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**Surface Water Quality Issues Workgroup  
Summary of 1<sup>st</sup> Workgroup Meeting, August 23, 2016**

**Attendance**

**Committee Co-Chairs:**

- Paul Zimmerman, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
- Dick Lamers, Tainter/Menominee Lakes Improvement Association
- Jim Baumann, Water Quality Specialist, Retired DNR

**Facilitator:** Pat Murphy, Retired Assistant State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

**Recorder:** Melissa Keenan, Sauk County Conservation, Planning, and Zoning Department

**Committee Members:**

- Kenn Buelow, farmer, Calumet County
- Bill Hafs, New Water (Green Bay MSD)
- Dana Cook, President, Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin
- Dave Marshall, Aquatic Ecologist, Underwater Habitat Investigations
- Dave Taylor, Director of Ecosystem Services, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District
- Eric Birschbach, Independent Crop Consultant
- Greg Baneck, Outagamie Co. Conservationist
- Jim Coors, Courte Oreilles Lake Association
- Jim Hebbe, farmer
- Laura Ward Good, Associate Scientist, UW Soils
- Matt Krueger, River Restoration Director, Rivers Alliance
- Rachel Rushman, NMRP Program Coordinator, DATCP
- Randy Eide, Director of Public Works, Menomonie
- Rick Georgeson, President, Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards
- Scott Sturgul, Outreach Program Manager, UW Nutrient and Pest Management Center
- Steve Jacquart, Intergovernmental Coordinator, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
- Steve Richter, The Nature Conservancy
- Kriss Marion, Wisconsin Farmer's Union/Lafayette County Board Supervisor
- Chad Cook, UW Extension (for John Exo)
- Corinne Billings, Wisconsin DNR (for Mary Anne Lowndes)
- Jessica Schultz, Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance
- Maria Woldt, Dairy Business Association
- Angela James, Michael Best & Friedrich

- Judy Derricks, USDA-NRCS
- Randy Poelma, HoChunk Nation
  
- Absent:
  - Scott Laeser, Water Quality Specialist, Clean Wisconsin
  - Amber Radatz, Co-Director, UW Discovery Farms
  - Eric Booth, Assistant Research Scientist UW Agronomy and Limnology
  - Faith Fitzpatrick, Hydrologist, USGS
  - Greg Fries, Principal Engineer, Madison Sanitary & Storm Sewer System
  - Jeff Endres, Producer/Private Landowner, Yahara Pride
  - Karl Klessig, Farmer, Saxon Homestead
  - Kevin Connors, Director Dane County Land & Water Resources Department
  - Paul Dearlove, Watershed Program Manager, Madison Clean Lakes Alliance
  - Pete Nowak, Professor of Environmental Studies, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies

**Hopes and Fears**

**Dana Cook:** President, Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin

My biggest concern is that regulations will outpace our ability to figure out what really works on the ground, to do it sustainably, and get the job accomplished. It will take time to determine the right practices and technologies. It will also take money. It may be more cost-effective to share some equipment and technology but that is often difficult to arrange. But if we all work together, and make the necessary investments, we can do better.

**Dave Marshall:** Aquatic Ecologist, Underwater Habitat Investigations

I hope that we start looking at nitrates in aquifer-driven surface water systems, such as oxbow lakes and spring fed systems. Otherwise, they will continue to be degraded.

**Dave Taylor:** Director of Ecosystem Services, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District

What excites me is, you know a lot of people talk about bringing everyone together around a shared water resource. In the Madison area, we actually have a program, on the ground at the watershed scale, that's accomplishing that. I hope to see more of these projects throughout the state. I believe we can do it, it just requires a lot of work.

My fear is that it's complicated. It takes more than horse power, it takes the right kind of horse power. We should not let bureaucracy get in the way of being innovative. We have to keep the process uncomplicated if we want to be successful.

**Eric Birschbach:** Independent Crop Consultant

There are many concerns related to nutrients and nutrient management. Nutrients come from various sources, including manure and commercial fertilizer, depending on location. My hope is that we have the tools to accurately identify and effectively address surface water and groundwater concerns. Producer-led groups provide a good forum to try some things on a small scale basis and to measure results. That's what we're trying to do in the Sugar River watershed. My fear is that we will ignore the science and make decisions based on passion and gut feelings.

**Greg Baneck:** Outagamie Co. Conservationist

I fear that bureaucratic process can get in the way of innovative accomplishments.

My hope is farmers embrace good soil health practices. There are various ways to reduce nutrient runoff while maintaining or improving profitability.

**Jim Coors:** Courte Oreilles Lake Association

Effective solutions are already available. They just need to be implemented.

