

Dane County: Executive, Board of Supervisors, announce \$18 million to aid flood recovery, lake health, future resiliency

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MADISON - In the wake of historic late summer flooding that resulted in millions of dollars of damage in Dane County, over \$18 million in new initiatives will be included in the 2019 Dane County Budget to ensure Dane County can recover, rebuild, and remain resilient during future flooding events, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and County Board Chair Sharon Corrigan announced today.

The initiatives focus on moving water more quickly through Dane County's chain of lakes - Mendota, Monona, Waubesa, and Kegonsa - and the tie that binds them, the Yahara River; restoring damage to natural areas due to flooding; mitigating the amount of stormwater that enters our lakes from urban and rural areas, and improving Dane County's resiliency and preparedness with new equipment to blunt the impact of future flooding.

"This summer's historic rains brought flooding and destruction to many areas throughout Dane County," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. "Our charge moving forward is to come together as one community to ensure that we will

recover, continue to partner to improve our lakes and waterways, and strengthen our infrastructure and emergency response to become even more resilient in the future.”

“Preparing for a resilient system that reduces chances for flooding and increases our ability to recover from heavy rain events is essential,” said Dane County Board Chair Sharon Corrigan. “These budget proposals help Dane County move in that direction.”

Maximizing Water Flow Management

The faster water moves through the Yahara River, the quicker lake levels decline. Currently, it takes two inches of rain two weeks to leave the Yahara Lakes system. Nearly a month after August’s rains lake levels on Lake Monona were eight inches higher than its downstream neighbor, Lake Waubesa.

To maximize water flow, the 2019 County Budget will invest over \$2.5 million to analyze and address potential pinch points in the river where the flow may be constricted. Dredging decades of compacted sediment in the river, expanding the County’s weed cutting fleet and debris removal equipment, and analyzing and addressing bridge crossings that can collect debris and slow water flow will all be included.

The budget also includes \$75,000 to conduct real time modeling of the benefits and considerations for various lake level scenarios. The modeling will assist the anticipated community conversation led by the Lakes and Watershed Commission, recently introduced by the County Board and endorsed by the County Executive, on how to best manage lake levels given an increased frequency of heavy rains.

Flood Recovery

From Black Earth to Belleville, August’s flash flooding decimated homes, roads, and the places communities recreate and rely on for the quality of life Dane County offers. August’s rains turned Black Earth Creek, Pheasant Branch Creek, the Sugar River, and other gently flowing waterways into raging rapids. The 2019 County budget will create a \$1 million matching grant for park and trail repair, as well as a \$500,000 stream bank restoration fund to help communities recover, reduce future erosion, and promote a healthy habitat for fish and other wildlife.

Natural Mitigation

Wetlands are Mother Nature’s best remedy for reducing the devastation caused by

flooding. One acre of wetland, typically three feet deep, can hold 325,000 gallons of floodwater. In the Towns of Dunn and Pleasant Springs, the Door Creek Wetlands prevented worsening flood conditions for homes in those communities.

The 2019 County Budget will create a brand new Dane County Conservation Reserve Program to help convert lands at a greater risk of run-off into prairies and grasses that can hold more soil and keep water where it lands. The new \$750,000 program will pay farmers and property owners to convert portions of their lands to this permanent cover. An additional \$9 million is included in the 2019 budget to permanently secure properties that will improve the county's ability to reduce stormwater run-off and improve water quality in key areas.

While the magnitude and frequency of extreme rainfall is anticipated to continue due to climate change, it's important to recognize that rainfall increases explain only 50% of the observed increases in the Yahara River stream flows. The remaining half is due to the increase in urban and suburban stormwater runoff into the lakes from streets, parking lots, and rooftops as the county has developed over the last 20 years.

The average annual stormwater runoff from undeveloped agricultural land is about 2 inches per year, compared to stormwater runoff from a developed lot of 5 inches – about 120,000 gallons per acre per year. Since 1990, this amounts to an increase of 3.2 billion gallons of water run-off. To expand Dane County's partnership with municipalities that wish to improve the quality and reduce the volume of urban stormwater runoff, the 2019 County Budget will fund an addition \$1 million for the Urban Water Quality Grant Program, and will add stormwater volume control as an eligible project type.

Improved Resiliency/Preparedness

The increased frequency of flash flooding events in our quickly growing, more urbanized area means Dane County Government needs to enhance its emergency response capabilities. County government issued over 400,000 sandbags and deployed two sandbagging machines during the August rains and subsequent flooding. The 2019 County budget will include dollars to acquire three more fast-fill sand bagging machines, another 250,000 sandbags, and equipment that can re-open roads faster and maintain emergency operations if the power goes out.

The County also plans to look at more roads prone to flooding, and explore raising their elevation to prevent future flooding. The 2019 budget includes \$200,000 to

raise Highway W in the Town of Christiana, a route that was underwater on separate occasions this summer.

Additional funds for emergency responders are included as well. The Sheriff's Office will receive \$80,000 to purchase a second airboat, watercraft that proved invaluable when flooding of Black Earth Creek inundated the Village of Mazomanie, and required a number of residents to be evacuated quickly.

The County's 911 Center will receive funds for a new web-based phone communication system, used during Hurricane Harvey, that allows callers seeking help to report their emergency through a website when 911's lines are full. And a new \$25,000 investment included in the budget will help with emergency housing for those with special needs who need to be moved from harm's way in a short time.