

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

2/26/25 Meeting held at Dunn Co Government Center (with Zoom option)

Present at the meeting: Al Brown, Tom Bilse – Tainter Lake District; Tyler Gruetzmacher (Z) – Barron Co LCD; Pat Richter (Z), John Sippl, Sierra Harris, Adam Dowling (Z), Twyla Kite (Z), Melissa Bartz (Z) – NRCS; Liz Osborne – WDNR; Andrew Schneyer – UW-Stout; Chase Cummings – Dunn Co LCD; Chris Straight (Z) – WCWRPC; Brad Luedtke – 3M; Elise Theiler – Chippewa Co LCD (Z); Kelsey Hyland, Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

Discussion of NRCS Programs: Dan, Tyler, Chase, John and Pat had met back in December to talk about getting more information about NRCS programs to the group which led to today's discussion. In addition to local NRCS staff, some statewide staff joined via Zoom to talk to the group about NRCS programs. This included some presentations on the RCCP program, MRBI, and NWQI. While some federal funding is in question, many programs are still available to farmers and land owners to implement many of the practices needed to minimize runoff and improve soil health. All these programs will be kept in consideration as the watershed plan is updated.

Discussion of Plan Update: UW-Extension received a DNR planning grant to assist in the costs of updating the plan. This will help fund Dan's work on the plan over the next roughly two years.

Dan shared some public feedback he received on what folks envision for the watershed and what the Partnership can do to help people. This feedback was obtained at the end of two presentations he gave over the last few months; one to the Farmers of Barron County Watersheds at their annual forum in December, and the other was to folks in Rice Lake who are trying to acquire the designation of National Heritage Area for the Red Cedar Valley. This input will contribute towards plan updating.

Between now and mid-April Dan will not be doing much on the plan update due to many conferences and other activities happening between now and then. The next Red Cedar Partnership meeting in April will likely involve greater discussion on the plan update.

Discussion of 2024 Annual Report: Dan reminded everyone to please work on their pieces of the 2024 Annual Report and get them to him as soon as possible so he can start putting that together. He will send out a reminder to everyone along with last year's report as a template.

Check-In and Discussion: Everyone took a few minutes to update the group on their activities over the last few months pertaining to the work of the Partnership.

Dan: Reminded everyone of the Red Cedar Conference on March 13th, and to get registered. Will be on the Judy Clark show on WEAU TV later today to talk about the Conference. Recently attended the Producer Led Watershed Conference in Plover, with a good turnout and good sessions about farmer-led groups I the state. Also attended the regional farmer luncheon put on by Tara (Farmers Union) a few

weeks ago in Baldwin. Turnout was good with some good presentations about farming techniques and research.

Liz: Working on some enforcement cases in Dunn and Chippewa County that are having some groundwater impacts. Application date for TRM grants is April 15, and Dunn Co is exploring some ideas. Stormwater practices are also eligible this year. Rusk County had a TRM grant in the watershed, but had to cancel it due to lack of producer cooperation. That funding will be reallocated and available for projects. The statewide nutrient reduction strategy will be updated this year, with Joe Bonnell heading that effort for DNR. Is presenting at the Land and Water Conference next week in Green Bay.

Tyler: Is investigating some possible water quality trading in the Hay River watershed. The farmer involved will be meeting with Chris from the statewide water quality trading clearing house. Is working with a farmer interested in doing a grazing plan which will help curb a lot of manure runoff into the Hay River. Showed the group some groundwater data mapped out on graphics of Dunn, Barron and Chippewa Counties, showing high P in many wells, along with high levels of nitrate, though not necessarily in the same areas. His staff will be presenting some of this data at the Red Cedar Conference.

Brad: 3M is restoring some of the land east of the plant in Menomonie to prairie, and expanding some prairie further south after the completion of a building project.

Chris: WCWRPC is doing a similar watershed plan update for the Eau Claire River watershed, looking for any ways to collaborate. They are also updating the county comprehensive plans for Dunn and Chippewa Counties, and will be sending out a town survey soon. That will eventually be followed by a village and landowner/farmer survey. Is helping with some sanitary sewer planning in Menomonie, and also some hazard mitigation plans for area counties.

