

Healthy Farms Healthy Lakes Task Force Recommendations

The Dane County Board of Supervisors created the Dane County Healthy Farms, Healthy Lakes Task Force in 2017 with a charge to make recommendations for phosphorous reduction in surface waters.

The task force brought together a group of stakeholders and experts from a variety of backgrounds including agriculture, community groups, and state and local agencies to learn more from experts and each other and build on what had previously been done to improve water quality.

The following goals and recommendations were developed by the task force during 2018. Implementation of the goals and recommendations will occur over time and in tandem with other existing and future plans and efforts. While it is anticipated that Dane County may play a role in implementation of many of the recommendations, there are any number of community partners and other political entities that are anticipated to play lead or supporting roles.

Opportunities for implementation and funding of task force goals and recommendation are particularly strong within the Yahara Watershed, which is already the focus of considerable voluntary and regulatory plans, policies, programs and initiatives. Several municipalities within the Yahara Watershed along with the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) are under current regulatory obligations to meet phosphorus reductions. These municipalities and MMSD have entered into an intergovernmental agreement known as Yahara WINS to achieve their phosphorus obligations through an option known as adaptive management. Accordingly, it is anticipated that implementation of the task force goals and recommendations will complement the adaptive management efforts and that the entities obligated to reduce phosphorus to achieve regulatory compliance may logical partners in implementation.

Goals

1. Actively support and encourage conservation efforts by farmer-led groups and watershed organizations. 3
2. Enforce reasonable management regulations at the local level by adopting state agricultural performance standards into county ordinance as a complement to the state agricultural prohibitions already in county ordinance. 4
3. Improve the use of manure nutrients and prevent nutrient losses through improved manure management. 5
4. Improve soil and water quality through the expansion, adoption, and implementation of nutrient management plans along with the development and maintenance of a tracking database. 6
5. Continue to support, implement and evaluate the *Yahara CLEAN Strategic Action Plan* and adaptive management plans. 7
6. Develop and implement programs that aid in the preservation of agricultural land..... 8
7. Expand implementation of conservation practices through streamlined cost-share program administration, new program development and improved promotion of opportunities..... 9
8. Develop large scale watershed analyses to identify and prioritize high risk areas for phosphorus runoff and water quality degradation. 10

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1. Actively support and encourage conservation efforts by farmer-led groups and watershed organizations.

Recommendations

- A. Engage with farmer-led groups and watershed organizations to best understand how we might further support their efforts. For example,
 - i. Equipment needs
 - ii. Training/Education needs
 - iii. Support Needs (e.g. coordinator position, outreach, etc.)
 - iv. Regulatory obstacles (e.g. recent WDNR streamlined G.P. for conservation efforts to remove regulatory barriers that have inhibited practices such as waterways and buffers)
 - v. Financial obstacles
 - vi. Funding support through innovative or pilot programs such as “pay for performance”
- B. Engage with agronomists and agriculture industry partners to best understand how we might support the efforts of farmer-led groups.
- C. Develop collaborations between government, community partners and farmers to promote water quality and soil health through demonstrations that
 - i. maintain continuous living cover
 - ii. minimize soil disturbance
 - iii. maximize soil biodiversity
- D. Develop and promote voluntary local standards to address locally identified resource concerns and priorities.
 - i. Cropping practices (e.g follow corn silage with a cover crop)
 - ii. Manure handling and management
 - iii. Vegetable Systems
 - iv. Tillage Practices

2. Enforce reasonable management regulations at the local level by adopting state agricultural performance standards into county ordinance as a complement to the state agricultural prohibitions already in county ordinance.

Recommendations:

- A. Update Chapter 14, Dane County Ordinance, to include the state's agricultural performance standards for local implementation and enforcement:
 - i. Sheet, rill and wind erosion
 - ii. Tillage setback
 - iii. Phosphorus index
 - iv. Manure storage facilities
 - v. Process wastewater handling
 - vi. Clean water diversion
 - vii. Nutrient management
- B. Update the Dane County Land & Water Resources Management Plan to align implementation procedures with current initiatives and ordinance requirements.

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3. Improve the use of manure nutrients and prevent nutrient losses through improved manure management.

Recommendations:

- A. Update and expand Chapter 14, Dane County Ordinance, manure storage permitting language to include:
 - i. Staying current with technical standard requirements for manure storage
 - ii. Expand definitions to include new and emerging manure management techniques (i.e. composting, digesters, etc.)
 - iii. Expand the permitting requirements to address process wastewater (i.e. milkhouse waste, feed leachate, etc.).
 - iv. Improve manure storage application form
- B. Create and administer a manure storage “Certificate of Use” program through updates to Chapter 14, Dane County Ordinance. The certificate would apply to all manure storages in the county to evaluate safety and maintenance, track storage use and volumes, and improve implementation of nutrient management planning.
- C. Continue to pursue innovative manure processing, management and treatment options including but not limited to:
 - i. Composting
 - ii. Digesters
 - iii. Community manure storage
 - iv. Exportation and/or exchange of manure
 - v. Low disturbance manure injection
 - vi. Nutrient concentration systems
- D. Update and expand Chapter 14, Dane County Ordinance, winter spreading permit program including:
 - i. Align permit conditions with the new winter spreading requirements in the current 590 nutrient management technical standard
 - ii. Expand winter spreading permit requirement to all manure types (i.e. solid, liquid, etc.)
 - iii. Ty winter spreading requirements to nutrient management planning.

