

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Shining a Light on Conservation Success: 2016 Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Annual Report

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MADISON - A farmer pulling marginal lands out of production and into conservation permanently, producers taking the lead on water quality protection, a county that creates tiny little rainstorms to show what they can do to soil - you can find all that in the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Annual Report for 2016.

Land and water conservation staff in the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection presented the report today to the Land and Water Conservation Board at the group's regular meeting in Madison. It is available online at <https://datcp.wi.gov> under the Publications menu, or at <https://datcp.wi.gov/Documents/LandWaterAnnualReport2016.pdf>.

Conservation efforts in Wisconsin depend on county land conservation departments and landowners working with DATCP, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. Often private non-profit environmental groups are also part of the cooperative effort.

The reports are required by Wisconsin law. They used to be mostly lists of conservation

practices installed and dollars spent, but in recent years, staff at DATCP and DNR have used them as an opportunity to shine a spotlight on success stories in the conservation world.

Some highlights this year:

Dunn County - The Wilson and Annis Creek Watershed Partnership, a citizen-led group promoting land stewardship and best management practices for water quality, works with the DNR and NRCS. Among its projects was one that also drew in Trout Unlimited to restore a streambank. Now the DNR no longer has to stock trout there, because they're thriving on their own. (page 12)

Eau Claire County - In its first year of operation, the Eau Claire County Golden Triangle Agricultural Enterprise Area, or AEA, saw nearly 5,300 acres enrolled in the state's Farmland Protection Program with a pledge to remain in agriculture for at least 15 years. That represents a quarter of the total acres within the AEA acres. (page 9)

Fond du Lac County - A 50,000 gallon manure spill became the catalyst for conservation measures throughout the Pipe Creek Watershed. One visible sign of these efforts is the installation of a water and sediment control basin on a farm. (page 19)

Grant County - CREP, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program that allows farmers to remove marginal lands from production to protect water quality, is seeing an uptick in interest as commodity prices fall and farmers take advantage of the economic benefits that CREP offers. (page 17)

Kewaunee County - New efforts to encourage farmers to enroll lands in CREP are focusing on the program's potential to protect runoff into sinkholes in this karst region where bedrock is fractured, close to the surface, and a direct pipeline to groundwater for contaminants. (page 17)

Marathon County - Three brothers farming together set out to improve their manure management practices and ended up doing such a good job of it that they brought their land up to conservation standards that made them eligible for participation in the Farmland Preservation Program - keeping land in agriculture while protecting soil and water. (page 9)

Monroe County - CREP has been successful in the hills of the Driftless Region in working with DNR programs to restore trout streams. One new participant in the program sees the permanent conservation easement he's placed on his land under CREP as a way to make a difference while he's on this earth. (page 17)

Ozaukee County - A county conservationist and a farmer put their heads together and drew up a list of neighbors they thought would be open to a producer-led group to come up with ideas and incentives to protect soil and water. The result was the Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families, which won a grant from DATCP to protect these lands on the urban edge, where streams feed into Lake Michigan. (page 3)

Pierce County - The South Kinni Farmer-Led Watershed Council is offering financial incentives to farmers who try new conservation methods. The five-year-old group's efforts led to more than a mile and a half of grassed waterways last year alone. The waterways funnel water through a grassy surface, rather than bare soil, keeping soil (and manure applied as fertilizer) where it belongs. (page 3)

Polk County - A producer-led group here is focusing on education, including workshops that feature high-profile speakers from the conservation world. A network of mentors is evolving that extends beyond the Horse Creek Watershed where the group began. (page 3)

Sauk County - Conservation staff worked with the Lake Redstone Protection District and Pheasants Forever to buy a rainfall simulator that demonstrates just how tillage and overgrazing can lead to soil loss and nutrient runoff to streams. It's an education tool to encourage rotational grazing, no-till cropping and cover crops. (page 16)

St. Croix County - A residential drinking water program has led to more than 4000 wells being tested for contaminants to date; success that has helped identify hot spots and uncover water quality trends county-wide. (page 15)