

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

2/16/23 Meeting held at Barron County Government Center

(meeting off schedule due to conflicts occurring in early February)

Present at the meeting: Chase Cummings – Dunn Co LCD; Liz Usborne, Alex Smith, Andrew Schneyer, – DNR; Nick Stadnick – Rusk County LCD; Megen Hines, David Schofield – City of Menomonie; Gerry Johnson – Red Cedar Lakes Association; Tyler Gruetzmacher – Barron Co LCD; Andy Bensed – Farmers of Barron Co Watersheds; Tina Lee – UW-Stout; Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

Review of minutes of last meeting and current agenda: The outcomes from the previous meeting were discussed with no changes and the current agenda was discussed with no changes.

Discussion of 2022 Annual Report: It's time to start assembling the 2022 Annual Report for the Partnership. Dan asked for everyone to get him a summary of the activities in their constituencies in 2022 by March 13. Everyone agreed that date was workable. Dan asked if the counties could attempt to produce some data based on transect surveys to try to extrapolate estimates for soil health practices county wide.

Discussion of New Tainter Lake Rehabilitation District: The new lake District for Tainter Lake was officially approved on January 18. Friday, February 17 is the last day that formation of the District can be appealed, and so far no appeal has been filed. Initial Board members have been selected, however a fully seated Board will be elected at the District's first annual meeting, which is supposed to take place by statute, between May and September. At that time the Board can begin discussing their by-laws and other administrative logistics. The Partnership decided to reach out to the current Board and invite them to be a member of the Partnership. Chase will make initial contacts, and Dan will follow up with an email representing the Partnership.

Check-In and Discussion: Everyone shared any new information/developments pertinent to the Red Cedar River Watershed effort.

Dan: Reminded everyone of the upcoming Red Cedar River Conference on March 9, and updated everyone on planning, and reminded everyone to get registered. Summed up some recent meetings, the Cover Crop/Producer Led/Discovery Farms Conferences in Wisconsin Dells, and a regional producer led workshop held earlier this week in New Richmond.

Andy: The Farmers of Barron County Watersheds have recently welcomed some new members which will help maintain enthusiasm in the group. The group will be participating in the Commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP) through DATCP, which supports on-farm research projects that use nitrogen in a manner that will sustain soil fertility and crop production while reducing nitrogen loss to the atmosphere, groundwater, and surface water.

Alex: Surface Water Grant awards have been announced, with a couple in the Red Cedar Watershed, including a sediment study in the Chetek Lakes, and a project at Beaver Dam Lake to do work on a sediment basin for Library Lake. Mentioned some new positions that DNR will be hiring soon (see Liz's update below).

Gerry: Red Cedar Lakes is in the process of finishing an updated Lake Management Plan and should have it done soon. Shared some of the key strategies from the plan with the Partnership. These strategies include some focus on trying to control phosphorus from some of the major streams in the watershed that drain to the lakes. Many of these streams have shown a dramatic increase in phosphorus levels in the last few years, and land use changes have been minimal, so it's a bit of a mystery why this is happening. There is still quite a bit of phosphorus entering the system farther upstream from Big Chetac Lake, but there is no interest among the residents of that lake to undertake necessary steps to control the phosphorus levels in that lake.

Liz: The [State of WI Clean Water Fund Program Intended Use Plan](#) outlines that up to 2% of the funds can go towards staffing. It includes funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). DNR is requesting a total of \$1,111,329 of technical assistance funds for 8 full-time and 2 limited-term positions. The position activities are detailed below:

Wastewater Outreach Specialist (1 full-time position)

- Coordinate with Wastewater Program staff to identify facilities in need.
- Conduct outreach. Prepare materials, answer questions from facilities, set up meetings and give presentations to help distribute funding.
- Assist facilities with funding applications. Coordinate with Environmental Loans staff.

