

# Dane County Exec Parisi: Dane County to tackle most extensive “Suck the Muck” effort to date with restoration of the Door Creek wetlands

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Today, County Executive Joe Parisi announced Dane County will purchase approximately 128.3 acres of land in the Town of Dunn. The parcel is located off of County Highway AB, across from Lower Mud Lake Natural Resource Area. It is bordered by the Door Creek Wildlife Area to the east and Fish Camp County Park to the south. The 128.3-acre property purchase will significantly expand the Door Creek Wildlife Area and advance Dane County’s most extensive “Suck the Muck” effort to date.

“With this purchase, Dane County will be able to enhance public access and recreation opportunities, all while furthering our work to remove algae-making phosphorous from local waterways through ‘Suck the Muck,’” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “This effort will help ensure Door Creek and its surrounding wetlands can be enjoyed by the Dane County community for many years to come.”

The Door Creek watershed is the second largest contributor of phosphorus within the Yahara Watershed. Phosphorus concentrations in the sediment range from 350 ppm to 2,000 ppm, and the stream contains some of the largest sediment deposits of the tributaries that were assessed for “Suck the Muck.” Since 2016, Dane County has worked to implement the *Door Creek Watershed Management Action Plan* to reduce more than 2,300 pounds of phosphorus from reaching Lake Kegonsa. Dane County has worked to assess the watershed to reduce new sediment loading into

the creek. The average Phosphorus Index on agricultural fields within the watershed is 1.6 (significantly lower than the state performance target of 6), indicating good upland management in reducing both soil and nutrient loss.

Planning for Dane County's "Suck the Muck" sediment removal at Door Creek will occur next year, with construction slated for 2024. The property's northern upland will provide a staging area and dewatering site for the project as well as an alternate site, if needed, for the current Yahara Chain of Lakes sediment removal project. Parisi included \$2 million in the 2023 budget for this phase of "Suck the Muck."

Door Creek flows through a roughly 1,000 acre wetland complex, one of the largest wetlands areas in the Yahara Watershed. Dane County has worked to acquire lands within the Door Creek Wetlands since 2000 in anticipating of a significant restoration project, which was first identified in the *Door Creek Wetlands Resource Protection Plan*. In addition to sediment removal, the Door Creek "Suck the Muck" project will enhance high quality wetland plants, prevent the further expansion of invasive species, create additional flood storage, and provide additional spring spawning habitat.

"The Town of Dunn would like to congratulate Dane County for their purchase of the Symons property. The acquisition of this land will protect a large section of wetlands near Lake Kegonsa and Door Creek, and further protect lands within the Town of Dunn Environmental and Cultural Resource Protection Corridor," said Steve Greb, Town of Dunn Chair. "We also appreciate that placing this land into public ownership will increase access to the Door Creek Wildlife Area and could provide options to connect the Lower Yahara River Trail to Fish Camp County Park. The Town of Dunn has worked hard for decades to preserve environmentally sensitive lands and open spaces, and the protection of this property by Dane County Parks helps to advance that mission."

"Suck the Muck" is a \$12 million initiative introduced by County Executive Parisi in his 2017 budget and implemented by the Dane County Department of Land and Water Resources that initially prioritized 33 miles of streams countywide for analysis of potential sediment removal. The sediment found in these streams is estimated to be up to 125 years old and contain 870,000 pounds of phosphorus, which can increase the frequency and extent of hazardous algae blooms. To date, "Suck the Muck" has removed 180,000 pounds of phosphorus and 56,000 tons of sludge from four miles of Dorn, Token, and Six-Mile Creeks that all flow toward Lake

Mendota. Tests have shown the work has staying power, with Dorn Creek seeing an 850-pound annual reduction in phosphorus delivery to the lake.

The 128.3-acre parcel contains a mix of tillable land in the north, with pasture, a farmstead, and a large area of wetlands in the south. Acquisition of the property will extend the wetlands complex to CTH AB, expanding wildlife habitat and opportunities for public recreation, including hunting. The property will provide needed public access from the west, with the opportunity for a parking area. It will also provide options for a Lower Yahara River Trail connection to Fish Camp County Park.

The 706-acre Door Creek Wildlife Area is a public hunting area that consists of a large wetland complex extending north of Lake Kegonsa along Door Creek. The property is divided by the railroad into two units. The South Unit is located between Fish Camp County Park and Lake Kegonsa State Park. Hunting opportunities are available for deer, turkey, pheasant and waterfowl in both units.

Dane County plans to purchase the 128.3 acre property in the Town of Dunn for \$925,000, using the 2022 Dane County Conservation Fund. County Executive Parisi included \$15 million in his budget for 2023 to continue the fund's mission of preserving land with clear quality of life, conservation, and recreation benefits. A resolution to approve this purchase was introduced at last night's Dane County Board meeting and is expected to be approved in the coming weeks.