4. Improve soil and water quality through the expansion, adoption, and implementation of nutrient management plans along with the development and maintenance of a tracking database.

Recommendations:

- A. Develop a systematic approach for achieving nutrient management plan implementation on 100 % of all agricultural land within the county.
- B. Develop and maintain a robust and comprehensive county-wide nutrient management plan database including:
 - i. The extent of nutrient management plan coverage
 - ii. Planned rotational average phosphorus index levels
 - iii. Soil test phosphorus levels
 - iv. Ability to conduct periodic data evaluations and reporting of aggregated trends
 - v. Ability to integrate with other county conservation data management systems.
 - vi. Report aggregate phosphorus balance trends (by watershed / sub-watershed / TMDL stream reach).
 - vii. Ability to integrate electronic nutrient management plans

5. Continue to support, implement and evaluate the *Yahara CLEAN Strategic Action Plan* and adaptive management plans.

Recommendations:

- A. Evaluate and update the *Yahara CLEAN Strategic Action Plan* including progress from implemented actions, new information and assumptions used in estimating phosphorus reductions and funding requirements necessary for full implementation of all action items. The *Yahara CLEAN Strategic Action Plan* for Reducing Phosphorus addresses fourteen specific actions for a 50% reduction in the average annual phosphorus load from direct drainage sources in the Yahara chain of lakes.
- B. Collaborate on adaptive management plans as a way to implement both the *Yahara CLEAN Strategic Action Plan* and to work towards permit compliance for regulated entities such as the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District.
- C. Document progress towards meeting Rock River TMDL (WDNR is already tackling this) and other community goals to protect water quality:
 - i. Progress towards Rock River TMDL targets and Agricultural Performance Standards (NR151)
 - ii. Progress towards Yahara CLEAN goals
 - iii. Progress towards Yahara WINS regulatory obligations

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6. Develop and implement programs that aid in the preservation of agricultural land.

Recommendations:

- A. Develop a county wide agricultural conservation easement program in order to:
 - i. Ensure agricultural viability
 - ii. Provide financial support that will encourage conservation practices not easily covered by existing cost-share programs
 - iii. Maintain and monitor compliance with state performance standards or other conservation goals.
- B. Continue support for the Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan, which allows farmers and landowners to be eligible for state tax credits under the Working Land Initiative by maintaining land in agricultural uses.
- C. Encourage the development of Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs) in areas of the county not covered by County or local zoning. AEAs are community led efforts to establish designated areas for continued long-term agricultural production and investment in the agricultural community. Landowners in AEAs are eligible to enter into voluntary farmland preservation agreements with DATCP and claim tax credits.
- D. Encourage the preservation of agricultural land within urban areas.

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7. Expand implementation of conservation practices through streamlined cost-share program administration, new program development and improved promotion of opportunities.

Recommendations:

- A. Evaluate and assess current cost share programs for their limitations in funding conservations practices and identify obstacles with program and individual contract administration that are burdensome to both landowners and administering staff.
- B. Develop a Dane County agricultural cost-share guide to outline funding opportunities, procedures and policies for staff, program participants, policy makers and the public. Include information regarding:
 - i. Funding opportunities
 - ii. Application and planning procedures
 - iii. Conditions and requirements for funding
 - iv. Administrative procedures
- C. Develop funding opportunities to assist landowners and producers with improvements to soil health such as cover crops, nutrient management plans, no-till planting, and other cropland conservation systems.
- D. Consider an Agricultural Water Quality Grant program that provides funding opportunities for organizations or individuals for the implementation of conservation practices and systems beyond current cost-share and other existing funding opportunities.
- E. Explore the feasibility of new funding models or innovative programs such as:
 - i. Pay for performance
 - ii. Incentives for submittal of nutrient management plans or other data

8. Develop large scale watershed analyses to identify and prioritize high risk areas for phosphorus runoff and water quality degradation.

Recommendations:

- A. Develop a high level (macro scale) analysis for the entire county that quantifies the amount of phosphorus loading to nearby surface waters. Use the analysis to identify priority watersheds.
- B. Develop a mass balance of pounds of phosphorus and types of phosphorus imported and exported annually by watershed.
- C. Update the Yahara River Soil and Water Analysis Tool (SWAT) analysis to gauge progress. The SWAT model was initially conducted by Montgomery & Associates in 2010 as part of Yahara Clean and updated in 2014 for Badfish Creek.

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