

For immediate release

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New program honors River Falls for water conservation efforts

Recognition to take place at City Hall, Tuesday evening.

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River Falls, Wis.—A new state program is honoring River Falls as one of Wisconsin's first Water Star communities Tuesday for its exemplary water protection efforts. The city is one of only three Wisconsin municipalities to receive the program's gold-star designation and highest recognition.

The new program, Water Star, was launched on Earth Day and 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., Wisconsin Public Service Commission 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."

Early Water Star participants welcomed the opportunity to participate in a program that recognizes their municipalities' conservation efforts and helps them identify new ways of improving water resource protections.

The program has already begun to unveil a wide range of innovative ideas Wisconsin municipalities are using to protect water resources including those used in River Falls to control stormwater.

The city of River Falls has been particularly proactive in controlling stormwater to protect the Kinnickinnic River.

"We are the largest city in Wisconsin on a class one trout stream and we aim to keep it that way," said River Falls city engineer, Reid Wronski.

In its efforts to protect the Kinnickinnic River, River Falls has established a history of implementing stormwater controls that go above and beyond DNR regulations.

Wronski said the city's stormwater control efforts began not because the city had a problem, but because it did not want to create a problem. River Falls recognizes that temperature increases,

flash flooding and pollution can harm the Kinnickinnic ecosystem and trout fishery if stormwater is not tightly controlled.

Since the early 1980s, River Falls has been among Wisconsin's leading municipalities in implementing ordinances to control stormwater. River Falls' infiltration ordinances, for example, were created two years ahead of any state infiltration requirements and were stronger than what the state would later require.

City ordinances require any development adding 1,000 square feet or more of impervious surface to have stormwater controls designed to infiltrate the additional runoff generated by 1 ½ inches of rainfall on site. On top of that, standards adopted under the ordinance require a safety factor of two be used in designing infiltration areas. As a result, new infiltration basins must be able to infiltrate twice the additional runoff generated by a 1 ½ -inch event to be approved by the city. And although not required by state standards, River Falls requires developers to test newly constructed infiltration facilities to confirm the design infiltration rate.

In recognition of River Falls' achievements, the Water Star program will award the city a Gold Star Community designation in a ceremony at City Hall, 222 Lewis Street, at 6:30 pm Tuesday.

Water Star determines how well municipalities meet the program's standards for water resource protections and designates participants as gold, silver or bronze star communities. Early evidence demonstrates that Wisconsin municipalities have the capacity to 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, Water 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 DNR regulations.

Municipalities that have so far qualified as Water Star communities include three gold star communities—Fitchburg, Dane County and River Falls; three silver star communities—Beloit, Mukwonago and Waukesha County; and two bronze star communities—Darlington and Manitowoc.

Municipalities interested in being part of the Water Star program can apply online at <http://www.waterstarwisconsin.org>