

# Gov. Evers: Continues celebration of Earth Week, highlights initiatives to improve access to clean water, address PFAS and lead contaminants, and invest in producer-led watershed protection efforts

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers will today continue his statewide tour celebrating Earth Week by visiting farms to highlight initiatives in his 2023-25 biennial budget to improve access to safe, clean drinking water by addressing contaminants like PFAS, nitrates, and lead and investing in producer-led watershed protection efforts.

“Whether for household use or crops and livestock, access to clean water is an issue that affects all Wisconsinites, regardless of ZIP code, and ensuring that we are doing all we can to make sure folks, families, and industries across our state have access to clean, safe water should not be a question of if we can get this work done, but when,” said Gov. Evers. “Our farmers have been leaders in this work for generations, and investing in their long-term success and the health of our water systems is the very minimum of what we owe them as a state.”

Since taking office, identifying and remediating contamination in ground, surface, and drinking water has been a top priority for Gov. Evers and the Evers Administration. Gov. Evers [declared 2019](#) the Year of Clean Drinking Water and [created](#) the [PFAS Action Council](#) to develop a statewide [PFAS Action Plan](#), which

has led to key protections such as Wisconsin's first enforceable statewide standards for PFAS in surface and drinking water. Additionally, through funding provided by the 2021-23 biennial budget signed by Gov. Evers, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has [collected](#) over 13,000 gallons of PFAS-containing firefighting foam for disposal, protecting the health and well-being of firefighters, first responders, and local communities in 22 counties. Last year, Gov. Evers and Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul also [filed a lawsuit](#) against three Wisconsin manufacturers and 15 other defendants for "wrongful, deceptive, and tortious conduct" that led directly to PFAS contamination of Wisconsin's water, property, and natural resources.

The governor has also allocated millions of dollars to farmers and producers to implement runoff management practices and protect watersheds across the state. The 2021-23 biennial budget signed by Gov. Evers increased the statutory cap on annual awards for the producer-led watershed protection grant program to \$1 million and allocated an additional \$500,000 for the program. These grants help groups of farmers work collaboratively to reduce and prevent runoff that causes nonpoint source water pollution. Additionally, in August 2022, Gov. Evers [celebrated the release](#) of funding for the Commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program and the Cover Crop Insurance Premium Rebate Program by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance. These programs, which work in tandem to further conservation efforts of Wisconsin's soil and water resources, were created under [2021 Wisconsin Act 223](#), legislation co-authored by the bipartisan Water Quality Task Force and [signed into law](#) by Gov. Evers last year.

Last August, Gov. Evers also [announced](#) a new \$10 million grant program to support the replacement, reconstruction, treatment, or abandonment of contaminated private wells. Based on the state's Well Compensation Grant Program and funded with federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, the program includes expanded eligibility beyond the current Well Compensation Program to support more private well owners and increase access to clean drinking water. It is estimated the program could help well owners address PFAS, nitrates, and other harmful contaminants in approximately 1,036 additional wells. To date, more than 100 well compensation grants and more than 50 well abandonment grants have been awarded, totaling more than \$1.7 million.

Finally, in addition to efforts at the state level, in October 2022, Gov. Tony Evers, together with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the DNR, [announced](#) the start of new federal funding to support municipal investments

in wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, including funding for the existing State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) program and for lead service line replacement and addressing emerging contaminants like PFAS. Wisconsin has a proud history of partnering with the EPA to implement the SRF program, which has provided over \$6.2 billion in financial assistance to Wisconsin municipalities since 1991. The state has been a national leader in using SRF program funds to remove lead service lines.

Continuing the momentum from his first two budgets and efforts over the past four years, Gov. Evers' 2023-25 budget includes historic investments to protect ground, surface, and drinking water, bolster partnerships with local governments, farmers and producers, and businesses, and ensure all Wisconsinites have access to clean, safe water. More information regarding these proposals is available below.