Wastewater Plan Review Engineer (2 full-time positions)

- Provide technical assistance to small and disadvantaged communities identified by the Wastewater Outreach Specialist, working with consultants to provide input on preliminary facilities plans.
- Review facilities plans and plans and specifications to ensure compliance with applicable design administrative codes for sewers, wastewater treatment plants, biosolids processing facilities, and storage structures.

Healthy Waters/High Quality Water Technical Expert (1 full-time position)

- Provide technical assistance to rural, small, and tribal POTWs identified by the Wastewater Outreach Specialist and work with consultants to provide input regarding high quality water protection focused on preliminary facilities plans.
- Facilitate development of POTW plans to augment protection of high-quality waters.
- Review facilities plans and plans and specifications to ensure compliance with applicable design administrative codes for sewers, wastewater treatment plants, biosolids processing facilities, and storage structures.

- Promote and report successful restoration and protection efforts associated with rural, small, and tribal publicly owned treatment works.

Non-Point Source Planning and Outreach Specialist (1 full-time position)

- Provide assistance to municipal wastewater treatment facilities that are participating, or that might participate, in the Pilot Projects Program for water quality trading.
- Lead outreach efforts to increase awareness among local governments with a focus on small, rural communities, internal and external partners, and other stakeholders about potential uses of the CWFP.
- Assist municipalities in leveraging CWFP funds for other agricultural-based wastewater compliance options, such as adaptive management or the state's multi-discharger variance for phosphorus.
- Integrating CWFP funding into the long-term financial planning process for low-income communities unable to afford wastewater facility upgrades mandated by the 2010 phosphorus rule.

Climate Resiliency Specialist (1 full-time position)

- Assist local governments in identifying projects that reduce flows and capacity burden on downstream infrastructure and integrate effects of climate change into risk assessments for facility planning and sanitary sewer service area
- CWFP SFY 2023 Intended Use Plan amendments.
- Lead outreach efforts to increase awareness among local governments, regional planning agencies, internal and external partners, and other stakeholders about potential uses of the CWFP under the current program for infrastructure projects that apply the best available technology, standards, and climate information and projections.
- Coordinate internal policy development for using CWFP funds on integrated climate resiliency planning, with a focus on small, rural and/or tribal community municipal treatment plant operations, and storage and conveyance projects.

Water Resources Engineer (1 full-time position)

- Support the increased demand for storm water program services generated by the increased frequency and scope of projects funded by BIL. As projects increase in frequency and scope, demand is anticipated to increase significantly for services provided by this position including proactive technical assistance during project development, project permitting support, and project compliance oversight. The position will also provide outreach, compliance and

technical assistance, and regulatory oversight.

- Provide support to municipalities and local units of government, engineering review of the technical and design aspects of permit applications, as well as oversight of project compliance and implementation effectiveness. This position will also provide outreach to communities interested in implementing pollution reduction strategies, such as Green Infrastructure projects and other best practices.

Wastewater Specialist (1 full-time position)

- Advise permittees on best practices, approaches, and strategies, for stormwater management and control techniques and systems. Answer permittee and stakeholder questions related to stormwater program development and implementation. Assess and evaluate compliance with permit requirements and provide compliance assistance.

Wastewater Regulator and Zoning Engineer/Specialist (2 limited-term positions)

- Review plans for municipal wastewater treatment and conveyance infrastructure.
- Conduct outreach to small and disadvantaged communities and assist potential small and disadvantaged CWFP applicants.

Some DNR leadership updates:

- Adam Payne is the new Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources
- Ann Kipper became the External Services Division (my division) Administrator after Dave Siebert's retirement, and Brian Weigel took Ann's place as Deputy Division Administrator
- Sean Kennedy is the DNR's first Climate Change & Climate Resiliency Policy Advisor. He will advise the Secretary's Office and the agency, lead the DNR's Climate Executive Oversight Team, and will liaison with the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI).

Runoff Grant applications, both [Urban Nonpoint Stormwater](#) and [Targeted Runoff Management](#), are due April 17th.

