Farmers Improve Water Quality!

Says who? The United States Geological Survey (USGS), that’s who. Despite all the attention given to phosphorus runoff from farms across the nation, and all the efforts to work with farmers on conservation practices to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff, there has not been a single, documented reduction in phosphorus loading to a stream that has been clearly linked to the adoption of conservation practices by farmers in a sizable watershed... until now.

The Pleasant Valley Project in the Pecatonica Watershed in Dane and Green Counties has shown a 37% reduction in phosphorus loads as a result of installed agricultural conservation practices. Water quality, as measured by USGS at stream gauging stations showed an improvement that is statistically valid with 90% confidence. Farmers in the watershed responded, and the stream responded. Did they have to put in fancy bio-digesters, bio-reactors, or some other “new” technology? Nope. They installed the common practices that have been available for years. Nutrient and residue management, pasture management systems, and streambank management were the selected practices. And they worked!

What makes this project different? The project planners identified the areas contributing the highest phosphorus loads in the watershed by using the latest science, including the Wisconsin Phosphorus Index. Then, they went door to door looking for partners within those areas. This targeted approach was a way to have the most impact, and get the most bang for the conservation buck. No-till and nutrient management reduced soil erosion and phosphorus runoff. Stream crossings managed cattle access and protected the banks from continued erosion. The vegetation on the banks started growing back. The project shows an estimated reduction of 2000 tons of soil loss per year in the implementation period (2010-2013) compared to the baseline years (2006-2009).

This project began in 2006 by collecting baseline data. Many of the landowners in the Pleasant Valley watershed were not already engaged with the county conservation staff, so the relationships between them took time to build.

“We had a lot of back-n-forth discussion,” said Duane Wagner, Dane County Soil and Water Conservationist. “We discussed resource protection, water quality improvement, livestock health and the quality of pasture forages. As we listened to each other we discovered we had similar goals.”

This two-way communication established mutual trust which was critical for farmer participation. The project was implemented as a pilot program and has improved working relationships across the county. Collaboration between county conservation staff and farmers is proving successful in watersheds across the state as interest in controlling phosphorus runoff continues to grow.

The greatest credit for the project goes to the farmers who stepped up to implement the practices. But, an amazing partnership worked behind the scenes with Land Conservation staff to ensure its success. The list includes The Nature
Farmers Improve Water Quality! continued...

Conservancy (TNC), who funded the work of the Dane and Green County Land Conservation offices and University of Wisconsin (UW) to engage farmers, conduct the watershed inventory, and help farmers install practices. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, along with TNC, provided critical practice funding. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, USGS, and UW, with funding from TNC and USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture conducted the necessary water quality monitoring and analysis.

Special recognition needs to go to Pat Sutter, Dane County Conservationist, whose foresight, guidance, clear thinking and care for people and the land got the project going and sustained. This project required all of the partners mentioned above to make it work, but Pat was probably its most effective and important proponent.

Where does the project go from here? The practices have been implemented, and the funding for additional practices has ceased. The partners are planning to continue monitoring and some have interest in funding the county land conservation staff to check in with the farmers on an annual basis for a status review. Most farmers appreciate the financial incentive to initially test the practices. After seeing improved herd health and/or financial benefit, they often expand the practices to the entire farm and maintain them because it’s just good business. Maintaining these practices over time will be essential if the impressive water quality gains are to be sustained.

For more information on the Pleasant Valley Watershed project visit: Nature.org/Pecatonica-wi.

A Conservation Turning Point?

Wisconsin citizens are asking for solutions to a host of environmental problems. While the issues differ across the state, every region’s resources are being pressed hard. County conservationists are on the front lines dealing with growing concerns.

Here are some of the issues:

- The frac sand boom in western Wisconsin has created concerns about dust, noise and light pollution, truck traffic, road failure, blow-outs of retention basins, and worries about the real usability of reclaimed land.
- In northeast Wisconsin, manure spills within the last month have resulted in contaminated drinking water and, in one case, a subsequent hospitalization. Well contaminations seem to be becoming more common-place, almost expected.
- Some dairy farms are investigating manure irrigation as a more efficient method of application to land, but neighbors are concerned about direct application or drift of manure onto their residences. The primary worry is about transmission of pathogens in the manure.
- The Madison Lakes; Lakes Tainter and Menomin; the Big Eau Pleine, Petenwell, and Castle Rock reservoirs along the Wisconsin River; Lake Winnebago, the near shore of Lake Michigan and Green Bay itself, are some of Wisconsin’s premier water bodies that suffer the algal blooms triggered by too much phosphorus in polluted runoff.
- Lakes and streams in the Central Sands of Wisconsin are drying up as more and more wells are drilled.
- The pristine lakes of northern Wisconsin, while not impaired by polluted runoff, are impacted by aquatic invasive species that are wreaking havoc with native plant and wildlife communities. The problem is expanding, not retreating, now reaching prized lakes such as Trout Lake in Vilas County.

