

Dane County Awarded Grant for New Initiative to Reduce Algae Pollution in Yahara Chain of Lakes

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Dollars from Madison Community Foundation Come as Dane County Receives Statewide Recognition for Water Quality

Dane County will use a \$75,000 grant from the Madison Community Foundation to expand ongoing efforts to reduce the amount of algae-growing phosphorus that runs off farm fields and into the Yahara Chain of Lakes. County Executive Kathleen Falk made the announcement at a news conference overlooking Lake Waubesa at Lake Farm County Park Monday.

"Thanks to the generosity of the Madison Community Foundation, these new dollars will help us reduce runoff from agricultural areas that grows green algae in our beautiful blue lakes," Falk said. "Phosphorus run-off from farmland is the greatest single cause of our lakes being green instead of blue. That's why we're building a first-of-its kind manure digester for several farms near Waunakee and now expanding our efforts with this detailed soil testing."

The county will use the Community Foundation grant to do soil testing on approximately 7,500 acres of farmland in the Lake Mendota watershed where most of the phosphorus runoff comes from. Those findings will then be used to help farmers determine the right amount and type of fertilizer to apply and develop strategies to reduce run-off from hills and slopes and along streams that feed into the lakes. The expansive soil testing will help ensure fertilizer is only applied to land that needs it, which could help save farmers money while reducing the amount of phosphorus that runs-off into the lakes.

"We're really delighted to support the pioneering work of Dane County in cleaning up the Yahara Lakes watershed," Bob Sorge of the Madison Community Foundation said.

In addition, Dane County is submitting a nearly \$2-million federal grant application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Monday. If those federal dollars are awarded to the county, they would be used to cover the cost of implementing changes the soil testing may show are necessary to further reduce run-off.

Falk also announced Monday that Dane County has been named one of only three places in the entire state to receive the highest recognition from a group that evaluates

water conservation and water quality efforts across Wisconsin. Following an extensive review of stormwater controls, efforts to protect lakes, streams, and groundwater and other steps the county has taken to improve water quality, Dane County received the “Gold Star Community” recognition from the Water Star Program. This statewide program is sponsored by the DNR, the UW Extension and others.

The Water Star program commended Dane County for being the first Wisconsin county to create an ordinance years ago banning unnecessary phosphorus in lawn fertilizer (which became a model for the recently passed statewide phosphorus ban), having the toughest stormwater and erosion control standards in the country (one of the very few in the country with a “thermal standard”), being the only county in the state to regulate the application of liquid manure on frozen or snow-covered farmland, the upcoming construction of Wisconsin’s first community manure digester that will take phosphorus out of 88,000 gallons of manure each day, and the county’s restoration of 60 miles of trout streams in the past decade.

To recognize the prestigious achievement, the Water Star program presented Dane County with a sign that was unveiled at Lake Farm Park Monday.

“Our county is honored to be one of only three places in Wisconsin to receive these high marks for water quality, but we want to do more to make sure the lakes we all love can be enjoyed by families for generations to come,” Falk said.

In addition to the award for water quality, the UW-Madison Nelson Institute for Environment Studies recently honored Dane County’s Watershed Management Coordinator Sue Jones by selecting her to be one of only six in the inaugural group of Nelson Institute Community Fellows. The program honors champions of the environment and Jones will participate in a number of activities with the Nelson Institute over the next year.

“I’m honored to be recognized by such a strong partner in our water quality improvement work,” Jones said. “The Nelson Institute’s community environmental forums and Yahara Lakes conferences have been a great help in informing area residents about our waters and what we all can do to protect and improve them.”

Falk also announced at Monday’s press conference that Dane County has received a Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council Award for its first-of-its kind plan to ready for the Emerald Ash Borer. This plan was unveiled in 2009 and lays out strategies to slow the spread of the ash tree killing beetle and minimize the potential economic and social costs should it arrive in Dane County.

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