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NEWS RELEASE

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SUBJECT: Yahara WINS, partners reduce phosphorus to improve water quality

MADISON, WIS. – The Yahara Watershed Improvement Network and its partners last year kept some 29,000 pounds of phosphorus from reaching area surface waters – an important step toward reaching water quality goals set for 2036.

The 2016 reduction came as [Yahara WINS](#) transitioned from a four-year adaptive management pilot effort to the full-scale project. The 20 year project offers the most cost-effective way to achieve water quality goals, providing a savings to watershed residents estimated at \$13.5 million per year.

“We’re pleased to see so many participants take action to improve our local waters,” said Kathy Lake, president of the Yahara WINS executive committee. “It’s rewarding to see this unprecedented level of commitment to the future health of these waterways.”

Yahara WINS pools resources from local municipalities and provides funding for practices that reduce phosphorus runoff. Working with key partners including Dane County and Yahara Pride Farms, the group supports work ranging from cover crop planting and stream bank stabilization to low-disturbance manure injection and improved urban stormwater management.

With more than 300 farmers and 23 communities participating, the group also supports water quality monitoring throughout the basin including permanent installations and a citizen monitoring program. In 2016, Yahara WINS analyzed more than 600 water quality samples for phosphorus. The monitoring now being compiled will serve as baseline and trend data to gauge the project’s success going forward.

“Working together, area farmers, local governments, urban residents and stakeholder groups have made remarkable strides in reducing phosphorus,” said Michael Mucha, chief engineer and director of [Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District](#), which leads the collaborative effort. “Our quality of life and our economy depend on clean water and we intend to build on this success with our partners in the months and years ahead.”

During 2016, reductions reported by Dane County totaled some 18,000 pounds. To achieve this reduction now and for the future, [Dane County Land and Water Resources Department](#) assisted 295 landowners in the watershed, implemented and tracked more than 313 conservation practices such as harvestable buffers and entered into cost share agreements totaling more than \$677,000.

“Dane County is committed to improving the quality of our community’s lakes and streams and we are working on many levels to make a difference,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “In cooperation with Yahara WINS, these efforts include water quality monitoring, working with farmers and major new projects such as the planned removal of 870,000 pounds of phosphorus-laden muck from streams in the upper Yahara Watershed.”

Area farmers independently made significant strides during 2016 with Yahara Pride Farms reporting its members put practices in place that reduced phosphorus runoff by 11,000 pounds. The reductions include amounts directly supported by grant dollars as well as reductions accomplished by Yahara Pride Farms members without cost share funds.

“Yahara WINS has helped members of the [Yahara Pride Farms](#) group by giving us the opportunity to try new technologies that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to put in place,” said Scott Maier, a Yahara Pride board member who has dairy and field crop operations near Waunakee. “We have the best soil around and we all want to keep it where it’s at – in the field.”

Excess phosphorus entering the water causes algae to grow faster than ecosystems can handle, harming water quality and depleting the oxygen needed for fish and aquatic life to survive. Based on ongoing monitoring, key rivers and streams in the Yahara Watershed register median phosphorus concentrations ranging from 0.12 to 0.24 milligrams per liter during the growing season, above the state phosphorus criterion of 0.075 milligrams per liter. Through modeling, a phosphorus reduction goal of 96,000 pounds per year by 2036 has been established by Yahara WINS to help partners reach overarching goals established by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The adaptive management strategy being implemented by Yahara WINS and its partners advances permit compliance efforts by municipal storm water systems and wastewater treatment plants while avoiding tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure investments. The strategy also represents the lowest cost approach to phosphorus reduction throughout the region, with municipalities, businesses and farms all bearing responsibility for watershed goals established by DNR.

For 2017, the Yahara WINS executive committee has approved a budget calling for water quality improvement efforts totaling \$1.09 million. For more, visit: <http://www.madsewer.org/Programs-Initiatives/Yahara-WINS>.

ABOUT YAHARA WINS

The Yahara Watershed Improvement Network, known as Yahara WINS, is a groundbreaking initiative to achieve clean water goals for the Yahara Watershed. In this effort, community partners led by Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District are collaborating on a strategy called watershed adaptive management in which all sources of phosphorus in the watershed work together to reduce nutrient runoff. The work began in 2012 and following a four-year pilot effort has now transitioned to the full-scale project.