

December 2021

2022 Special Recognition/Friend of Conservation Award

Nominee: Mike Sorge, NR Basin Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
608-275-3247, michael.sorge@wisconsin.gov

Nominator: Amy Piaget, Dane County, 608-212-9172, piaget.amy@countyofdane.com
John Bohonek, Dodge County, 920-386-3662, jbohonek@co.dodge.wi.us

Nomination Summary:

Mike has been a long-time supporter of locally led conservation efforts throughout his career with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. He is particularly adept at building relationships and strengthening partnerships through unconventional pathways. His work with counties through the years as a water quality biologist and now supervisor with DNR has led to the implementation of many practices, improvements in water quality, and formation of producer-led groups.

Nomination Criteria:

In Dane County, Mike's work with supporting implementation can be shown through many projects including:

- Providing technical assistance and stream monitoring as part of the Pleasant Valley project and numerous stream restoration projects in Southwest Dane County.
- Assessing water quality for the Lake Mendota North Priority Watershed.
- Conducting pre- and post-monitoring for Targeted Runoff Management (TRM) Grants targeting 303(d) waters and removal.
- Reviewing and consulting on Dane County's Aquatic Plant Management Plan and planning process.
- Assessing water quality data in partnership with county staff for Dane County's "Suck the Muck" legacy sediment removal project.
- Acting as a liaison to the Yahara WINS Adaptive Management project.
- Assisting with the development of the Yahara CLEAN plan and serving on the Strategic Implementation Team for plan development.
- Bringing agency and county partners together to improve Chapter 30 and Wetland permitting procedures for conservation projects.
- Inviting county staff to present to DNR staff on the roles and responsibilities county land conservation departments play in improving water quality throughout the state.

In Dodge County, Mike's relationship building is showcased through a number of actions including:

- Attending problem solving meetings that led to the development of a producer-led group, the Dodge County Farmers, Healthy Soil, Healthy Water.
- Providing helpful information to the producer-led group in the early stages of their formation.
- Breaking down barriers and improving relationships between producers and the DNR.

- Assisting with the formation of the Dodge County Alliance, Healthy Soil, Healthy Water.
- Providing pertinent information for the Alliance group in keeping them on track with their goals.

Mike spends a lot of his time behind the scenes supporting conservation that is hard to capture or quantify. He knows that land conservation departments are one of the best kept secrets and the true boots on the ground when it comes to assisting with the implementation of conservation projects in the state. In turn, Mike is one of the best kept secret supporters of conservation efforts.



Laura M. Hicklin, Director
Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive

Administration • Land Conservation • Parks • Water Resource Engineering

December 23, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

The Dane County Land & Water Resources Department fully supports the nomination of Mike Sorge, NR Basin Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, for the *Special Recognition/Friend of Conservation Award*.

Mike has been a close collaborator and partner on numerous conservation and watershed related County initiatives for more over 30 years. Some of these include the Lake Mendota North Priority Watershed Project, Management of the Yahara River and lakes, Yahara Capital Lakes and Environmental Assessment and Needs (CLEAN) project, and Dane County's "Suck the Muck" Legacy Sediment Removal.

In addition to bringing his knowledge and expertise, he has often gone above and beyond to further the understanding, collaboration, and implementation of conservation work to improve our county's natural resources. Specific examples include: his voluntary participation and leadership in technical working groups and interagency meetings; in-field support and assistance in collecting and evaluating environmental samples to better understand resource concerns; and continued advocacy for innovative conservation projects that often do not fit smoothly into existing regulatory frameworks.

The WDNR has been in a tough position for many years and what sets Mike apart is his willingness to collaborate and discuss details rather than relying on boilerplate language that does not help other resource professionals understand the "why."

Thank you for your consideration of Mike for this award. Everyone involved in the nomination discussion has been unanimously in support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Hicklin".

Laura Hicklin
Director
Dane County Land and Water Resources Department



Dodge County Land and Water Conservation Department

127 East Oak Street · Juneau, WI 53039-1329
PHONE: (920) 386-3660
EMAIL: landcons@co.dodge.wi.us

To Whom It May Concern,

Dodge County Land and Water Conservation Department fully supports the nomination of Mike Sorge for the "Special Recognition/Friends of Conservation Award". Mike has been instrumental in the development and continued support in both the Dodge County Farmers-Healthy Soil-Healthy Water and Dodge County Alliance-Healthy Soil-Healthy Water.

The Dodge County Farmers-Healthy Soil-Healthy Water is a farmer led group. They have made a huge impact on the use of cover crops in Dodge County. Several of the members have been featured in the No-Till Farmer, a nationally recognized magazine.

