



County Of Dane
Office Of The County Executive

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Dane County Executive Parisi Announces Breakthrough in Lakes Clean-Up Work

Groundbreaking Discovery Means Cleaner Lakes Decades Sooner

Today Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced a significant breakthrough in efforts to clean up the Yahara Chain of Lakes. The cornerstone of Parisi's 2017 Dane County budget – to be unveiled later this week – is a new \$12 million initiative to clean up 33 miles of streams that feed phosphorus directly in the lakes on a daily basis. This work will remove 870,000 pounds of phosphorus, the chief culprit responsible for algae growth, from area waters.

“Working with farmers, business, environmental advocates, and communities we have reduced runoff and made incredible progress but this new analysis shows we can’t accomplish our goals of cleaning our lakes without removing what is already in our waterways,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. **“This breakthrough research demonstrates with the path we were on, we wouldn’t have seen the results of our work until our great grandchildren’s lifetime. We cannot wait 100 years for clean lakes.”**

Two years ago, County Executive Parisi funded a \$60,000 study in his budget to analyze the water quality and phosphorus content of the miles of streams and creeks that feed into Lake Mendota. A year of research later, the findings are stark: if the accrued sludge that sits at the bottom of these streams is not removed, it will take 99 years to see a 50% reduction in phosphorus that finds its way into the lakes. Even more concerning, the roadmap to cleaning our lakes completed a couple of years ago (Yahara CLEAN) suggests it will cost \$78 million to achieve that 50% reduction.

Our community has long cited that 50% reduction as the goal in our lake cleanup. We can’t accomplish it in this lifetime without getting into these waterways and removing the continuous source of phosphorus that seeps daily into our waters. Spending \$78 million and having to wait 99 years to see the benefits of those investments isn’t the answer.

"Harvesting phosphorus laden silt from our streams is an important piece to the water quality puzzle," said Jeff Endres, Farmer and Chair of Yahara Pride Farms Conservation Board. **"If we don't strategically remove this legacy phosphorus from our stream, we will never be able to meet our water quality goals and fully capitalize on the phosphorus reducing practices that the farmers are implementing on their farms."**

Testing shows the phosphorus concentration in this stream sediment is seven times more potent than what's found on crop fields in the watershed. County staff and farmers have implemented conservation and runoff reduction practices on 90% of those lands. Soil testing shows farmlands in the watershed are on average already two times better than the state standards on phosphorus concentration.

This data shows what's been done to date has worked at reducing what nutrients goes on the land, when it's applied, and most importantly, keeping it there. The County and its partners are making progress. However, our community can't accomplish our goal without getting at what's already in the water.

Dane County will invest \$12 million over the next four years to remove 870,000 pounds of phosphorus - - Dane County's boldest, most tangible effort yet to improving the health and vitality of waters so integral to our economy and quality of life. Removing the muck and sludge that long settled into 33 miles of streams feeding our lakes will cost roughly \$15 per pound of phosphorus.

These waterways are feeders of phosphorus into our lakes. Until the sludge under the water flowing above is free and clear of pollutants, they will continue to channel a steady stream that we need to clean up. This project will have the added benefit of returning these stream bottoms to the way they were back in 1890, allowing for new fisheries and healthy habitats for wildlife.

Studies show that even if all phosphorus and sediment stopped entering streams today – all runoff from farm and cities stops immediately - it would still take 60 years for all the established sediment and phosphorus to be flushed out of the system.

A significant component of what hurts our lakes, is already in our waters. The 2017 budget starts the work of getting it out, removing 125 years of accrued sediment. This budget has the first \$4 million for this multi-year effort.

“This breakthrough will allow us to see the efforts of cleaning up our lakes decades sooner,” concluded Dane County Executive Joe Parisi.