

# Wisconsin Sea Grant: Bipartisan infrastructure law funding expands marine debris prevention efforts in Milwaukee and Cleveland

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Wisconsin Sea Grant (WISG) today announced it is expanding a successful marine-debris-prevention project in Milwaukee and will build on that success to spark similar awareness and action in a fellow Great Lakes city, Cleveland.

Marine debris is an increasing global problem that causes negative impacts in oceans, the Great Lakes and other waterways. Nearly 22 million pounds of plastics enter the Great Lakes each year, according to a Rochester Institute of Technology study.

In Milwaukee, this pollution affects Lake Michigan and local watersheds, which serve as a source of drinking water, offer recreation for residents and support ecosystems for wildlife and fish. With plastic pollution on the rise, the Lake Michigan freshwater ecosystem and the people surrounding it are at risk of negative health impacts that can be mitigated by increasing awareness of plastic pollution through youth education, actionable science and civic action. Similarly, plastic pollution is a problem in Lake Erie's ecosystem and for those who live, work and recreate in Cleveland.

In 2021, WISG joined forces with Milwaukee Riverkeeper, a key player in an initiative called Plastic-Free MKE, to coordinate Milwaukee youth to lead civic engagement projects on how to reduce single-use plastics in their schools. As part of an initial grant received from the National Sea Grant Office's Marine Debris program, the groups created a plastics audit, shared a plastics education toolkit

about how plastics impact water quality and human health and provided resources to students and teachers on how they can reduce plastic pollution in their homes and schools.

“We’re excited to see Plastic-Free MKE be a model for other cities that have great intentions towards reducing single-use plastics but needed some support to be more organized to build a local coalition in their city,” said Deidre Peroff, WISG social scientist. “I look forward to continue collaborating on this initiative in Milwaukee as well. We plan to continue our partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools to get more plastics education into classrooms and provide space for students to lead the effort.”

Peroff said she and Milwaukee Riverkeeper will share their success from Plastic-Free MKE with businesses and individuals in Cleveland to encourage the reduction of single-use plastics, which ultimately protects the waters, wildlife and people’s health

This project was competitively selected. It was part of a competition through two opportunities supported by the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and leveraging funds from the Inflation Reduction Act: The Marine Debris Challenge Competition and The Marine Debris Communication Action Coalitions. The laws are infusing a total of \$27 million nationwide, administered through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to marine debris education, prevention, cleanup and research initiatives. In addition to the project in Wisconsin, another 18 community-based projects are being funded, along with 10 research projects. The Wisconsin project is funded at \$300,000 for two years.