In all these cases, county conservationists are doing the best they can within state rules, but local residents want more decisive action. As a result, some county and town governments have pursued ordinances and moratoria on sand mining permits, manure irrigation, and manure application restrictions to protect groundwater. Judges have insisted that the cumulative pumping impact of surrounding wells needs to be considered by DNR in its well permit decisions. I see these actions as a symptom of a larger, systemic problem. The public is losing faith in the current system that is set up to protect their natural resources.

So what to do? The pressures on Wisconsin’s land and water resources will not subside, period. If we want lasting, comprehensive solutions to conserve what we have, we will need to work together, public and private, or we will see a greater proliferation of problems and spasmodic attempts at regulation by towns and counties who feel they have no choice. And citizens will sue other citizens.

Wisconsin’s Land and Water Conservation offices are uniquely positioned to help provide solutions for real, on-the-ground problems. We know how to work with our public partners as well as farmers and other private individuals to effect positive change. As described in the earlier piece on phosphorus reduction in the Pleasant Valley watershed, locally led conservation works, even when the obstacles seem great. The key is developing a common vision that everyone owns.

If we can put our differences aside, we can address all of the issues outlined above without putting people out of business or plundering our shared resources. This perspective will require some new thinking and a willingness to work together at the local, state, federal and private levels. To paraphrase Pogo a bit: “We have met the solution, and it is us”.

On October 22, 2014, the WI Land+Water Southern Area adopted a resolution to engage Wisconsin’s governor, legislature, and agencies in a conversation about how to handle the growing problems caused by the increasing volumes of liquid manure spread in this state. It is a recognition that the public health and well-being has been affected and that the existing approach to manure management needs to be examined and changed, if necessary, to protect water resources and the health of Wisconsin’s people. The resolution will come before the WI Land+Water membership on March 11, 2015. This resolution could mark a conservation turning point if agriculture joins with conservationists in a serious discussion. - Jim VandenBrook
WI Land+Water 2015 Annual Conference

Celebrating Women of Conservation

NEW EVENT! Join WI Land+Water, Wisconsin Women in Government, and Wisconsin Counties Association for a special event on Monday evening, March 9 to honor and celebrate women who have dedicated their careers to conservation and public service. Registration information will be posted soon.

Sponsorship

In a time when most public policy has become a partisan issue, WI Land+Water points the way forward for land and water conservation in Wisconsin. We advocate for local conservationists who work directly with farmers and other landusers to solve real problems that affect our lakes, streams, farmland and forests. With our partners we get things done.

This year’s WI Land+Water’s 62nd Annual Conference provides an opportunity to strengthen the relationships of local conservation staff, their county supervisors, and partners across the state. They will gather to assess accomplishments, discuss challenges, and outline how to improve land and water resource management in Wisconsin.

Your sponsorship supports WI Land+Water’s strategies to promote locally led conservation through professional training, conservation standards development, youth education, grants, partnership building, and advocacy for the 450 Land Conservation Committee (LCC) supervisors and 350 conservation staff in 72 county Land Conservation Department (LCD) offices. Show your support for conservation that works.

More information about sponsorship levels and benefits can be found on our website: wisconsinlandwater.org/events/sponsorship

Sessions Include:

Cover Crops, Managing Generation Gaps, Lake Sturgeon Reintroduction, Social Media Outreach and Education, Emerging Mobile Technologies, Aquatic Invasives, Urban Stormwater Standards, Forest Health and MUCH MORE!

Silent Auction and Raffle

It’s never too early to sell raffle tickets and solicit silent auction items for the 2015 WI Land+Water Annual Conference.

Raffle

Raffle tickets are now available! Sales continue until the drawing at the close of the conference on March 11th. Tickets are bundled in packets of 40, 10 packs of 4 tickets, and are $3.00 each or 4 for $10.00. If you still need raffle tickets, contact Patty Benedict (benedictPJ@co.portage.wi.us, 715-346-1334) and she will arrange ticket delivery.

NOTE: Raffle regulations prohibit mailing raffle tickets, stubs, or money. All raffle proceeds benefit the WI Land+Water Scholarship Program. You need not be present at the conference to win.

