

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

9/4/25 Meeting held at Dunn Co Government Center

Present at the meeting: Tom Bilsé – Tainter Lake District; Megen Hines – City of Menomonie; Tom Goodwin – Red Cedar Lakes Association; Joe Ailts – Farmers of Barron Co Watersheds; Tyler Gruetzmacher (Z) – Barron Co LCD; Chase Cummings – Dunn Co LCD; Jamey Lideen – Chetek Lakes Association; Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

Discussion of 2024 Annual Report: Dan has everyone's input and is mostly done putting the report together, with some checks and formatting left to do. However there will be no new data from DNR from the monitoring below Lake Menomin dam in time for the report. Staffing issues at DNR will likely mean the data will not be available any time soon. Dan will get the report along with a press release out to everyone soon.

Discussion of Plan Update: Not much progress has been made since the last meeting on the plan update, but Dan will have more time to work on it before the October meeting, and is hoping to have some bits for the group to review by then. Beyond that, Chase and Tyler have been in conversations with Andrew Craig of DNR regarding the Regrow data for some parts of the watershed. It was also mentioned that DNR may be working on a template for plan updates that will meet EPA's guidelines. Such a template would be helpful in completing the Red Cedar 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.

Dan: Kelsey Hyland is no longer with Extension, as she left to pursue a masters degree at the U of Missouri. Hopefully the Extension Ag and Water Quality program will replace her soon. Tyler also mentioned the new nutrient management outreach specialist in Rice Lake, Matt Bolen, as a potential member of the partnership. Dan will reach out to Matt. Mentioned a story from WPR that talked about how DNR has lost 500 positions in its agency in the last 22 years, including another 20 or so this year. With possible budget cuts to federal funds coming soon, there could be more positions cut in non-point work and water quality monitoring. Reminded everyone (through Alex, who couldn't make the meeting) that preapplications for surface water grants are due September 15.

Tyler: Cheryl Clemmons is now working with the Red Cedar Lakes Association and has been coordinating with Tyler and Nick Stadnik in Rusk County on surveying some farm fields to the east of Red Cedar Lake to try to ascertain why phosphorus levels have been increasing in the Red Cedar Lakes chain. Has been working on a grazing conversion near Hay River. Plans are also in the works to close 7 abandoned manure storage pits this fall. The county is again offering cost share through the county for cover crops at \$25 per acre.

Tom G: Red Cedar Lakes Association has partnered with the Birchwood Charter School who will be helping on several projects, including raising beetles to address purple loosestrife, and studying wetlands between Birch and Balsam Lakes. Will be applying for three DNR surface water grants this fall for several projects.

Megen: The City of Menomonie is updating the urban storm sewer service area plan, looking at possible future boundaries for possible sewer service. An environmental newsletter will be going out soon to city residents. Clean Sweep has a waste collection event coming up later this month. The Rain to Rivers stormwater group is going to be starting a chloride monitoring program with volunteers this fall with a grant from Xcel's Chippewa River Fund. Lots of talk in the City regarding the proposed AI data center for which some land has been annexed on the east side of Cty Rd B north of I-94.

Chase: An NOD project for a farm with groundwater contamination issues is underway. Is waiting on approval from the County Land and Water Board to move forward with a project funded by a TRM grant to build some winter manure storage for a farm. Producer Led Watershed Groups in the county are doing work on a NOPP project, and also some grazing work through a Nature Conservancy grant. Has been receiving some complaints regarding manure spreading recently. Also some inquiries about where and how the solids pumped from septic systems is being spread. Working on updating the county's land and water plan. Also discussed a project to curb erosion issues on a very visible piece of land on Highway 25 north of Menomonie known as "Corn Mountain" that will also involve some wetland restoration.

Tom B: Tainter District's annual meeting was held on August 2nd with all projects and budgets approved. The District leased a weed harvester this summer for one week in July and one week in August on an area of about 100 acres on the lake. This year a huge batch of aquatic vegetation broke loose and shut down access to some portions of the lake near the Hay River mouth. The District will hold a fundraiser on September 20th at Elk Point Resort.

Jamey: Saw lots of weed growth this year, but algae seemed to be less prevalent. However there was a blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) bloom on the west bank of Prairie Lake, which was unusual. Increased plant growth may be due to thin-to-no ice over winter driving earlier plant growth. Most of the aquatic vegetation was native, with much less invasive species presence. Harvesting of plants ended two weeks ago. Planning for next year is underway which may include more educational work regarding no-wake zones in the lakes.

Joe: Barron County producer led group will be applying for a DATCP grant on September 15. DATCP is reminding groups that the focus of the grant program is supposed to be on water quality practices, as they've seen some groups wandering away from that to some degree. Will be having a field day on September 18. Their December Conference in Barron will be happening, with no date or agenda set yet. The national group, Farmers for Soil Health, is offering \$45 per acre cost share for cover crops, which is quite a bit more than most programs offer. Joe is a regional representative for this offering and can help with any farmers interested in participating (the program is being run through CTIC, the Conservation Technology Information Center). Because of all the rainfall it will likely be a year of record yields for

many farmers in the area, but markets are down. Suggested that the Farmers of Barron County Watersheds would be interested in doing a presentation at the Red Cedar Conference in March.

Becky (via email): All five producer led groups she works with, including the Hay River and Red Cedar groups in the watershed, are applying for DATCP grants this month. There is a multi-species cover crop field day Sept 22nd- more details to come. Grazing dairy pasture walk will be held Sept 24th (see attached flyer). Save the date for DATCPs Producer Led conference Feb 24th, 2026. There is an information session on large solar Sept 23rd in St Croix. There are a couple happening in the Red Cedar Watershed. Tara has money to put on educational workshops related to solar. If you want more information, let me know or you can reach out directly to Tara, Tgreiman@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

Evaluation: On a scale of 1 to 5 (five being the best), most everyone rated the meeting as a 5 with a couple slightly lower due to turnout.

Next Meeting: The **next Partnership meeting is scheduled for October 22nd in Menomonie.** Due to the travel restrictions on DNR staff, we will likely provide a Zoom option for those who can't be there in person.