The frustration is that we can't implement those solutions because we fail appreciate our common interests. Even lake shore owners often think in narrow terms about their own property values without considering their impacts on the overall watershed. That is also true of farmers. My hope is that we can all come to see the larger picture, and assume our share of responsibility for the overall resource.

**Chad Cook:** Natural Resources Educator, UW-Extension

There's been a lot of good activity in the last few years around water quality issues, including the connection between surface water and groundwater. There has been a lot of regulatory controversy, but that has spurred increasing interest and good conversation around water quality issues. My hope is that we can continue those conversations and make real progress.

**Corinne Billings:** Statewide nonpoint resource coordinator, DNR

I think we have some good tools in the toolbox; but we need to use them effectively, collaboratively, with clear focus and sustained purpose. We need adequate human and financial

resources to do the job, whether at the state, county, or local levels, including the farmer-led council approach.

**Rachel Rushman:** NMRF Program Coordinator

I fear that regulations will preclude voluntary, locally-led conservation efforts including producer-led ideas. I hope that grass roots, producer-led efforts will thrive and make a big contribution to improved water quality.

**Scott Sturgul:** Outreach Program Manager, UW Nutrient and Pest Management

I've been in the nonpoint game since 1985 and I've seen a lot of ups and downs in water quality practices. In one bad year, a bad storm can wipe out years of work. We haven't seen any real improvement in surface water quality, and one could argue that surface water quality and groundwater quality are getting worse. I think the public is getting more aware and more fed up with the degradation of surface and groundwater quality.

My hope is that this group can help to get some good things done. We've seen successes, and we need to figure out what the recipe is. One example of success is the reduction in the excessive phosphorus fed to dairy cattle, which can lead to higher levels of phosphorus in manure. Industry educators helped farmers understand the problem and cost of excessive P feeding, and many farmers responded. Dietary phosphorus has decreased significantly. That was achieved without regulation, but it had water quality benefits.

**Steve Richter:** The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy is striving to work collaboratively across state chapter lines to bring new solutions and ideas to these types of challenges, whether it's water, climate, forestry, urban, ocean conservation. I hope I can bring a similar collaborative model to this effort.

Success will require a lot of relationship building and hard work. I hope we can stick with it and come up with some real strategies we can all live with.

**Maria Woldt:** Director of Industry Relations, Dairy Business Association

**Fears** – The biggest fear that I have, in regards to what we are talking about today, two things really. One, dramatic weather events ruining really good hard work and progress that people are working toward throughout the whole year. And two would be, economics getting in the way of practice adoption. Dairy farmers are struggling with milk prices and that might impact their ability to buy new equipment to try things that may have some risk associated with it.

**Hopes** – And my biggest hope would be that, some of the farmer-led groups whatever goals they have that they would achieve those goals and even surpass them so that they can really have evidence, supported by data to talk about the good things they are doing in their communities.

**Kriss Marion:** Lafayette County Board Supervisor, Wisconsin Farmers Union

**Hopes** – That we can create some aspirational language that can overcome, either true economic hardships or perceived. In Lafayette County we're the most ag dependent county in the state and we did have a great tradition of conservation, but what we see on the landscape is contour strips torn out and people right back up to the stream. Again, it's a little bit of heartbreak looking out on the landscape for some of the older farmers that have been around as well as some of us that have great hopes of rebuilding our tiny towns with driving some other economic opportunities like tourism.

**Fears** – Economics will derail people's best hopes, efforts, aspirations.

**Jessica Schultz:** Executive Director, Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance, (steering committee)

**Hopes/Fears** – My biggest concern is that economic costs of meeting some of these TMDL regulations are either going to be too great on our point sources in the watershed and will impact the region we live, work, and play in. But also the costs for the agricultural sector may be too high. So, finding the win-wins is my biggest hope. That the discussions that are happening right now, whether it's the producer-led group or the discussions about alternate compliance options that are out there. We can find a cost effective solution is my biggest hope. Which is also another concern that we aren't going to be able to do that. But, I think the discussions that are happening right now are what didn't happen, from what I understand years ago with the priority watershed days, is the discussions outside the individual sectors. So I'm excited to be here and I'm excited these discussions are happening at local levels as well.

## Unattributable:

As far as goals, we need to find a workable solution. Starting in short-term and working long-term to meet water quality goals and objectives. In doing so we've got to acknowledge we've got to work with the farming community to put the right amount of nutrients on at the right place at the right time. When I say that, we went from the daily haul dairy farm where we had, what I call, prime water quality issues as far as hauling near the stream, and some instances of surface water impacts, to now we have more manure to haul in a short timeframe and hopefully we don't have what Maria talked about. We need to find more windows to apply manure in the winter time. There's certain places in the state with the right type of manure that we should be applying manure in the winter time, and other times not. What I'm saying, we shouldn't go by the calendar but rather by the field conditions, and this applies to commercial fertilizer applications as well.