Kelsey: Will be presenting phosphorus infiltration research at the Red Cedar Conference. As part of the statewide nutrient reduction strategy Discovery Farms will be sharing a lot of data on edge of field monitoring, some of which could be relevant for the watershed. Reminded folks of the Ag & Water Quality webinar series currently happening weekly.

Andrew: The Limnology Center at Stout will have a booth at the Red Cedar Conference. They have been successful in bringing in business/work, as well as money to fund the lab, and are buying some new equipment to update outdated elements. Field season is coming up with some monitoring of many area lakes that had alum treatments, the data for which will be available to the Partnership if needed.

Tom: The Tainter Lake District is working on some water quality projects including a large erosion project that is dumping sediment into Tainter Lake. Also working on some projects to address carp in the lakes. These include a carp bounty program to pay folks \$2 per head for harvested carp on certain days. And also adding some predator fish such as muskie to the lakes. Has been working with a local group, Muskies, Inc to assist on this with funds and stocking. Has also met with Dunn Co Fish and Game alliance to discuss this.

Al: The District is now producing a newsletter, and you can request to get on the list on their website. Reminded folks that their Board meetings are recorded and available on the website. Some Board members will be attending the Lakes and Rivers Conference in Green Bay at the end of March. They are finishing up the strategic plan for Tainter Lake. Also looking into doing some plant cutting/harvesting in some portions of the lake where it interferes with recreation.

John: In the process of allocating funds for 2025 contracts. Some funding may be more difficult than others. Has been getting interest from folks on manure issues, and may be organizing an event on that topic.

Chase: Both the Hay and Red Cedar producer led groups got some funding in the latest round of the DATCP Producer Led program. Also some other funding has been obtained through a Nature Conservancy grant. The Dunn Co Comprehensive Plan update will include some farmland preservation elements. Also the county Land and Water Plan will need to be updated by the end of 2026. Will be conducting some private well monitoring work using EPA funds already in hand. Money from the Multi-Discharge Variance (MDV) program will be coming to the county, probably more than \$20,000. Is taking applicants for the summer intern program currently. Enforcement actions in the County mentioned above by Liz could involve TRM or NOD grants, and is trying to time all this work up to match grant programs. Red Cedar Producer Led group will be having a workshop on March 4. Is starting to get some runoff complaints with all the rapid melting going on.

Elise (via Zoom chat): Not much here, but just working with our LTE on our board for Red Cedar and outreach lists for our TRM grant. Also working on NMP annual reminder letters and outreach for pit closures. And yes Liz, spills hotline!! Getting that email from the governor's office was too stressful (especially because there was no resource concern what so ever).

Tara Greiman (via email): 1) we are working to get a new coordinator hired for the FLWCs which will support the Hay River council as well as the Chippewa council and my other 3 primary councils - we got a good pool of candidates and are getting interviews scheduled

2) The Hay River group held a meat marketing event last week which had good farmer discussion on meat marketing considerations

3) Have a small grains event on 3/20 which will feature a speaker on wheat and one on kernza

4) We held a town hall last week at the WFU headquarters regarding the impacts of the federal government impacts on our membership to share the story - our members have advised us they'd like to see more of those and we're getting a lot of requests to know what's going on and what action steps members can take.

Alex Smith (via email): The biggest news for the partnership is that the plan update grant got funded! No one else in the watershed applied for a surface water grant this cycle. No planning or implementation grants.

Tom Goodwin (via email): I mentioned to the group in previous meetings that Dave Blumer (RCLA's past lake management consultant) decided to retire. The RCLA has contracted with Steve Schieffer from Ecological Integrity Services, Inc. and Cheryl Clements - Harmony Environmental to provide ongoing lake management services. One of the key projects we will be pursuing with Steve and Cheryl is the development of a strategy which leads to lower phosphorus loading into our lakes. Also, I had one question that I thought I would raise. The primary goal of the Red Cedar Watershed Quality Partnership is to lower the level of phosphorus into the Red Cedar River. We have been at this for over 10 years now. We know that we have significantly lower phosphorus loading into the river. Do we have other measures we should be monitoring that would be good indicators of improved water quality? We've discussed that some of our lakes don't seem to have improved from an ascetic standpoint - but are there other indicators we should monitor and measure?

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

Next Meeting: The next Partnership meeting will be held Wednesday, April 23rd at 9 AM at the Barron County Government Center.