Auction

Have a great item to donate? Visit our website for details and download the bid form, sample thank-you letter, and “Why Donate” info sheet at: wisconsinlandwater.org/events/annual-conference. Proceeds from the silent auction benefit youth education programs (such as the Conservation Awareness Poster and Speaking Contest, Wisconsin Envirothon and two youth conservation camps, Sand Lake Conservation Camp and the Wisconsin Land+Water Youth Conservation Camp).

November 2014 Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association, Inc.
Welcoming Big Changes

Thank you all for your patience as we transitioned from WLWCA to WI Land+Water and changed our logo, website, emails, and listservs. We are pleased with the outcome and excited with the opportunities updated communication tools will bring. Visit us at wisconsinlandwater.org and let us know what you think!

Listservs
All WI Land+Water listservs have been replaced with the new domain - wisconsinlandwater.org. See list below to message a group or committee.

Land Conservation Department Staff:
lcd-staff@wisconsinlandwater.org includes all county conservation department staff

Land Conservation Committee Supervisors:
lcc-supervisors@wisconsinlandwater.org includes all supervisors who have provided email addresses

County Conservationists:
countycons@wisconsinlandwater.org

Board of Directors + Advisors: bod@wisconsinlandwater.org

To view all listservs, including committees, visit our website: wisconsinlandwater.org/member-resources/listservs.

Newsletter updates
We will continue to send our hard copy newsletter twice a year in both print and electronic versions. We are also sending additional conservation news through our e-newsletter. If you would like to opt out of a hard copy and only receive an electronic version, contact christina@wisconsinlandwater.org.

Visit our website to sign up for our e-newsletter and view all archived newsletters and e-newsletters: wisconsinlandwater.org/about/newsletter-archive.

Help us promote you!
From a successful tree sales program to a cleaned up barnyard, we want to hear from you! Share your successes or thoughts on current issues with your county colleagues and partners. Do you have an idea for a story, but just don’t have the time? No problem! Contact us and we’ll help you craft the story, find the appropriate outlet, and share it with your colleagues.

Join us on Facebook and Twitter
If you or your county department has a social media presence, find us at facebook.com/wisconsinlandwater & twitter.com/wlwca. Like us and connect with your conservation community. Share pictures of your projects, articles about your county, or upcoming events. By engaging with WI Land+Water through social media, you’ll help us expand our reach and share the great work coming from county conservation members and partners.

Contact outreach@wisconsinlandwater.org and share your story.

Welcome and thank you to our conservation leaders

WI Land+Water Board of Directors
During even-numbered years the county membership elects 16 area representatives to its Board of Directors.

Welcome new members: 
Alan Barrows - Waukesha
Dick Gilles - Oconto
Dwight Jelle - Pepin
Dave Solin - Langlade

Thanks to outgoing members: 
Chuck Wagner - Kewaunee
Tom Rudolph - Oneida
Fritz Garbisch - Clark
Perry Lindquist - Waukesha

We appreciate their service to the organization. See the last page of the newsletter for current board list.

Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Board
Also in even-numbered years, the WI Land+Water membership elects 3 of its Land Conservation Committee members to serve on the Wisconsin State Board of Land and Water Conservation (LWCB), with a two-year term to begin the following year. Current LWCB members from WI Land+Water include: Joe Piechowski - Waushara County; Tom Rudolph - Oneida County; and George Mika - Ashland County (replacing Chuck Wagner - Kewaunee County). In 2015, Joe Piechowski, George Mika, and, Dale Hood - Grant County, will begin 2 year terms on the LWCB.

County Conservationist Meeting
The County Conservationist Fall Meeting was held on October 3-4 at Hotel Mead in Wisconsin Rapids. During discussion it was requested that the meetings be held in December and July. There is consensus throughout the group to hold the next County Conservationist Meeting in July 2015.

Aerial of restored shoreline off Lake Winnebago. Success story submitted by Winnebago County. See more Conservation Success Stories or submit yours at: wisconsinlandwater.org/programs/county-conservation-stories.
Know Your Conservationist Series

What does the future of conservation look like to you? Our members are answering this question and many more through this series to better know our over 700 conservation members. Read full interviews at: www.tumblr.com/blog/wisconsinlandwater.

Richard (Dick) Gilles Former dairy farmer and current WI Land+Water Board member, shared with us a little about his experiences, his thoughts on the future of conservation, and why he thinks it is important to serve the community he loves.

What previous experiences/education prepared you for your position on the Land Conservation Committee? Since 2008, I have served as the Farm Service Representative on the Oconto County Conservation Committee. I have also served on many farm, church, civic boards, many as chairman. As a retired dairy farmer, I’ve used many LCC programs for conservation practices. I have implemented nutrient management, installed many grass waterways to prevent erosion, installed barnyard to protect against manure runoff, and installed manure storage in 1980 to eliminate winter spreading.