Fear, if we don't do that, we're not going to accomplish water quality goals and objectives if we regulate by the calendar.

**Jim Baumann:** Retired DNR Water Quality Specialist, co-chair

**Fears** – From working on that project for a few years [Nutrient Reduction Strategy], there are two fears that came out. One was, that said a lot of what was going on in Wisconsin, what was happening, what was accomplished, but we could not look into the future. I did not see a strong vision of the future in the state on controlling nutrients. It may be that the format was just not correct for that, but it was really a lack of consensus vision on where we're going. On a more detailed level, there was a lack of ability to really track what was going on in our watersheds. In some cases many great things are happening, Pleasant Valley, for example is an exception that we've been able to track great progress. But in many of our watersheds we don't really have a good way of saying what's happening that's good or bad.

**Hope** – My hope, is somewhat satisfied by having these discussions taking place. This gives us an opportunity to look into the future, look at what issues we see, look at how we can work towards solving these issues. I'm very enthusiastic that this type forum is meeting one of the fears and needs that I've seen, where there was a lack of vision.

**[note, clarifies that the Nutrient Reduction Strategy is not DNR's as it says in the background documents]**

**Angela James:** Attorney – (Steering Committee)

**Hopes** – We can get to a place where everyone is on the same page so that we can convert that into an enforceable plan going forward.

**Fears** – But my fear is, I'll admit, I'm a little road weary from fighting it over the last three years. But, while I think there are huge challenges, there are huge opportunities so I'm excited to have the conversation.

**Bill Hafs:** New Water

**Hopes** – At the local level – I've seen this trend go away from local creative solutions to state decisions – My biggest hope is that we can reverse that and go back to some locally found ideas. We have to be allowed to be creative and innovative because I think we're not all the same in the state. And we might have some ideas where we're at that won't fit other places, but will do the job.

**Fears** – My biggest fear is where I'm located in the watershed at the end of the pipe. New Water being at the end of the Fox River and what will the community say, what will everybody at the end of the day look at water quality? Will they expect us to be the ones that, because of our location, have a lot of responsibility? I have a fear that we haven't grappled with the amount of staff we're going to need to do this. Organizations like Waste Water Treatment Facilities, we've put a lot of money into wastewater treatment, a lot of staff and a lot of dollars over the years and I don't think we've really come to grips with the funding this effort and what will be needed for ag/nonpoint. That's a fear that this could be an instant replay that we could put in practices. In the priority watershed days, I thought that was a pretty good program. And then years later you see those practices have disappeared. They're not there anymore. I have that fear that we need to find some creative ways, we have to pay farmers enough money to make it sustainable. To make it long lived.

**Jim Hebbe:** farmer

**Hopes** – My big buzz thing I always say is, we need to be thinking more of demand driven solutions rather than always supply driven solutions for a lot of our problems.

**Fears** – I've been on a number of blue ribbon task force and a lot of different things and great ideas come out and then the sad reflection is that a lot of it doesn't get implemented. I hope that doesn't happen.

**Kenn Buelow:** Farmer Calumet County

**Hope** – The key for our operation is that we work with 40 farmers in our area. We get the crops from them, put our nutrients back on to grow our crops, and there's a lot of talk about integration on how we operate. We also offer several food processing facilities from Appleton to Chilton and into the Green Bay area where we take some of their waste and manage it for them. So we're used to this integration in trying to make things work well together. Not just within ourselves, but within the community, schools (we get a lot of waste from the schools), and processing. I guess that's my hope we can keep doing that and do it better.

**Fear** – So I guess my fear is effectiveness vs regulatory requirements. We tend to get regulations that I think are well meant, no question. And people want more regulations, but it limits what we can do. And often regulations are statewide and there are so many very specific locales and soil types and topography that change what you should do instead of what you have to do. That's important. And we have a lot of these great farmer-led groups and we have discovery farms that are doing a lot of research and getting numbers on what's happening and how you do things and what the impact is on runoff. Those are really cool numbers, but I don't think they get out enough. And I'm worried that these producer groups won't get them out in a forum that people can see them. That they won't have the caveats about, "well the soil is different here" or "what made it work here?" It might just be the determination of the farmer sometimes to make it work.

