionally, aquatic plant management supports outdoor recreation for local and regional users of the lakes and helps minimize losses of water-based economic activity. Management is also needed to provide adequate access to the lake by riparians and other users. The LWC recommends: that the county continues to provide funding (\$1,000,000) the current program including the expansion of the operating hours from 8 hours/day to 10 hours/day that were implemented in 2022 which was expected to increase harvesting operating hours by 33%. This approach is the least expensive way to increase harvesting operating hours.*
3. *Continue ongoing communication with the HoChunk Nation to ensure transparency regarding impacts of dredging on the Yahara River fish weir and appropriate ways to mitigate any impacts and engage in discussions on building resilience within the Yahara River to reduce and eliminate the need for future dredging.*
4. *The Lakes and Watershed Commission asks for the benefit of lake users and riparians and to keep them informed, in real time, of potential hazards from aquatic plant harvesters and barges, that the data received from GPS aboard the harvesters and barges should be available in real time on the Land and Water Resources website. Allocate up to \$3,00 for this project.*

Lake Safety. The Dane County Sheriff's office provides deputies to patrol the lakes, enforce safe boating regulations, and respond to emergencies. The LWC recommends:

1. *Continued funding of Lake Patrols from May 15th to September 15th to reduce response time to emergencies and to enforce no-wake zones and no-wake periods. Patrols should be on each of the four lakes during weekends and holidays.*
2. *Funding the Capital Request of the Marine and Trail Enforcement Bureau of the Dane County Sheriff's Department for Dive Team Equipment. With over 25,000 registered boats in Dane County, this Department is responsible for year-round patrolling of Dane County lakes, enforcement of all laws pertaining to the lakes, investigation of accidents, and rescue operations.*
3. *Continued participation in the Law Enforcement Aids to Municipalities program under NR 50.13 where applicable.*

SUPPORT FOR COUNTY INVESTMENTS IN WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. Water resource management requires investment from county Departments and staff with diverse areas of expertise and authorities, as well as investment from Dane County citizens that are providing leadership throughout the county.

1. **Maintain Funding for Other Operating Costs, such as gasoline and parts for equipment maintenance.** Aquatic plant harvesting is one effort that suffers significantly when gasoline or replacement parts are not available. Like the need for appropriately trained dedicated staff, these supplies are critical to improving water quality as well as maintaining target lake levels.
2. **Continue to Support the Yahara "CLEAN" Compact (Version 3.0).** The Yahara CLEAN Compact seeks to renew and strengthen a community partnership to clean up our lakes and meet their designated uses and benefits under the Clean Water Act.

3. **Fish, Crystal, & Mud Lakes District.** The water levels of the three lakes has fluctuated over the past 100 years, but recently have risen significantly. Crystal Lake has come up over 7 feet while Fish & Mud Lakes are up over 12 feet. Water levels have inundated 95 house trailers, and destroyed a dozen homes around the lakes, as well as three Town roads. At these high levels Crystal, which is a shallow muddy lake, can overflow into Fish Lake. Should Fish Lake rise another 3 feet, it will flow overland to the Wisconsin River destroying fields, homes, roads, and farm buildings. It will destroy the ability to farm thousands of acres as well as washing tons of manure into the river., The Towns of Roxbury and West Point & the Lake District have engineered a plan to install a free flow control structure and pipe to lower the water levels in a controlled manor. The LWC recommends allocating \$7,000 to assist in pumping costs for Crystal Lake.

INITIATIVES TO REDUCE PHOSPHORUS POLLUTION. In 2020, 46 bodies of water in Dane County did not meet water quality standards because of phosphorus pollution. Excess phosphorus, largely from nonpoint runoff, is recognized as the primary pollutant. Wisconsin is one of the first states to have a numeric phosphorus water quality standard for lakes and streams and is the only state to include an innovative, regulatory compliance option, called Watershed Adaptive Management. This law allows regulated wastewater point sources (Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, MMSD) to work with nonpoint sources (agricultural producers, municipal storm water utilities, etc.) on cost effective strategies that target phosphorus reduction while achieving water quality criteria. One of the first adaptive management projects in the nation, called Yahara WINS is being led by MMSD, who has contracted with Dane County (Land and Water Resources Department) to assist rural landowners in implementing conservation practices that reduce phosphorus. In addition, the County's taxpayers have invested in the construction of manure storage facilities, manure digesters, composting and other new technologies to remove phosphorus from manure and stream sediments. We strongly support these ongoing investments, but we must enforce current agricultural performance standards and need conservation efforts to target critical parts of the landscape, where investments in conservation practices will result in verifiable, high levels of soil and nutrient retention. Every pound of phosphorus in our lakes has the capacity to create up to 500 pounds of algae, reducing water quality and the ability to use our lakes for fishing, swimming, and other water recreation.