Looking forward to attending several upcoming in-person events:

- [Annual CAFO Update Meeting in Menomonie](#) 2/24
- WI Land + Water Annual Conference 3/1-3/3
- [2023 Nutrient Management Update](#) 3/6 (this one is virtual)
- Red Cedar Watershed Conference 3/9
- TBD Q&A session among DNR CAFO & Nonpoint staff with Dairy Ag Lenders

Enforcement cases updates:

- Issuing citations on cropland erosion
- NOD grant that had stalled and was set to expire at the end of 2022 was successfully completed

In 2022 Stanford University (SU) researchers developed a computer program intended to identify surface applications of manure to snow covered fields from satellite/aerial images taken in February and March. Their published 2022 findings are linked [here](#). There's a short presentation at the link. EPA staff and SU researchers then approached DNR with their 2022 findings and asked if DNR would assist by ground truthing the SU program. SU researchers are also working with non-profit partners for additional ground truthing in eight counties (Brown, Kewaunee, Door, Manitowoc, Green, Grant, Dane, and Lafayette).

Andrew: Working with Chris Willger and Tara Daun to assemble and analyze past data for water quality monitoring in some of the subwatersheds of the Red Cedar Basin. In looking at data for the Hay River watershed in the subheds of the Hay River Farmer Led Council, there appears to be some variability in the phosphorus readings over time. Wants to analyze this for any pertinent information that could help contribute to decisions regarding work to install BMPs in such watersheds, and also how this information can help determine where more monitoring may be needed.

Nick: Has a TRM grant for this year for a barnyard in Rusk County in the Red Cedar watershed. There is a farmer-led group forming in Rusk County but is outside of the Red Cedar.

Tina: Projects for more water quality monitoring around Menomonie are being funded for students at Stout by funds from the Fresh Water Collaborative. Applications for students to be part of the LAKES REU program for this coming summer have been submitted and closed yesterday. There is now a concentration in Stout's Environmental Studies program that focuses on preparing students to do the sociological "people" work necessary to change land management for healthy soils and clean water.

Chase: 900 people signed up for well monitoring this year funded by ARPA funds. Recently did some PFAS sampling in parts of the county, and it looks like a few locations may be showing levels above regulated limits. Is making a budget request of the County for nearly \$1 million to help pay for a NOD issue that is also receiving some other cost-share funds. Dunn Co will get \$21,500 this year in MDV funds, which will likely be distributed among several eligible projects. Tina Barone in the Land Conservation office will now be the County cooperator for both the Red Cedar Farmer Led Watershed group and the Hay River group. The Red Cedar Farmer Led group has applied for the NOPP program mentioned above (see Andy's check-in). The village of Elk Mound is discussing with the County the possibility of doing some water quality trading.

Megen: Menomonie City Council approved an increase in the City's storm water utility, which has been hurting financially, so this should help. Is working on some phosphorus modeling for the City. Recently opened bids for a large runoff control project on some private property draining to Wilson Creek.

David: His first meeting with the group. Mostly listening.

Tyler: Barron County's groundwater study is entering year two. Only 350 sites participated last year (even though considerably more people showed interest). In order to fill in some gaps, some farmers were asked, with poor response. However many County employees living in some of the gap areas have agreed to participate. Depending on the area of the County, last year's samples showed from 8% - 13.5% of wells were showing nitrate levels exceeding the limit of 10 ppm. Barron Co will be getting a little over \$30,000 in MDV funds this year, with much of that going to buffers and work in the headlands of watersheds. Has about a dozen manure storage abandonments to do this year.

Brad Luedtke (via email): Since 3M has decided not to renew or readvertise contracts for farming land around the plant in Menomonie, Brad would like the Partnership to brainstorm on ideas for what to do with that land.

Evaluation: Everyone gave the meeting a rating of 5 even though we went about 45 minutes longer than the agenda. (It's possible everyone was just so glad to see each other in person that no one cared!)

Next Meeting: The Partnership's next regular meeting is **Wednesday, April 5, 2023**. If conditions allow, the plan is to have this meeting in person in Menomonie.