

Dept. of Natural Resources: Awards 2026 surface water grants

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has announced approximately \$6 million in grant funding to lake organizations, nonprofit organizations and municipal and county governments throughout Wisconsin.

This grant program provides cost-sharing for projects that restore and protect surface water. Surface water is defined as all water open to the atmosphere, including rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, impoundments and wetlands. This year, the program received 471 applications from eligible applicants requesting nearly \$7.3 million. Of the applications received, 426 grants were awarded, totaling over \$6.1 million.

The projects are incredibly diverse, including education and outreach activities, management planning, habitat restoration, runoff management, water quality improvement projects and aquatic invasive species (AIS) prevention and management. The projects selected for award leverage substantial local funding and commit to making significant contributions to Wisconsin's natural resource legacy.

Annually, the program supports many local and regional partnerships working to improve water quality across counties and watersheds. This year, the program funded several projects to implement river and lake restoration and management plans.

“It is always rewarding to see implementation and restoration projects get funded that will have a long-lasting positive impact on our water resources,” said Michelle Nault, Wisconsin DNR lakes and rivers section manager.

Of the eight river restoration and implementation projects that were funded, two projects on the North Branch Embarrass River (Shawano County) and Elvoy Creek (Forest County) will replace culverts to collectively restore stream function and fish habitat to over 21 miles of Class 1 trout streams. Other projects in Ozaukee County will work to remeander stream channels as well as restore degraded wetland and riparian corridor habitat on Mole Creek and Mineral Springs Creek. Projects focused on culvert replacement and habitat restoration were also funded on Papoose Creek (Lincoln County) and Lamon Tangué Creek (Florence County).

Eleven lake restoration and implementation projects were funded this year and span a wide range of activities, including watershed-scale water-quality improvement projects, shoreline restorations, alum treatments and staffing positions. A county-wide project in Marathon County will install 35-foot vegetative buffers along all navigable waters, in addition to providing education and outreach, technical assistance and community science engagement to landowners.

Alum treatments to control internal loading of phosphorus and restore water quality were funded on East Balsam and Big Round Lakes in Polk County. Grant funding awarded to the Lake Ripley Management District (Jefferson County) will be used to reestablish a population of western banded killifish in the lake, a fish species that was previously common in the waterbody but has not been found in the lake in over 50 years. Projects to control erosion and reduce sediment and nutrients from entering the lake will also be completed on Magnor Lake (Polk County), Lake Redstone (Sauk County), Lake Eau Calle (Dunn County) and Deer Lake (Polk County).

A total of 157 organizations will receive support to participate in the Clean Boats, Clean Waters (CBCW) program and 39 organizations will receive support to participate in the Lake Monitoring and Protection Network (LMPN). As part of CBCW, local advocates focus on education and outreach to empower watercraft users to help prevent the spread of AIS. The LMPN supports lake monitoring and AIS prevention activities at the county level and remains present in 70 of 72 counties in Wisconsin.

These projects are just a few examples from the organizations and communities receiving funding this year. While the grant projects from this year are just getting underway, next year's grant cycle will begin soon. Local organizations that could benefit from a surface water grant are encouraged to reach out now to determine eligibility and begin developing ideas before the September 2026 pre-application

deadline.

For more information or to find a Surface Water Grant project in your community, visit the [DNR's website](#).