

## Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

### 10/2/24 Meeting held at Barron Co Government Center

**Present at the meeting:** Megen Hines – City of Menomonie; Al Brown, Tom Bilse – Tainter Lake District; Tyler Gruetzmacher – Barron Co LCD; Tom Goodwin – Red Cedar Lakes Association; Alex Smith, Liz Osborne – WDNR; Tara Greiman – Farmers Union; Jamey Lideen – Chetek Lakes Association; Joe Ailts – Farmers of Barron Co; Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

**Discussion of Plan Update:** Most of the meeting was spent discussing the plan update, with many conversations about ag regulations, CAFOs, and the relationships between farmers and non-farmers.

One of the action items from previous meetings was to find ways to meet farmers where they are to discuss the plan and to discuss their role in crafting and implementing the plan. Per that item, the Farmers of Barron County Watersheds is meeting on December 12, and Joe has invited Dan to speak to the group about this topic. Chase was not present today, and Tara did not have any new info about contacts with the two Dunn County producer led groups.

Another action item was for lake groups to find ways to communicate information to their various members about the plan update and lake residents' input. Jamey mentioned that information about the plan update had been put in the recent Chetek Lakes Association newsletter. Tom Goodwin said that he could put something in the spring newsletter for the Red Cedar Lakes Association, and maybe have members of the Partnership sit in on an Association Zoom meeting over the winter months. Dan will be speaking at the Tainter Lake District meeting on October 17.

Some items regarding the Red Cedar Conference were discussed. Tara suggested maybe having some local food producers be vendors at the Conference, which would go well with one of the breakout presentations that will focus on the topic of local foods and direct marketing. Several people said they would like to see more local focus at the Conference rather than national speakers talking about broad issues. Members of the Partnership who are also on the Red Cedar Conference Committee will communicate these concerns at the next Conference Committee meeting on October 14.

Tyler brought up the idea of meeting with local NRCS folks to talk about ways to use some of the generous, but temporary funding NRCS received via the Inflation Reduction Act. That money must be spent by 2031. He will try to set up a meeting between NRCS, the land conservation departments in the watershed, and Dan.

Tom Goodwin also asked if there was research available showing that more polluted/eutrophic lakes tend to lower property values on those lakes (with the reverse also true...that cleaner water increases property values). Several studies were mentioned, and members will send that information to Tom.

Broader discussion of the plan update revolved around major strategies that should be included in the update. Joe and others mentioned that the producer led watershed groups are a key. They are getting more practices on the ground, are normalizing the idea among farmers of trying innovative practices, and are learning many things in the process that are then shared with others at field days and educational events. Adding more of these groups is already in the current plan, but making that happen will take resources. And the need for resources became a focal point of discussion.

Regarding such resources, two areas of focus were discussed as needed to implement a major strategy to reduce phosphorus inputs to the watershed; 1) funding for cost-share, the DATCP producer led grants, and other incentive programs, and 2) funding for positions – the “boots on the ground” needed to promote those programs and help move producers toward more soil health and water quality practices via education and relationship building. The strategy of lobbying lawmakers to make such resources available was brought up as being a necessary part of the plan update. Numerous examples were given of how funding has materialized from the legislature for relevant water quality issues brought to their attention by stakeholders. One item of focus could be to get the state to fully fund, according to existing statute, the county land conservation offices.

Identifying all the needs, as discussed above, is a good first step. The plan update will be crafted such that strategies for addressing these needs will also be defined.

**Feedback on Distribution of 2023 Annual Report** The 2023 Annual Report was completed in August, and a press release was sent out in early September. Coverage of the report was noted in several local newspapers, and also went out in a DNR report. But other media outlets were not heard from. It has also been posted on some websites with some of those sites showing visits.

**Check-In and Discussion:** Because of the format of the meeting (focusing on just the issue of plan revision) we did not do our regular check-ins.

**Evaluation:** On a scale of 1 to 5 (five being the best), everyone rated the meeting as a 5.

**Next Meeting:** Chase asked via email that the Partnership find a new regular meeting date, as the first Wednesday has become unavailable for him. The group agreed that the fourth Wednesday would work, and that was an option proposed by Chase. Unfortunately, the fourth Wednesday in December falls on Christmas this year (and will be near Christmas most years), so a different December date will have to be decided upon for the next meeting. Dan will solicit possible dates via email.