

## Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

### 12/5/25 Meeting held at Barron Co Government Center

**Present at the meeting:** Tom Bilsé – Tainter Lake District; Megen Hines – City of Menomonie; Joe Ailts – Farmers of Barron Co Watersheds (Zoom); Tyler Gruetzmacher – Barron Co LCD; Chase Cummings – Dunn Co LCD; Jamey Lideen – Chetek Lakes Association; Liz Usborne, Alex Smith – WDNR; Becky Brathal – Farmers Union; John Sippl – NRCS (Zoom); Cheri Richards – Barron Co WAVE; Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

**Discussion of Plan Update:** Dan has made a little more progress on the plan draft, adding some modeling information from Grasslands 2.0 regarding conversion of cropland to grassland, and adding detail to other portions of what has been written so far. The timeline is to have some sort of draft out the Partnership by June or July, and then submit to DNR for approval.

**Discussion of Erosion Issues from “Corn Mountain”:** Joe presented some data from some work he did analyzing soil/runoff from a crop field located right along Highway 25 between Menomonie and Barron, where a very steep hill (locally known as “corn mountain”) is farmed and produces an incredible amount of runoff and erosion, with the sediment flowing downhill toward the highway, through a culvert, and into a flatter field and wetland, that rapidly fills the wetland. This soil has the potential to (and has in the past) flow further down hill and into Tainter Lake which is between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile away. Joe’s research showed high quantities of organic matter and nutrients in this soil, which would produce ideal conditions for algal growth if it found its way to a water body, especially an impounded lake such as Tainter. Several folks at the table said they have been working with the landowner where the erosion is occurring to hopefully get some sort of mitigating practices in place, but so far the landowner seems unwilling to do much of anything, even in the face of reduced profitability from the marginal land on this very hilly field.

**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:** Spoke at the NW Grazers Conference in Shell Lake on November 1, on the topic of the value of watershed partnerships. Reminded the group that the WWASH Conference is coming up in WI Dells on December 16-17. Updated everyone on the Red Cedar Conference planning for the Conference on March 12, 2026.

**Jamey:** Chetek Lakes is working on their planning for 2026-27, including getting grants submitted and looking for other grant opportunities. In their most recent newsletter they summarized the Partnership’s 2024 report to educate the lake folks about what the Partnership does, and how Chetek Lakes fits in to all of the work of the Partnership.

**Megen:** The plan for managing the urban service area for their stormwater permit is moving forward. Pond and outfall inspections are still underway. Met with their urban forestry board and are moving

forward with a plan for some tree planting in Phelan Park. Working on reducing salt usage. Some staff turnover will be coming soon that could have effects on some work.

Liz: Another retirement in the NPS program has led to her territory being expanded until the position is filled. Travel ban has been mostly lifted for DNR staff, and there is also less of a hold on hiring than there was in the last several months. Todd Prill left his position at DNR and is now with UW-Extension's Ag and Water Quality program, replacing Kelsey Hyland in NW WI. Is working with Dunn County on the update to their land and water resource management plan update. Announced that there are regional outdoor recreation plan meetings in the area, with one to be held in Menomonie on Monday, 12/8. There is a contested case in another part of the state that deals with nitrogen regulations and how they are not sufficient to protect groundwater...something to watch.

John: NRCS staff is back to work, but lots of mitigation needed on program aspects that were affected by the long government shutdown. Trying to get all fall practice and stewardship payments out to people. 2026 EQIP signup was retracted, but NRCS still open for anyone interested in signing up for programs. The budgets for EQIP and CSP have been submitted to Washington. Ducks Unlimited has filled the grazing specialist position in NW WI that was vacated by Sean O'Connell several months ago. The new person hired is Chris Johnson.

Becky: Hay River producer led group got \$22,000 from DATCP for this year. A field day will be held tomorrow (Saturday, 12/6) at Logan Dwyer's farm, showing the grazing of a post-harvest sorghum field by some cattle. Will be doing some grazing workshops next year.

Chase: Dunn Co Land and Water Plan revision is underway, at the same time as the County Comprehensive Plan, so is trying to make sure the two plans speak to each other in the same ways about managing natural resources. Will be doing some focus groups on all this soon, looking for public input. Red Cedar farmers producer-led group got over \$20K in their DATCP grant. There is an NOD grant for a farm near to Tainter Lake. Also the County received a small-scale TRM grant for a new manure storage facility on a farm in the watershed. Submitted a few surface water grants last month to DNR.

Tyler: There will be office staff turnover soon with a retirement. Finished up a grazing conversion project that was fun to do, as the producer was very proactive and interested in the process of converting to grazing. Told the group about the Copernicus Browser, which makes it possible to download very recent aerial imagery, with two new photos per month. DATCP unveiled their new cover crop program recently, but the website for the program is a little clunky. Has one more manure pit closure to take care of this year.

Tom B: Stocked over 400 muskies in Lake Tainter with some help from Muskies, Inc. Hoping that this leads to more control of carp populations, and possibly increase fishing activity on the lake. The District held a public hearing last week on the topic of possibly extending the slow/no wake regions of the lake, with about 25 people in attendance. Has applied for a grant (through Chase's shop) from DNR to begin an engineering study of a huge eroded bank region of the Red Cedar. Is looking for more funding for that project, as it will likely cost into the millions of dollars.

Alex: Working on all the recently submitted surface water grants...over 300 submitted, but not enough funding for all projects. Total \$ requested in all applications: 7.4 million. Total available funds before contracts is 6.2 million.

Joe: Nothing further.

Cheri: Had to leave before check in, but mentioned in a follow-up email that they were monitoring Pokegema Creek in the Blue Hills, but are interested in doing others if needed and available.

**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 Wednesday, February 25<sup>th</sup> in Menomonie.