

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

2/25/26 Meeting held at Dunn Co Government Center w/Zoom option

Present at the meeting: Tom Bilsé – Tainter Lake District; Chase Cummings, Heather Wood – Dunn Co LCD; Jamey Lideen – Chetek Lakes Association (Z); Liz Osborne, Alex Smith (Z), Andrew Craig (Z) – WDNR; Cheri Richards – Barron Co WAV (Z); Chris Johnson – Ducks Unlimited; Todd Prill, Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

Discussion of 2025 Annual Report: Dan will start assembling the 2025 annual report soon. Everyone needs to get their information to him as soon as possible. Andrew mentioned that the monitoring data for the Red Cedar River below the Lake Menomin dam is still being collected and is available, but there simply is not staff to analyze it to average things out and normalize for flow. So it will likely not be included in the 2025 report. Dan will send out a reminder to folks for their data, along with the 2024 report for reference.

Discussion of Plan Update: Dan has made some progress on writing the plan update. He has been estimating load reductions from various practices with the outcome to be a new load reduction goal for the plan. He is waiting on some information from land conservation departments on barnyards in need of work, along with manure storage needs, and a few other BMP updates. Not much work will be done over the next couple months, with lots of conferences and out-of-town meetings on his calendar. The update will be structured much like the 2016 plan, with the same five chapters, just updated for the new plan. Dan hopes to have a draft ready for review by the group sometime this summer (the plan needs to be done by the end of 2026).

Andrew mentioned a few things to focus on, such as critical areas for implementation, like certain farm fields or HUC 12 watersheds. The Partnership had previously mentioned Lower Pine Creek and Barker Creek as two HUCs of interest. Liz mentioned that critical areas may also include areas of protection rather than remediation. Chris mentioned Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) grants as a possible source of funding for some work, that could be done quicker than through an NRCS cost-share process. The issue of estimating costs was also discussed, with suggestions from Andrew that small-scale costs would be good, such as working in specific watersheds and fields, along with the more large-scale, watershed-wide cost estimates done in the 2016 plan.

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: It's conference season, and will be attending the WI Land and Water Conference next week in the Dells, the Red Cedar Conference on March 12 in Menomonie, an Extension water program in-service April 7-8 in Stevens Point, and the WI Lakes and Rivers Convention April 15-17 in Stevens Point.

Chris: First meeting with the group. He has been hired by DU but is fully integrated with NRCS in the NW part of the state as a grazing specialist. Is looking forward to working with everyone in the Partnership.

Tom: The carp population study was completed but they are thinking about doing another one to get better data on carp populations in Lake Tainter. They will do a carp bounty program again this year, with a bit more advertising and perhaps extended dates. They are working with Stout to study who uses the lake. The aquatic vegetation committee is looking into buying a weed harvester, but they are expensive. The boating and safety committee wants to extend the slow/no wake portion of the lake through the entire channel. The water quality committee is exploring installing boat cleaning stations at docks around the lake. Tom will be presenting on work done by the Lake District at the Red Cedar Conference.

Chase: Is looking into manure storage and barnyard data for the plan update. The two producer led watershed groups in the Dunn Co each received a DATCP grant this year. The Red Cedar PLWG also has a nitrogen optimization project (NOP) grant. And two new Nature Conservancy grants have also been awarded for this year focused on funding cover crops. A TRM grant is in place in the county for manure storage on a farm they've been working with for a while. There is also an NOD grant in place for a farm very near to Lake Tainter. The County is getting about \$28,000 in MDV funds this year which will mostly be used toward cover crops. Both the County Land and Water plan and the County comprehensive plan are currently being updated. Had 24 applicants for an internship position, with lots of good candidates to choose from.

Heather: The County's groundwater program is continuing this year, with staff going out again to sample wells in the County. Chris Wilger from DNR is also coordinating with the County on some surface water monitoring. The Red Cedar producer led group is putting on a water quality discussion meeting open to the public next week, Monday 3/2 in Colfax.

Liz: Will be attending and presenting at various conferences in the next few months. Currently there are no DNR enforcement actions happening with respect to water quality in Dunn Co's portion of the watershed. DNR is embarking on a gap analysis regarding NR 151 (runoff rules), using random sampling of farms to see where things are with NR 151 compliance, and where we need to improve. Is back to her regular territory for coverage since all NPS coordinator positions are full for the moment.

Todd: First meeting with the group. Started with Extension in December, taking Kelsey Hyland's position. Is presently meeting and getting to know various stakeholders in the area; land conservation staff, producer led watershed groups, etc. Is hoping to continue some of the work Kelsey was doing, including soil test phosphorus studies in the region.

Cheri: Planning a training for WAV volunteers in May, and hoping for more local folks to be involved in that. She (and her daughter) are monitoring Pokegama Creek north of Rice Lake, but open to other sites the Partnership may need.

Alex: Finished up with the most recent surface water grant cycle, with several grants awarded in the Red Cedar watershed including monitoring by the Red Cedar Lakes Association, and AIS grants for several lakes.

Jamey: Looking at possible projects for the next two years. Did an online survey getting feedback from lake folks on what things they were interested in, with general water quality education, and no wake education and enforcement as two items listed by many people. Healthy lakes projects have fallen in numbers recently but two new implementing vendors have been added to help people implement projects on their properties, so this should help with future projects.

Evaluation: On a scale of 1 to 5 (five being the best), most folks rated the meeting as a 5, with a few lower numbers mostly due to some of the internet technical issues that occurred during the meeting.

Next Meeting: The next Partnership meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 22nd in Barron.