A. Continuous Cover Program - Perennial Agriculture Cost Share and Conservation Easement Program. Cost sharing for conservation programs is typically the amount that is needed to encourage a farmer to install and maintain a conservation practice. This new \$750k conservation program launched in 2019 was designed to complement the "suck the muck" investments to reduce legacy sediments by implementing upstream perennial agriculture practices. Research shows the best performing practice for reducing run-off and improving water quality is maintaining perennial vegetative cover on the land. Along with reduced run-off, perennial vegetation also provides for increased infiltration and improved soil health. The program was very popular and applicants exceeded cost share dollars. This program was also listed as an agricultural recommendation within the *2020 Dane County Climate Action Plan*. The LWC recommends:

1. *Expanding this program to \$10 million in capital funds (\$2million/year for 5 years) with the goals of;*
 - a. *Establishing 10,000 acres of perennial vegetation practices in Dane County in five years (native prairies and non-native pastures),*
 - b. *Providing education and technical assistance to land owners (including non-farmer landowners) on ways to integrate perennials (perennial cover crops, prairie strips, harvestable buffers, alley cropping etc.) into farm plans and leases targeting fields that contribute high levels of phosphorus and*
 - c. *Expanding the use of conservation easements. During this period, leases for all county-owned land (purchased via the taxpayer-funded Dane County Conservation fund) which are steep sloped or high in phosphorus have been converted to perennial vegetation. Over time, wherever practical, other county owned lands will be converted to prairie or perennial vegetation. In the Yahara River Watershed, we recommend exploring a matching cost-share program with Yahara WINS for perennial establishment and integrating it into their adaptive management program.*

B. Expand Grazing and Sustainable Agriculture Programs. A grazing specialist was hired in Dane County in 2017 and has greatly expanded outreach and enthusiasm for grazing as an environmentally superior and economically viable farming system for livestock. Grazing farms typically have fewer capital investments and are an affordable way for beginning farmers to start farming. Grazing may also assist larger, confinement operations looking for ways to reduce manure volumes and reduce costs by grazing non-milking cows. Brown County reported a 35 to 51% cost savings from grazing

dairy heifers compared to replacing confinement heifers. Grazing operations can rebuild soil health and healthy soils act as carbon and nutrient sinks. In partnership with the Continuous Cover cost-share program, *LWC strongly recommends:*

1. *Expanding outreach efforts, in partnership with the Dane County Extension, with a goal of promoting managed rotational grazing of well-managed pastures. These grazing systems are among the best livestock practices for water quality and provide important ecosystem services (crop pollination, climate stabilization, flood mitigation, clean water, and wildlife habitat).*
2. *Continued development and expansion of programs that; support free trainings and pasture walks, provide technical assistance, create farmer networks and provide small grants (for fencing etc.) to farmers interested in exploring grazing.*

C. Continue to partner with the University of Wisconsin to predict and validate phosphorus reductions. Dane County is partnering with researchers in the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences who were awarded a grant in 2018 to establish the *UW LandLab*, whose mission is to identify science based solutions and improve phosphorus reduction outcomes. This work will be expanded in 2019 with \$10 million in support from USDA for Grassland 2.0 whose goal is to engage in the local watersheds to develop greater supply and demand for grass-fed livestock and technical and financial tools for grass-based farming enterprises. The LWC recommends that *Dane County Land and Water Resources Department continue to collaborate with UW researchers, and look for ways to expand grass based ideas in MMSD's adaptive management implementation efforts and to annually present to LWC, EANR, and LCC its strategy for implementing phosphorus reductions.*

D. Improve Nutrient Management Planning, Compliance and Phosphorus Accounting. Because clean lakes and streams and safe drinking water are important to all, the State of Wisconsin, with the support of farm organizations, adopted minimum agriculture performance standards, including mandatory nutrient management (NM) plans, for all Wisconsin farms. Counties are responsible for implementing state farm conservation and NM standards. Improved nutrient management and conservation compliance could significantly reduce phosphorus and we should continue to work to get additional farms implementing NM plans. The LWC recommends *continued support of Nutrient Management Plan farmer training and cost share assistance and continued tracking of nutrient management plan implementation.*

