

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

7/7/25 Meeting held at Dunn Co Government Center

Present at the meeting: Becky Brathal – Farmers Union; Al Brown, Tom Bilse – Tainter Lake District; Megen Hines – City of Menomonie; Tom Goodwin – Red Cedar Lakes Association; Andy Bensed – Farmers of Barron Co Watersheds; Tyler Gruetzmacher (Z) – Barron Co LCD; Liz Osborne – WDNR; Tina Lee – UW-Stout; Chase Cummings – Dunn Co LCD; Kelsey Hyland, Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

Discussion of 2024 Annual Report: Dan is still waiting for some information from a few of the partners. Also it's not clear if any NRCS data acquired in years past will be available this year due to all the turmoil with federal staffing, but Dan will investigate further. Another bit of data that is valuable is the monitoring data from below the Lake Menomin dam, which has been steadily collected since the early 90s. DNR staff shortages may cause issues in getting this data in a timely fashion, but Dan will investigate.

Discussion of Plan Update: Tina had collected and summarized all the feedback from the public at the afternoon discussion sessions of the Red Cedar River Conference in March, and this was distributed to the Partners, and can be informative in many ways moving forward with the plan update. Andy pointed out that some federal changes, including a biofuel tax credit may be of interest to many farmers, and perhaps could be mentioned in the plan, and also featured as a session at the Red Cedar Conference next year when more is known. Kelsey mentioned that the P Index and SNAP+ have been updated since the original plan was written, and it may be appropriate to review how those changes may impact which practices are promoted in the plan for the best load reduction results. Tyler also mentioned that the average soil test phosphorus for counties would be good information to use, and Kelsey said that data is available. Dan hopes to have some draft language mostly focused on any revisions needed for the first two chapters of the current plan, ready by the next Partnership meeting in August.

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: After expressing uncertainty regarding funding, it was discovered after the meeting that Extension did not get funding in the recently passed state budget through the “nonpoint grants” that DNR was funded for in years past. However this should not affect Dan’s funding until early 2027, as he currently has a DNR grant to update the watershed plan, as well as some NRCS funding.

Becky: Several field days coming up include July 9 – a kernza field day in the St. Croix watershed; July 21 – A rotational grazing field day in the Hay River watershed; July 29 – a pasture walk near New Auburn; and August 8 – a Land to Lakes day in the Lake Wissota watershed.

Tom B: The carp bounty program finished up on Tainter Lake last month. Not a lot of carp were caught (at \$2 per carp) but the timing of when to have the event again next year may be a bit more obvious due to what was learned this year. The lake will be stocked this fall with about 440 young muskie.

Al: The strategic plan for the Tainter Lake District is completed, and features five goal areas; water quality, sedimentation, aquatic invasive species; community relations/partnering, and proper water craft use and safety. The District newsletter is now available and can be signed up for online. Plant harvesting is underway on the lake now. The annual meeting for the District is August 2nd.

Megen: Stormwater pond inspections are going on in the City of Menomonie. Some problems are being found, but so far nothing major, and lots of good cooperation from private entities. Capital improvement discussions with the City have included discussing new ponds. The waste water treatment plant is working on meeting water quality goals. Con Agra is funding some new treatments for water coming from their plant. A stormwater needs study is coming up. There is \$40,000 in the City budget for tree planting.

Andy: Farmers of Barron Co Watersheds will be meeting on August 5. The group is participating in a two-year nitrogen utilization project. He is doing some studies on his own farm to compare certain herbicide treatments with roller/crimper termination of cover crops. Is also trying some vertical till projects focused on slug issues and stand development. Has some speaking engagements coming up at a few events.

Liz: Federal funding is very uncertain currently, but will likely decrease at some level. In anticipation of lost funding, travel restrictions are being put in place which will keep her from future meetings. Will also be doing some work toward the end of July to partially fill in for an unfilled vacancy. A grant meeting will be held later today to discuss recent grant applications including from Dunn County. A proposed program to fund grants for grazing projects is now likely not going to happen due to budget issues.

Chase: MDV money is being used for many water quality projects in the County. The Red Cedar producer led group has an NOPP grant, and the Hay River producer led group has a Nature Conservancy grant. Is working with Liz on TRM and NOD projects. County transect survey was recently completed. The next phase of groundwater monitoring using already-received EPA money is now underway. Is also working on the update to the County Land and Water Management Plan. The fact that the County is also working on their own Comprehensive Plan (with assistance from Regional Planning) is helpful.

Tina: The Freshwater Collaborative program may be giving some funds to Nicole Hayes at Stout for monitoring work. The LAKES REU program proposal for next year is still held up in talks with the Federal government, and they are asking for changes to some aspects of the program. Former LAKES REU students, now mostly working out in the world as environmental professionals, are having a reunion this weekend in Menomonie.

Tom G: Red Cedar Lakes Association is examining the phosphorus load issues coming from their watershed, as data is showing that, without much change in land cover/use, the amount of P entering the lakes is considerably higher than a study showed 25 years ago. Some of that difference may be due

to large areas of curly leaf pondweed having established in Big Lake Chetac upstream. They've hired some new consultants to look into this and also do more monitoring. They'll be applying for some DNR grants in the fall. They have treated some CLP in their lakes this year. Their annual meeting is this Saturday, July 12.

Kelsey: Is offering irrigation water testing for nitrates to farmers who irrigate, hoping to get folks signed up for that by July 15. This may be offered next year as well. Is helping plan the WI Watershed and Soil Health (WWASH) Conference for December, likely held the week before Christmas in the Dells. Soil dislodgement mats are being tested on different practices on some farms in Dunn County. A two-year analysis of soil test phosphorus data that has been collected is being put together. Is helping DNR with their updating of the nutrient loss reduction strategy for the state.

Tyler: River systems in the county are moving lots of water right now. Is working with a big producer on a grazing project on the Hay River. EQIP has funded a half dozen manure pit closures in the county. Helped a farmer on the Hay River get lined up with some water quality trading. MDV funds coming to the county are small this year. The Chetek waste water treatment plant is fully operational now and is exceeding expectations. The county's transect survey has been completed. The groundwater study in the county should be completed soon. Is considering some way to get a weather station set up that can coordinate with the groundwater conductivity, which could show if large weather events are affecting groundwater quality. Is currently updating the county's farmland preservation program.

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 is scheduled for August 27th in Barron**, however there may be a conflict with a field day at the Marshfield Research Station, so another date may be chosen if need be.