The Dodge County Alliance-Healthy Soil-Healthy Water is a local group that was organized to:

1. Support the farmer led group.
2. Bridge the gap between farmers and lake property owners.

Partnerships and friendships have been made that otherwise would not have.

Sincerely,

John Bohonek
County Conservationist
Dodge County Land and Water Conservation Department



December 20, 2021

Amy Piaget
Dane County LWRD
Madison WI

Amy,

This letter is in support of your nomination of Mike Sorge for Wisconsin Land and Water's 2022 Special Recognition/Friend of Conservation Award.

I have known and worked with Mike almost 30 years. He has a lot of positive characteristics and Mike is strongly driven by wanting to help others and a focus on natural resources. He has an ability to think outside the box and put himself in others shoes as has been evident by his work with farmer led groups and agricultural producers and lake association representatives.

Mike spent many years as a Water Resources Biologist and was technically one of the top biologists in the state. He knows water quality, stream and lake habitat, and the biota that are dependent on the water and habitat. Mike has a keen eye for identifying and understanding that what happens on the landscape influences and impacts water quality. He has been involved in many projects that assess surface waters and their watersheds and lead to implementation of activities to address restoring waters. Many of these projects are outlined in your nomination. In addition to numerous projects Mike has been involved with in Dane County and southwest Wisconsin, Mike has supported projects throughout the state, including:

- serving as the single point of contact with Crave Brothers Dairy and DNR's Green Tier program; in the position he works with representatives from Crave Brothers, a CAFO, on their implementation of practices and procedures to achieve and maintain superior environmental performance.
- working with Discovery Farms on the annual Cover Crop Workshop.
- assisting the Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil Healthy Water with field days, soil health expos, and cover crop tech field days.

Mike did not grow up on a farm. He did grow up farming on the Sorge family farm that belonged to his grandparents. I have learned a lot from Mike. He has particularly educated me about healthy soil practices with an emphasis on no till and cover crops. I feel like I know enough to participate (at least a little) in conversations with those that are knowledgeable. Our daughter married the son of cash grain farmer and, while riding along with him during the harvest this last fall, I was able carry on somewhat intelligent dialog with our son-in-law's father. Mike is responsible for that and I am one of many individuals he has spent time educating about farming and the myriad of issues producers deal with day in and day out. He has a focus on mentoring and teaching others and that focus is driven by the way he cares about others.

One of Mike's greatest strengths is his ability to build relationships which he does by taking the time to understand others concerns and their points of view. He used the information to build bridges such as working with the Dodge County producers and lake interests. His resource and farming knowledge gives him the credibility to work with the producers and lake associations. His sincerity builds trust and relationships. You said it well that Mike spends a lot of time behind the scenes supporting conservation.

Thank you for nominating Mike Wisconsin Land and Water's 2022 Special Recognition/Friend of Conservation Award. He is very deserving.

Greg Searle

Greg Searle (signed electronically)
Water Resources Field Operations Director
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Fitchburg, WI 53711



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December 22nd, 2021

Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association
131 W. Wilson St. #601
Madison, WI 53703

Letter of Recommendation for the Nomination of Mike Sorge to receive the 2022 Special Recognition/Friend of Conservation Award

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to support the nomination of Mike Sorge for the 2022 Special Recognition/Friend of Conservation Award. Mike Sorge's has demonstrated numerous times the ability to build relationships and carry out innovative conservation focused solutions that address today's nutrient management challenges. Mike has shown that working together in partnership toward common sense solutions is the only way to do business and meet water quality goals. This was, and is, on display with his involvement with the Adaptive Management project in the Yahara River watershed as part of the Rock River TMDL compliance. His leadership as a partner in the project demonstrated that when working together and focusing on all sources of phosphorus, we better our ability to provide solutions to a wide array of farm operations.

Mike Sorge is one of the original participants of a group that is now known as the Yahara Watershed Improvement Network (Yahara WINS) where community partners in a watershed work together to reduce phosphorus in our local waters. Mike's support and leadership in facilitating the implementation of projects that help reduce phosphorus runoff into local waterways makes the partnership stronger and our waters cleaner. Mike has been a long-time supporter of innovation around pushing for big solutions to improve regional water quality. Through his leadership the DNR has prioritized understanding the science supporting the link between conservation, nutrient reductions, and environmental benefits. This makes conservation efforts accessible to the public which strengthens community partnerships toward a common solution like Yahara WINS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Griffin", written in a cursive style.

Martin Griffin
Yahara WINS Executive Committee President