[A critique of the Food, Land and Water report: - the report shows that we use more nitrogen, but what doesn't show is that we produce way more corn. We use less nitrogen to produce more corn. Worries about the way it's displayed and how the public will view it]

**Laura Ward Good:** Associate Scientist, UW Soils

**Hopes** – My hope is that we can generate enough education and information about what's really driving, for phosphorus anyway, what really drives losses in given situations. That the people who make management decisions can work out the right solutions for the place they're working on.

**Fears** – In the search for simple solutions or silver bullets, we're going to put a lot of resources into, and make people make painful changes, that really aren't going to work. Because, there isn't any one-size fits all solution and you really need to work on systems.

**Matt Krueger, River Restoration Director, Rivers Alliance (1:20:10)**

**Hopes** – I’m really heartened by the collaborations and conversations and shifts in dialog about water quality that I’ve observed in recent years across many different sectors. My hope is that those conversations are genuine and they can continue in earnest and continue to progress along that line to make the improvements that we need to make on the land and with the water ultimately.

**Fears** – My fear is that climate change blows up all of those good cultivations. That the good groundwork and relationships that we’ve built and programs and regulations and standards that we’ve developed are not adequate in a changed climate and in places where we’re seeing it. The storms a couple weeks ago in northwest Wisconsin or in buffalo/Trempealeau counties have economic and environmental effects. How do we plan for that, especially in a time when there’s still disagreement about the science behind it. If we don’t get ahead of that, we’ll be in a lot of trouble.

**Randy Eide: Director of Public Works, Menomonie**

**Hopes** – My hope is, some of the things we’ve talked about today, the practices we’re doing and looking at here and across the board, not this generation, but two generations from now when we’re all long gone, will be second nature. They’ll be implemented. It’ll be things people do. And the people that aren’t doing them will be not the norm, they’ll be the exception. So my hope is we’ll get to that point. And I think we will. In my small community, Menomonie, I know some of the residents. We’ll get calls, where we used to not get calls, of people blowing grass into the curb. Now that might seem like a small thing, but the nature is changing. How people think is changing. People call up and say, “You’ve got to talk to these guys, they’re blowing grass into the curb”. What’s better yet is when neighbors talk to neighbors and say, “you can’t do that”. It’s changing.

**Fears** – I’m going to pass on the fear because I think there’s been enough fear here. [everyone laughs] and the second reason is that the co-chairs will go back and report that there’s more hope than fear here!

**Rick Georgeson: President, Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards**

**Hopes:** Hopeful that we will all commit to find the solutions together. We have shown that collaboration between the PACRS and local farmer groups exist. For example, at one meeting one farmer said, “Why are you guys looking at us as being the problem?” and before that

question could be answered, another farmer stood up and said, “We’re not being blamed for this, we’re being invited to help find a solution”.

**Steve Jacquart:** Intergovernmental Coordinator, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District

**Fears** – One of the fears I have is that current and future generations are becoming less connected to land over time. People having fewer experiences with nature. Not understanding where the food is coming from or what farms do. I come from a farm farming family. Those barns are gone. In fact, in one of the cases the community is gone. My experience is so much different than my parents, but at least I got on those farms to see them. My kids have not had that experience. Aside from those, they experience things differently. We have to think about next generation and how do you engage them in nature. It’s going to be different.

**Hopes** – A greater level of collaboration over the years. You think about soil health with water. It’s something that wouldn’t have occurred to me, and I’ve been working these issues for decades.

**Judy Derricks, Natural Resources Conservationist, NRCS (57:17) [NOT LISTED]**

**Hopes** – I’ve lived through 100 storm events that were not supposed to happen. I’ve lived through more than 100 year storms and have had to deal with the issues associated with those. And boy am I excited for tools. I’m excited to be in a room with this kind of synergy. And I can’t create tools alone. We’ve got to have more tools; we’ve got to know that science is behind our standards. And that has been a major focus for us. We kind of tipped the agency upside down in the last year or two and we’re really focused on making sure the standards are applied, making sure the standards are understood. And making sure conservation, even though we’re a voluntary agency, we are very serious about putting dollars where dollars need to be put. And making sure the obligation receiving the dollars is promoting stewardship. And that’s what I’m about. I am a farmer and am in my 20-something year of no till. And I’m an advocate for soil health all the way. There’s nothing new about it, but it’s trendy and it’s exciting to see it back. So we are excited, on behalf of the agency, we’re excited to hopefully get to influence the future.

**Fears** – But on a scary somber note, when I’m driving down the road with my sons or worse yet, my grandkids, and they ask me questions about, “what causes that?” It’s a pretty heavy load. So hopefully, as a result of this work, we will get creative, we will get some additional tools, we will get some energy out of a group like this that can make a difference. And I want to really say that there is a lot of stewardship out there, some of the challenges on top of the stewardship are the biggest factors that we’ve got to look at.