Why do you think it is important to be active on the Land Conservation Committee? To help farmers protect our land & water, to fight invasive species, and help Lake Associations work with USDA, DNR, & DATCP to institute programs.

Chase Cummings Pepin County’s Conservationist, has been working with volunteers to monitor water quality, educating students interested in natural resources, and helping community members implement conservation practices for more than six years. We asked Chase to tell us a little about himself, his vision for the future of conservation, and what he loves about his job.

What previous experience/education prepared you for your position as County Conservationist? I grew up around my grandparent’s beef cattle operation and the potato and vegetable industry. I attended UW-Stevens Point and graduated with a Soil and Land Management degree. I was a crop scout for a large potato and vegetable producer in the Central Sands for several years. I managed the land application program of paper mill bio-solids for Stora Enso in Wisconsin Rapids. Prior to my Pepin County employment, I worked as County Feedlot Officer and Zoning Coordinator for Todd County, Minnesota.

What drew you to conservation work? Being able to maintain an agricultural connection and protect our natural resources for future generations.

What project are you most proud of? Conservation Field Days for 5th and 6th grade students in Pepin County. These educational events are held twice each year to expose students to a variety of outdoor activities and careers that have an impact on our natural resources.

Who is one interesting fact about your county that few may know? Wisconsin’s last remaining wood-framed courthouse is in Pepin County. Although maybe not be a fact, Pepin County borders Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River, which has been known to be home to Pepie. Pepie is thought to be a relative to the Loch Ness monster “Nessie”. There is currently a $50,000 reward for indisputable proof of Pepie’s existence.

What makes you decide to run for County Board? I had served as Clerk before, and then ran for County Board to give back to the community.

What are your county’s most valuable natural resources? Forests, gravel, sand, crusted limestone, good fishing & hunting, good hard working people.

What is one interesting fact about your county that few may know? Some of the best walleye fishing in the Midwest off of the shore of Oconto in the Bay of Green Bay.

What is your favorite outdoor activity in your county? Hunting

What does the future of Wisconsin conservation look like? Just as this organization has changed our name and brand to WI Land+Water, the strategy may change but the ultimate goal will always be the same - to protect our land and water. The future looks good, but we need to continue having active land conservation efforts in all counties.

What made you decide to run for County Board? I had served as Clerk before, and then ran for County Board to give back to the community.

What are your county’s most valuable natural resources? Forests, gravel, sand, crusted limestone, good fishing & hunting, good hard working people.

What is one interesting fact about your county that few may know? Some of the best walleye fishing in the Midwest off of the shore of Oconto in the Bay of Green Bay.

What is your favorite outdoor activity in your county? Hunting

When you’re not working, you’re… Outside in the yard, garden, woods, or training for the Birkie.
Happy Anniversary Youth Ed Committee

October marks the one year anniversary of the creation of WI Land+Water’s Youth Education Committee. This committee is made up of conservation staff who are committed to providing quality educational programs to students across the state and increasing participation of schools and students in conservation activities. Learn more about the committee by visiting: wisconsinlandwater.org/member-resources/youth-education-committee

2015 Youth Education program highlights:

Poster & Speaking Contest

- The 2015 Poster and Speaking Contest theme is Local Heroes, Your Hardworking Pollinators. For a list of guidelines, registration forms and county and area contest dates please visit our website at www.wisconsinlandwater.org/events/poster-amp-speaking-contest.
- The 2015 first place speech winners in each age category will present their speeches at the WI Land+Water Annual Conference on March 9, 2015 in Appleton, WI.
- Posters will be judged at the conference and the winning posters will compete at the National NACD poster contest in February 2016.
- This year we have six new counties participating in the Poster and Speaking contest. We hope to continue to increase participation.

Conservation Training Program

With support from DATCP, WI Land+Water continues to coordinate the State Interagency Training Committee (SITCOM) to identify training needs and provide free and low-cost training to conservation employees at the local, state, and federal levels as well as in the private sector. In November, the subgroups will be re-prioritizing the list of needed trainings to include any emerging issues. SITCOM is also distributing an electronic newsletter to consolidate and deliver upcoming trainings. If you have a training you would like to promote or would like to receive our SITCOM newsletter, please contact christina@wisconsinlandwater.org.

Conservation Professionals Training Program (CPTP) New Website

The Conservation Professional Training Program recently launched a new website to streamline course registration and provide valuable information and resources to conservation professionals in one simple interface. Enhanced web features at conservation-training.uwex.edu include:

- Online course catalog with integrated registration
- Status and tracking of course registration and completions
- Interactive communities of practice and discussion groups
- Conservation blog
- News aggregator
- Courses and events from other partners and conservation agencies

If you’ve used CPTP’s old registration site, you’ll need to reset your password on the new one to remain active.

