

For immediate release

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## **New program honors Fitchburg for water conservation efforts**

Recognition to take place at tonight's city's council meeting

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Fitchburg, Wis.—As a charter member of a water conservation program to be launched statewide on Earth Day, Fitchburg will be the first to receive the program's highest recognition.

The new program, Water Star, honors cities, villages, towns and counties that have taken important steps to protect surface water and groundwater, such as strengthening stormwater controls, ensuring water quality, protecting habitats and encouraging residents to conserve water.

Water Star program sponsors include the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Cooperative Extension, MSA Professional Services, Town and County RC&D, Rock River Coalition, UW-Extension Environmental Resources Center, Dane County, Natural Resources Consulting Inc. and Ruckert-Mielke.

"Too often we complain about what isn't being done instead of celebrating the positive steps municipalities are taking," said Suzanne Wade, a University of Wisconsin-Extension basin educator and Water Star coordinator. "I'm amazed at the local wisdom that these municipal staff and elected officials have used in solving problems. Water Star is one way for them to share their good work."

Felipe Avila, Fitchburg's engineering and GIS specialist said Fitchburg has worked hard to rigorously protect local water resources and welcomes the recognition the program offers.

Fitchburg has established regulations prohibiting septic tanks and limited development to areas that can be served by gravity-fed sewer systems. The community is in the process of installing a stormwater basin to protect marshlands from pollution and trash, and is planning to irrigate its Nine Springs Golf Course with wastewater effluent to conserve water.

For its achievements, the Water Star program will recognize Fitchburg as a Gold Star Community during a ceremony at the city's council meeting at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Based on how well a municipality meets its recommended standards, the Water Star program ranks municipalities with strong water resource protections by identifying them as gold, silver or bronze star communities. The program's early participants have

demonstrated that Wisconsin municipalities have the capacity to establish and achieve high conservation and protection goals.

Representatives from municipalities, the DNR, the University of Wisconsin-Extension and other organizations said they hoped that when the program begins to show how Wisconsin municipalities stack up, gold star-designated municipalities will inspire other municipalities to set loftier goals.

Jim Congdon, Upper Rock Watershed Department of Natural Resources supervisor, said opportunities for optimizing water resource protections include taking steps that go beyond water DNR regulations.

Municipalities nominated to participate in the pilot testing of the Water Star application process represented some of Wisconsin's leading water conservation communities and, like Fitchburg are also slated to receive recognitions. Pilot test participants included, Dane County and River Falls which will receive Gold Star Community recognition, Beloit, Mukwonago and Waukesha County which will receive Silver Star Community Recognition, and Darlington and Manitowoc, which will receive Bronze Star Community recognition.

The Water Star program's application will open to municipalities statewide on Earth Day April 22. Municipalities can register and complete the application by visiting <http://www.waterstarwisconsin.org>.