**Fears** – I’m fairly new in my career, only been working for Sauk County for about 3 years. Some of the people that I work with have been there for 20-30 years and now they’re looking back and saying, “what did we accomplish?” After all of the priority watershed projects and all of the work that they’ve done and there are still problems. So my fear is that when I retire, someday, that I will say the same thing. And I don’t want to say the same thing.

**Hopes** – I was really excited to learn about this meeting. And I volunteered to be a part of it in some capacity. And what I hope for is that we have the right people in the room now. We have people far and wide reaching different parts of land/water/food. And I think it’s really promising that we have the right players in the room now for something to happen.

**Dick Lamers:** Lakeshore owner, co-chair

**Hopes** – Something has to be done now. So when I’m in meetings and we talk about the next generation or two generations down the road, I guess I caution this group to say, that is a good strategic plan to make sure we’re looking at that kind of timeline, but don’t let that stop us from making things happen today. It was encouraging to listen around the room. Something Jim has counseled me to not do is to look at each group and think about what group you represent and then have perceptions about that. Today I really concentrated on listening to each person and why they’re here. Forget about their background, just why do you want to help water. And what’s so encouraging is to have this many people, in a room, talking about how to improve the water across the state of Wisconsin. That can really move us forward. And I think it’s the best group of talent that I’ve ever seen or been associated with. And that’s the real hope. That we can make a change. And if we can all lock into that and say we’ll do our part and make this happen, there’s some really good things to come out of this group.

### **General Discussion**

The morning session concluded with members discussing concerns about the representation in the stakeholder group, information provided, etc. Comments included:

- We need to be careful how information is presented. Just because the pounds of nitrogen used on crop fields has increased since 1960, doesn’t mean it is all being lost (#bushels/unit N has also increased).
- We should remember to state what we are presenting: facts, beliefs, or opinions.
- Some groups are underrepresented including Tribes, WPDES permit holders, consumer purchasers, diversity.

The afternoon session started with Jim Bauman presenting on the state of water quality in Wisconsin, specifically outlining information that was included in Wisconsin Nutrient Reduction Strategy that was approved in 2013.

The question was asked what are the criteria for listing/delisting impaired water bodies. Jim stated that 90% of water bodies were listed due to monitoring results. More waterbodies have been listed in the last 5 years because a numeric value for phosphorus criteria in surface water was developed in 2010 meaning they may have been impaired before 2010 and may not be getting worse. Biotic criteria will be added in the future which may delist some that meet the recreational criteria but not the phosphorus criteria.

In regards to nonpoint source implementation, the strategy identifies the agricultural performance standards and the requirement of cost share offers to the producer before compliance can be required. The strategy estimates \$1-2 billion in cost share would be needed in order to meet compliance. This is assuming all farms will meet the agricultural performance standards, however; in order to achieve phosphorus criteria, farms may need to exceed standards to comply.

Jim also presented on results from work done in the Chesapeake Bay and Adaptive Management and Multi Discharger Variance. Some dischargers were identified as currently participating in phosphorus trading in Wisconsin. However, it was pointed out that these dischargers were not trading with any farmers or other groups, mainly due to the constraint of staying within their jurisdiction.

At the end of the afternoon session, the facilitator asked what information is needed prior to the next meeting in order for the group to answer the questions posed by the steering committee. There was much discussion on the question, "Is the current surface water quality situation getting better or worse?" A hand vote was taken with 8 members voting it is getting worse and 8 members voting it is getting better with some members abstaining or feeling as though the question was not direct enough to answer. Afterwards, a number of comments were made and are captured below:

- There will be a presentation on the Agriculture Performance Standards and the misnomer that they are voluntary. The comment that "Agriculture gets paid for everything" will also be addressed.
- Additional information on nitrates in surface water is needed.
- Additional information on naturally occurring and background phosphorus.
- Information on the breakdown of nonpoint dominated watersheds in Wisconsin (can be accessed on the PRESTO WDNR website)
- We need to better understand everything that goes into determining surface water quality including recreational criteria, anti-degradation, phosphorus criteria, etc.
- Can we identify the low hanging fruit and how can we take care of those issues first?
- We need to know the economics of tourism and how surface water quality impacts that industry.
- We need to share success stories – it's not just doom and gloom.
- Do we need to establish goals? Maybe as we get closer to the end?

Any additional comments or questions can be forwarded to Pat Murphy at [murphypa58@gmail.com](mailto:murphypa58@gmail.com).