E. Matching grants for watershed and farmer-led groups for local planning and implementation. Successful land and water management includes understanding the ecology of a place and the needs and motivations of the people that use and impact the land and water. Leadership by farmers and other citizens in local watersheds is critical for short- and long-term success. Multiple literature reviews and the personal experience of many professionals and volunteers indicate that effective watershed coordinators are integral to successful collaboration within watershed initiatives. Therefore, Dane County should work with partners to provide sustained funding and support for watershed leadership and coordination throughout Dane County by providing matching grants for citizen organizations, including farmer-led organizations to coordinate and participate in watershed planning, implementation, and monitoring. Small grants would allow for the purchase of conservation equipment and administrative support to grow local watershed leadership and outreach. They would also complement existing funding for conservation practices. Coordinators would work with LWRD and partners to set and prioritize watersheds and tasks. They would also work with Land Conservation staff and others to integrate farm and property scale technical assistance up to watershed scale performance and communication of results. Coordinators would work to build trust and shared direction in watersheds, as well as support science and data-based conversations about both well-understood and innovative conservation practices.

INITIATIVES TO REDUCE CHLORIDE POLLUTION. Average annual chloride levels in groundwater have increased rapidly in the last 20 years. Today, thanks in part to the work of the multi-agency Wisconsin Salt Wise partners (<https://www.wisaltwise.com>), there is expanded public awareness that salt use applied to roadways, parking lots, sidewalks and driveways and inefficient water softeners have markedly increased chloride levels in area lakes, creeks, marshes and groundwater. Strengthening the message and continuing to educate salt applicators can have significant impacts on reducing chloride pollution. The LWC recommends *continued support for voluntary certification and training through the City of Madison's certification program for winter maintenance of parking lots and sidewalks and improvement in the county's own organizational practices, including the good work being done by Dane County Highway and Transportation and Dane County Facilities management to reduce salt and deicers, including upgrading water softeners in county facilities.*

ENHANCED COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES. The Lakes and Watershed Commission supports the following investments to maintain community engagement in water stewardship.

A. Continued County Investment in the Land and Water Resources Department. Dane County's investment in watershed leaders through the Dane County Watershed Network and volunteer engagement has paid great dividends, increasing awareness and focus of the role of watershed organizations in addressing clean water goals. The LWC recommends continued *county investment in the Watershed Management Coordinator, Strategic Engagement Coordinator and the MAMSWAP positions.*

B. Outdoor Explorers: Educating and Diversifying Youth. The Outdoor Explorers program takes place during Bayview's eight week Summer Camp. Overarching goals for the program include 1) increased connection to, and stewardship of, the park system and the natural environment as a whole, 2) Improved science education through lesson and experiments about local lake ecosystems, parks, and other natural areas, 3) Increased appreciation of lakes and understanding of issues such as water quality, conservation. And supply, 4) Increased access to and instruction in open water recreation and safety, 5) Encouraging curiosity and feelings of joy about the natural world and especially Dane County lakes and parks. . The LWC recommends maintaining *\$16,000 in funding to enable more diverse and/or low-income youth to participate in Outdoor Explorers Program.*

C. Purchase of Water Quality Testing Supplies for the Dane County Natural Resource Education Center (NREC). The NREC is an important resource, serving 2,000-3,000 volunteers annually. It makes hands-on learning available to citizen groups that engage in educational stewardship activities including local surface water and groundwater assessments. The NREC lends out educational and stewardship equipment to community groups free of charge so that they can engage in hands-on field based activities at low to no additional cost. The NREC also coordinates the storm drain marking for Dane County. The LWC recommends *\$500 to the NREC for the purchase of materials including stream/lake and drinking water monitoring equipment and chemical test kits (for dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrates, and other parameters), water transparency testing, and biological assessment testing.*

Urban Water Quality Grant Program. Since 2005, Dane County has provided nearly \$10 million in cost-sharing funds to municipalities via the Urban Water Quality Grants (UWQG) for re-construction of stormwater outfalls and other projects. To strengthen this program, LWC recommends that *the Land and Water Resources Department continue to prepare and present a written annual report on the UWQG to the LWC and the general public to document projects funded and progress toward water quality improvement goals and review and amend as needed the eligibility criteria used in awarding funds.*