

Dane Co. Exec. Parisi: Announces next phase of Lower Yahara River Trail, several initiatives to improve water quality as part of 2021 budget

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 29, 2020

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi joined community partners at the Lussier Family Heritage Center to announce funding for the next phase of the Lower Yahara River Trail, along with several water quality improvement initiatives as part of his 2021 budget proposal. The trail's bridge and boardwalk that connect Lake Farm County Park with the Village of McFarland have become fun family destinations for the entire region. County Executive Parisi's 2021 budget includes \$6.5 million for construction of the second phase of the Lower Yahara River Trail from Fish Camp County Park to Lake Kegonsa State Park.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many to retreat to the outdoors where they can unwind and explore Dane County's natural resources. By expanding the already incredibly popular Lower Yahara River Trail, we hope to help even more Dane County residents connect with the outdoors and immerse themselves in new recreational opportunities," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. Plans and permits for this next phase of the **Lower Yahara River Trail** are on track to be done by spring, with construction bids slated for release later next year. "The day is nearing when Dane County residents and visitors will be able to hop on a bike in downtown Madison and pedal straight to Stoughton along a route of unrivaled scenic beauty," Parisi added.

Another trail project the county continues to make progress on is the **North Mendota Trail** project adjacent to Highway M near Waunakee and Westport. To date, Dane County has invested over \$1.3 million for the planning and development

of a segment of the trail between Highway M and Woodland Drive and Governor Nelson State Park. Constructed in 2020, this segment includes over 1,600 feet of elevated boardwalk and a 100-foot clear span bridge over Six Mile Creek. The new section of trail provides an off-road option in an area that frustrated many cyclists due to a lack of safe riding alternatives. Parisi's 2021 budget includes \$350,000 to continue development of the trail through Governor Nelson State Park and funds to plan for a future trail connection that eventually leads to Mendota County Park.

In addition to improving outdoor recreation opportunities to enhance residents' quality of life, Dane County is also prioritizing several water quality improvement initiatives in the 2021 budget. County Executive Parisi is including \$1.75 million to expand the **Continuous Cover Program**, where interest by farmers and rural property owners continues to outpace available funding. The popular program helps to preserve lands from the ongoing pressures of development, reduce run-off, and mitigate the effects of climate change. To date, Dane County has protected close to 700 acres of land in 22 townships. Converting to grasses and pollinator habitat has reduced phosphorus run-off into local waters by over 1,700 pounds a year.

Dane County continues to make important progress with its multi-million-dollar effort to reduce flood risk along the Yahara Chain of Lakes. The **Yahara Chain of Lakes Sediment Removal Project** started this summer and is designed to improve flow—moving rainwater that currently sits in the lakes for weeks through at a steadier clip. This year's work is focused on the area between Lakes Monona and Waubesa. When completed later this fall, the river will be 2 to 4 feet deeper, and 40,000 cubic yards of sediment will have been removed. Dane County purchased its own dredging barge and equipment this year, which is due to arrive in October. It will be deployed next summer as part of the second phase of flood risk reduction work and focus on areas downstream of Lakes Waubesa and Kegonsa. There is over \$6 million in the budget, including \$2.5 million in new money, for this work to stay on track next year.

Dane County learned of the virtues of sediment removal for flood mitigation because of its experience with "Suck the Muck," which continues to remove phosphorus from river and stream beds that feed into area lakes. Sediment removal was completed this summer along a nearly one-mile stretch of Token Creek, where 20,000 tons of phosphorus-laden sediment was removed. Additional restoration work was done to reduce erosion along the creek, slowing the return of new sediment in the water. Dane County's next stop with this multi-year initiative is Six Mile Creek in the Town of Westport in an area known as Mary Lake. Bids on this

next phase of **“Suck the Muck”** will be released this fall. Parisi is including over \$9.1 million in his budget to keep this work going in 2021.

“My 2021 budget prioritizes initiatives that improve the quality of our water in area lakes and streams to ensure they remain accessible for future generations to enjoy,” said County Executive Parisi. “The impacts of climate change and a growing community require us to adapt and create new solutions. Our initiatives—whether they be ‘Suck the Muck,’ the Continuous Cover Program, or our sediment removal efforts along the Yahara River—tackle these challenges head on and work to preserve our natural resources for many years to come.”

Other important projects receiving funding in the 2021 budget include:

- \$150,000 for the **Walking Iron Trail**. Dane County is pleased to continue partnering with Sauk County on the feasibility, planning, and design of a multi-use trail bridge across the Wisconsin River. 2021 funding will be used for further analysis of the Wisconsin River channel and existing railroad bridge crossings. The bridge, when constructed, will link the Village of Mazomanie to Sauk City.
- \$100,000 for the **Ice Age National Scenic Trail** at the Ice Age Junction Natural Resource Area. Dane County, the City of Verona, the Ice Age Trail Alliance, and the Southern Chapter of Wisconsin Trout Unlimited worked together in 2019 to start restoring a segment of Badger Mill Creek and adjoining wetlands. The project includes realigning a segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, which has suffered from wet and muddy conditions.
- \$500,000 for the **PARC & Ride Grant Program**. PARC & Ride grants support development of regional bicycle trails that are identified in the Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan. Funds are awarded to local units of government and nonprofit organizations. Eligible projects now include bicycle playgrounds – an outdoor space designed to offer a variety of features and fun obstacles that safely build cycling confidence.
- Dane County will continue its multi-year restoration of the 20-mile long **Cap City Bike Trail** next year with engineering work to identify long term solutions

to preventing flood damage near the Badger State Trail overpass. All told, Dane County refinished over 8.5 miles of the Cap City Trail in 2018 and 2019, improving safety for all users.

- Dane County continued its legacy of preserving lands by protecting close to 600 more acres in 2020. Dollars being put into conservation have the dual benefit of preserving the finite resource of land and the opportunity to improve water quality and recreational access. With this in mind, \$4 million will go to Dane County's **Conservation Fund** and \$1 million will go to its **Flood Risk Reduction Fund** in 2021.
- The **Urban Water Quality Grant Program** continues to be an effective tool at tackling phosphorus and other runoff from urban sources. Dane County awarded almost \$1.1 million in county funds this year for local projects that will remove over 85,000 pounds of sediment and 173 pounds of phosphorus annually from runoff. The budget includes \$750,000 in new money for these stormwater grants to local communities in 2021.