2015 Wisconsin Envirothon

- This year’s Envirothon will take place at Lion’s Camp in Rosholt, WI on Thursday, April 16, 2015.
- Registration materials will be available in November and posted on our website.
- Interested in volunteering? Contact kim@wisconsinlandwater.org.
- If your county would like to help support the Wisconsin Envirothon, check the $50.00 donation for Wisconsin Envirothon on your membership forms. We hope to increase the number of counties who support this important program.

Nutrient Management Trainings

Overwhelmed by the Nutrient Management Plans sitting on your desk? New to SnapPlus or need a refresher on the new version? DATCP Nutrient Management staff are here to help. Staff in Eau Claire and Madison are offering one-on-one trainings to get you comfortable with this software and show you how to do a quick and thorough review. Contact Stephanie Schneider at Stephanie.Schneider@wisconsin.gov to request a training today!

The UW Soil Science Department and UWEX are teaming up to deliver eight Soil, Water, and Nutrient Management meetings around the state beginning December 2. UW professors, DATCP and DNR staff will provide the latest on nutrient management research and technology. Reserve a space at least one week prior to the meeting. Cost $40, lunch included. CEUs are available. For more information, visit: www.npketc.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2014-SWNM_Mtgs-flyer-v2.pdf.

More than 30 LCD staff and LCC supervisors attended WI Land+Water’s Fall Technical Tour to tour a cranberry operation in full harvest and an industrial sand mine in Monroe County.
Standards Oversight Council
The Standards Oversight Council is focused on the revision of two practice standards commonly used across the state: NRCS Standards 393, Filter Strip and 590, Nutrient Management. The Filter Strip team has completed a draft of the proposed changes to the standard and is currently working to produce a new Technical Note to accompany the standard. The group is championing the concept of harvestable buffers to encourage farmer implementation. Stay tuned for an announcement that the Filter Strip standard is open for broad review this winter.

The 590 Nutrient Management standard revision team continues to meet monthly. They have provided the first full draft of the standard and Technical Note to a select group of reviewers for initial feedback. The team has put significant effort into proposing guidance for winter manure spreading and nutrient application on land features sensitive to groundwater contamination, including karst land forms. The team plans to review the initial feedback and release a new draft for broad review and comment towards the end of winter in 2015.

This past summer NRCS made minor revisions to several of their land management practice standards including Standard 643, Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats; Standard 647, Early Successional Habitat Development/Management; and Standard 561, Heavy Use Area Protection. They released a brand new practice standard 383, Fuel Break that complies with its national counterpart. Wisconsin Construction Specifications 10, Fences and 634, Waste Transfer Pipe, were also updated. Brief explanations to these revisions are posted to the SOC website, at socwisconsin.org/category/news/.

DNR published revisions to Standard 1060, Storm Drain Inlet Protection for Construction Sites that included Type D-M and Type D-HR inlet protection devices. These devices are variations of the existing Type D inlet device and were developed by members of the Green Tier / Clear Waters Environmental Results Program Charter. The new devices use different filtering fabrics and allow for capture of smaller diameter soil particles. Both devices recently have been used successfully on several road construction projects within the City of Madison. The final technical standard incorporated comments from a broad review earlier this year.

DNR’s Standard 1004, Bioretention for Infiltration, was also revised and open for broad review comment. The proposed changes initiated from industry recommendations included: 1) specifying a planting density, 2) allowing erosion control mats to be substituted for hardwood mulch, 3) increasing the pH range of the soil mix to between 5.5 and 8.0, and 4) decreasing the depth of the engineered soil mix from three feet to two feet. This standard is in the final drafting stage and will be published soon. The technical standards for storm water control measures can be found at DNR’s website: dnr.wi.gov/topic/Stormwater/.
Calendar of Events

Standards Oversight Council meeting, Madison  
West Central Area Association meeting, Menomonie  
NRCS State Technical meeting, Madison  
Land & Water Conservation Board meeting, Madison  
UW Soil, Water, and Nutrient Management meetings  
WI Land+Water BOD meeting, Stevens Point  
Technical Committee meeting, Stevens Point  
Northwestern Area Association meeting, Hayward  
WI Crop Management Conference, Madison  
Grassworks Conference, Wisconsin Dells  
WI Land+Water Executive Committee meeting, Portage  
Leg/Admin Committee meeting, Portage  
Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance Conference, Oshkosh  
WI Land+Water Annual Conference  

For more information and events visit wisconsinlandwater.org/events/calendar.