



## Meeting Wisconsin's Conservation Challenges: New Annual Report Now Available

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**Contact: Donna Gilson, (608) 224-5130, [donna.gilson@wi.gov](mailto:donna.gilson@wi.gov)**

MADISON – Torrential rains, flooding, and water quality concerns underscore the importance of addressing conservation challenges, says the introduction to the newly published 2018 Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Annual Report. The report tells the stories of how county conservation offices successfully rose to those challenges last year.

Land and water conservation staff in the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) recently presented the report to the Land and Water Conservation Board. It is available online at <https://datcp.wi.gov> under the Publications menu. The report details the amount spent on land and water conservation in the state, lists the projects undertaken, and highlights conservation successes in 15 counties.

Conservation efforts in Wisconsin depend on county land conservation departments and landowners working in partnership with DATCP, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. Non-profit environmental groups are also part of the cooperative effort.

All told, conservation spending in Wisconsin in 2018 totaled nearly \$81 million. Of that, more than \$21 million was state funds, distributed to county land and water conservation departments for staff, training and cost-sharing to install conservation practices. About \$55 million came from federal funds. Local governments contributed more than \$3 million, and just over \$1 million came from private organizations and other sources.

Required by Wisconsin law, the report highlights conservation success stories, whether they involve developing and implementing practices or educational outreach to farmers and other citizens.

Counties featured in this year's report:

**Brown County** -- Sunset on the Farm brought urban residents out for a meal and tours highlighting conservation practices. (Page 29)

**Burnett County** – Putting a roof over a winter barnyard was designed to stop runoff from flowing into a ditch leading to a wetland. The project, which included a winter manure storage structure for a beef herd that grazes in summer, also provided a training opportunity for conservation professionals in northwest Wisconsin. (Page 18)

**Buffalo County** – In this Driftless Region county, Dairyland Cooperative stepped up to pay the full price to help farmers stop erosion on the steep slopes. The power co-op wanted to protect the bluffs and structures around a landfill for fly ash, and funded small dams to form retention ponds, along with outlets pipes, to control runoff on an area with a total drainage of about 2,400 acres. (Page 28)

**Fond du Lac County** – Farmers retiring, selling their livestock, or merging small farms with larger ones often results in a need to properly abandon manure storage pits. Fond du Lac county conservation staff describe the process in one such project that arose from a farmer's need to comply with manure storage standards in order to receive farmland preservation tax credits. (Page 20)

**Forest County** – Outdoor recreation is important in this northern county. The local conservation department established paddling routes and scenic auto routes. It also worked with the local newspaper to reach 7,500 households with 24 front-page stories that detailed land and water resource planning and the historic effects of wildfires. (Page 29)

## CONSERVATION – ADD ONE

**Manitowoc County** – Three-dimensional maps here show all the land features in this county – topography, vegetation, rooftops, streams – that can affect land and water conservation. The complex maps make work simpler, with fewer trips to sites to assess and measure. Cross-referenced with U.S. Geological Survey data on depth-to-bedrock, the maps are particularly useful in this karst region. (Page 24)

**Marathon County** – County conservation efforts include supporting the Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation, or EPPIC, a partnership that brings together stakeholders with different perspectives. Programs bring farmers together to learn from one another, and to talk to citizens who live on the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir. (Page 30)

**Oconto County** – When a single rainstorm dumped 7 inches of rain on a slope planted to corn, three huge gullies split a field into thirds. Conservation staff helped the farmer face the challenge by designing and installing conservation practices that still allowed most of the land to continue to be cropped. (Page 26)

**Pepin County** – Pepin County supported the Town of Waterville’s efforts to get certified for farmland preservation zoning in 2018. Farmland preservation brings new landowners into the county conservation office, and presents an opportunity to educate about conservation. (Page 16)

**Portage County** – The Little Plover River Watershed Enhancement Project entered Phase 1 in 2018, with activities including channel improvements, forest management, and wetland and prairie restoration. The public-private collaboration brings together local governments, farmers, and environmental groups to tackle the problem of river dry-ups resulting from big groundwater draws for municipal, industrial and agricultural use. (Page 7)

**Rusk County** – Working with an Amish farmer who needed up-to-date manure storage for his 200-calf veal operation was a new experience for the Rusk County conservation team. The partnership overcame challenges and the project ended up as a highlight for the year. (Page 19)

**Shawano County** – Youth Conservation Day, held annually, gives kids a chance to participate in environmental education activities, with the hope of inspiring future conservation leaders. (Page 30)

**Trempealeau County** – In 2018, the county doubled the acreage under nutrient management planning, to more than 55,000 acres. Outreach efforts brought new farmers in and helped give the relatively new staff a way to develop relationships with them. Farmers saved thousands of dollars by reducing their commercial fertilizer use, and showed the community they are doing the right thing. (Page 22)

**Vernon County** -- A multiyear project in the watershed of the west fork of the Kickapoo River returned cropland on steep slopes to grasses, and installed grassed waterways and contour grass buffers alternating with corn and soybeans. The project led a grateful farmer to send a thank-you note to conservation staff after the floods of 2010, when his soil stayed where it belonged. (Page 27)

**Waushara County** – An innovative three-month manure stacking system replaced a 50-year-old manure storage area on a winter feedlot at a beef operation, an important upgrade in the Central Sands where soil is porous and the groundwater aquifer shallow. (Page 21)

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