### **Comprehensively Addressing PFAS Contamination**

Gov. Evers is proposing a more than \$106 million investment to take a three-pronged approach to confront PFAS across our state. The governor is proposing:

- A historic investment of \$100 million all funds over the biennium for a municipal grant program for the testing and remediation of PFAS by local units of government;
- More than \$1.6 million, 10 full-time positions, and one four-year project position at the DNR for the implementation of the PFAS action plan. This includes:
  - Two positions to develop and prioritize a list of sources that may be emitting PFAS compounds into the air;
  - Three positions for drinking and groundwater monitoring;
  - Two positions to develop and implement standards to remediate PFAS contamination on sites where a responsible party cannot be identified or the responsible party does not have the financial means to remediate the site;
  - Two positions to develop water quality guidelines and standards related to PFAS, particularly for wastewater treatment facilities;
  - One position to develop standards related to PFAS disposal; and
  - One position to develop sampling methodologies and perform sampling in cases where wildlife is suspected of having been contaminated by PFAS;
- More than \$2.2 million for statewide monitoring and testing for PFAS. This includes \$600,000 annually for testing at state-led sites, \$55,000 annually for waterway monitoring, \$50,000 for testing fish and wildlife, \$25,000 annually for testing wastewater treatment plants, and \$750,000 one-time in fiscal year

- 2023-34 for sampling municipal water supplies;
- \$900,000 annually for emergency measures related to PFAS, such as providing temporary drinking water to homes impacted by groundwater contamination;
- \$1 million in fiscal year 2023-24 for the collection, disposal, and replacement of firefighting foam that contains PFAS;
- Establishing and enforcing various environmental standards for PFAS, including creating enforceable standards for PFAS in groundwater; and
- \$200,000 over the biennium for PFAS awareness and outreach activities.

### **Removing Lead Hazards**

Gov. Evers recognizes that too many communities still struggle with the presence of lead service laterals impacting their drinking water supply, leading to health complications for generations. The governor is proposing a once-in-a-generation investment to accelerate the replacement of these lines to match the urgency of the issue, including:

- \$200 million for the replacement of lead service laterals through the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program;
- Modifying current law to allow utilities to provide financial assistance in the form of 100 percent grant funding to support the replacement of lead service laterals for property owners; and
- \$50,000 in fiscal year 2023-24 in one-time funding for the development of a program at the DNR to promote the voluntary use of nonlead fishing tackle and ammunition.

### **Farmer and Producer-Led Initiatives**

Farmers and agricultural producers have been leaders in efforts to improve water quality and reduce runoff impact, and this budget includes multiple investments to support this work, including:

- Creating a Water Stewardship Grant Program with \$500,000. The program will reimburse agricultural producers who undertake the process to gain certification under the Alliance for Water Stewardship Program;
- More than \$12.8 million for grants to counties for county conservation staff to support land and water conservation activities;
- \$500,000 to support the Producer-led Watershed Protection Grant Program, which promotes innovative practices that improve water quality for farmers and other community members within their local watersheds;
- \$4.8 million to continue the Commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program,

as well as the cover crop insurance program;

- Authorizing \$7 million in bonding and providing \$100,000 for grants to counties for the implementation of land and water resource management plans, including cost-share grants to landowners through the Soil and Water Resource Management Program;
- Creating a new biodigester planning grant, funded at \$500,000, and providing \$50,000 annually for biodigester operator certification grants; and
- \$145,100 and one position to support the permitting of advanced wastewater treatment systems on Wisconsin farms.

### **Supporting Private Well Owners**

There are approximately 800,000 wells in Wisconsin that serve an estimated 40 percent of Wisconsin households. Yet, according to the Wisconsin Groundwater Coordinating Council, in 2021, about 10 percent of private well samples exceeded state and federal standards for nitrate and about 17 percent of private water supply wells were positive for coliform bacteria with three percent of these wells testing positive for E. coli. Building on the \$10 million ARPA-funded well compensation grant program, the governor's budget proposal further protects private well owners by:

- Increasing funding by \$1 million in fiscal year 2024-25 for financial assistance under the state well compensation program; and
- Amending the state well compensation program to bring the program's outdated contamination criteria in line with federal water quality standards and address emerging contaminants like PFAS, update the program's financial qualifications to allow the program to serve more Wisconsin residents, and expand the program to include owners of transient noncommunity public water systems.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).