

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

4/23/25 Meeting held at Barron Co Government Center

Present at the meeting: Tom Bilsé – Tainter Lake District; Tyler Gruetzmacher – Barron Co LCD; Alex Smith – WDNR; Tina Lee – UW-Stout; Chase Cummings – Dunn Co LCD; Megen Hines – City of Menomonie; Cheri Richards – WAV volunteer; Becky Brathal – Farmers Union; Jamey Lideen – Chetek Lakes Association; Joe Ailts – Barron Co PLWG; Kelsey Hyland, Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

Discussion of 2024 Annual Report: So far, Dan has received contributions for the 2024 Annual report from Chase, Tyler, Megen, Joe, and Kelsey. Others should get their contribution to him soon. Also hoping to get NRCS data about what practices were cost-shared in the watershed from either Alex or from NRCS directly. Chris Wilger has been contacted about water quality monitoring data from below the Lake Menomin dam, but is unsure when that data will be available.

Discussion of Plan Update: Dan reviewed what the group has done this far, with some feedback collected from various groups including recent feedback sessions at the Red Cedar Conference (Tina is compiling/processing this information for later use). Jamey also mentioned he will try to get Dan on the agenda for a summer meeting of the Chetek Lakes Association.

Dan needs to have a conversation with Andrew Craig about the plan update to get some more details regarding what's needed.

Tyler and Chase have been in conversations with Andrew Craig regarding some data from Regrow and the OptIS platform for some of the HUC 12 watersheds in the Red Cedar. Beyond that a few HUC 12s are already well suited to perhaps being the focus of more detailed work and planning. These included the Lower Pine Creek and Barker Creek watersheds. Barker Creek watershed is mostly in ag land for one large dairy operation.

The producer-led watershed groups (PLWGs) are a great resource in the watershed, and the Partnership can be an advocate for these groups in many ways. However it is apparent to most folks who work with these groups that if the DATCP grant money for the program is not expanded to meet the need, many of the groups may decide it's not worth their time anymore. The Partnership discussed ways to help fund activities of these groups, such as larger gatherings or smaller field days. DNR surface water grants, if timed and planned out correctly, could help pay for some of these events. Food sponsorships could come from the lake districts and associations.

Joe and others pointed out that there are great educational resources available from many of the folks in the Partnership. The key is to coordinate in a way to make maximum use of people's skills in communicating with producers, and reach these groups at the right time. Two key ingredients in the success of these events are a quality meal and quality presentations applicable to the farmers' needs. The Partnership can assist or connect with others to assist in both those ingredients. Joe also brought up

the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition, and the attractiveness of getting something like that going in WI. Discussion at the DATCP annual PLWG meeting, and/or the annual Wisconsin Land and Water Conference may be two ways to promote this idea.

Several folks talked about the need to follow up with farmers once they have committed to participating in some sort of management change. It doesn't have to be detailed, and can be as simple as "How many people here put on less N this year compared to last? More? The same?"

It's clear from today's discussion that engaging with the three PLWGs in the watershed in all the ways discussed above will be a key ingredient in the plan update.

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.

Tyler: There is a need in the watershed for a grazing specialist. The position created by Ducks Unlimited and held by Sean O'Connell has been eliminated and Sean now works for Portage County. There is an interest in grazing but a lack of enough professional resources to help those interested. Showed some video of a manure pit being cleaned and modified due to failure.

Chase: Has applied for three grants through the DNR that were due on April 15th. All of them are focused on manure storage pits. The two PLWGs in Dunn Co have DATCP funds and also some supplemental grants for NOPP projects and from the Nature Conservancy. This year's MDV funds for the county will be less...around \$7,000. It will be used for work on grass waterways.

Megen: The City of Menomonie is continually working with DNR to perfect their phosphorus modeling in the City to meet TMDL goals. Is also conducting inspections of storm water ponds.

Alex: Has been working with the Bear Lake group on some monitoring to determine where nutrient loading to the lake is sourced. There are some lakes upstream that could be major sources.

Tom: Tainter District's fundraising committee is working on raising funds. The carp bounty event is coming up in late May and early June, and will send Dan the flyer for the event. There is some erosion issues on some property near the lake, and they are hoping to convert that to some permanent grassland.

Jamey: Water quality testing has been kind of inconsistent from volunteers, and one of the reasons is a lack of enough equipment, so they have ordered some new testing gear.

Becky: The Hay River PLWG had a small grains event recently. Kernza was discussed but no one in the group has grown any. There is a farmer in the South Kinney PLWG who has about 30 acres of it, and that could be a source for education about it.

Kelsey: A nutrient management regional Extension person has been hired for NW Wisconsin. Would like to present to the Partnership some of the same data she presented at the Red Cedar Conference regarding soil test phosphorus, and find other ways to get that information out to people.

Joe: A spring field day will be held next week Wednesday by the Farmers of Barron Co Watersheds PLWG. Recently received an Nitrogen Optimization Project grant to study inoculating seeds in ways that help manage nitrogen.

Cheri: Her first meeting with the group. She is going to get trained on WAV stream monitoring on May 31st and will become a WAV coordinator for the area. She's hoping to recruit some more volunteers for other areas of the watershed.

Tina: LAKES REU program may still be able to get funded for summer 2026, but nothing for sure yet. This year is out. A huge NSF project known as Forward Ag Engine may be bringing money to the state, and she is a part of the team working on that. Some of that money could be used in the Red Cedar. The UW Freshwater Collaborative grants have been submitted. At Stout that funding would be used water quality monitoring training.

Dan: Shared some of the results of evaluations for the Red Cedar Conference, including positive reviews for the session Joe and Kelsey participated in.

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, June 25th at 9 AM at the Dunn County Government Center.