

CREATING THE DANE COUNTY HEALTHY FARMS, HEALTHY LAKES TASK FORCE

The Yahara Lakes are the crown jewels of Dane County – central to the county’s character, economy and quality of life. Public support for clean lakes runs wide and deep. Yet lake water quality continues to be seriously impaired by phosphorus runoff. Powerful underlying trends are aggravating the problem, despite the good work of many. This is a crucial moment for the future of our lakes.

Phosphorus is the primary cause of impaired water quality in our lakes, leading to harmful algal blooms, soupy green waters, and noxious odors that reduce public enjoyment of the lakes. Algal blooms can also pose toxic hazards to lake users, fish and other aquatic organisms, wild and domestic animals, and can lead to beach closures. Phosphorus runoff comes from many urban and rural sources, including runoff from farms, streets, and parking lots. Leaves that fall in our city streets and erosion from construction sites are major sources of phosphorus in urban areas. Phosphorus from soil, manure and commercial fertilizer are the major phosphorus sources in rural areas.

Moving forward, we want to build upon current efforts and investments toward reducing phosphorus runoff and accelerate progress toward our community water quality goals. Yet progress is being slowed by trends that impede our efforts. Rapid urban growth is one trend that is accelerating runoff to the lakes. Dane County has been adding 60,000 people every 10 years, and development has converted many farms, forests and wetlands to hard-surface urban and suburban uses. These hard surface areas prevent rainfall from soaking into the ground and lead to rapid runoff that carries phosphorus and other pollution to our lakes. Another trend impeding our progress is a pattern of increasingly intense rainfall events that, over the past three decades, has aggravated runoff from farms and urban areas alike.

Changes in our farm economy are also posing challenges. Farms are an important part of the economy in Dane County and, despite expanding urban development, represent well over half the land use. Today’s farmers produce more on less land, at lower cost – but with high nutrient inputs. Livestock operations in the Yahara watershed continue to produce bigger concentrations of manure phosphorus. Vibrant farms are important to Dane County, but without careful management, intensified livestock operations coupled with intense rain events can increase phosphorus and other nutrient runoff. Nutrient management is a special concern for farms and will be an important part of meeting our water quality goals. We must prioritize attention to agricultural sources, which, according to the *Yahara CLEAN Strategic Action Plan for Phosphorus Reduction*, account for 70% of the phosphorus that enters our Yahara lakes.

Controlling phosphorus runoff will require clear understanding and strategic action. We cannot save our lakes unless all of us – landowners, farmers, businesses, community leaders and citizens – do our part. Progress will require a new level of commitment, and concerted action.

In response to the on-going challenge of phosphorus runoff and recognizing that much of the phosphorus entering the lakes is from agricultural sources, there have been some calls for more fully implementing Wisconsin’s well-established farm conservation standards (including standards for nutrient management, manure handling, barnyard runoff, stream buffers and erosion control). As part of deciding how and whether to implement these conservation standards, there needs to be a broader understanding among all interested parties in Dane County about what options are available and what are the financial implications.

52 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors hereby
53 creates the “Dane County *HEALTHY FARMS, HEALTHY LAKES* Task Force” in an effort to
54 ensure the following:
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56 Create a greater community understanding of Dane County’s phosphorus budget and current
57 practices and policies for farmland management;

- 58 • Develop additional solutions and make policy recommendations to meet phosphorus
59 water quality standards in the Yahara watershed outlined in the *Yahara CLEAN Strategic*
60 *Action Plan for Phosphorus Reduction*, the *Total Maximum Daily Loads for Total*
61 *Phosphorus and Total Suspended Solids in the Rock River Basin*, and the *Yahara*
62 *Watershed Improvement Network* (Yahara WINs), led by the Madison Metropolitan
63 Sewerage District (MMSD).
- 64 • Ensure that County actions, policies, and funding are strategically targeted, transparent
65 to the public, and meet the complex challenges posed by phosphorus runoff in the
66 Yahara watershed; and meet the complex challenges posed by phosphorus runoff in the
67 Yahara watershed; and
- 68 • Promote greater collaboration between Dane County government, land conservation
69 groups, agricultural and economic experts, and the other public and private partners
70 dedicated to the cause of cleaning up our lakes and streams.

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72 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Task Force shall hold regularly scheduled public
73 meetings, with the purposes of:
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- 75 1) Understanding results from recent research/information (USGS and UW) about
76 phosphorus, manure, and water quality in the Yahara Watershed;
- 77 2) Understanding the status of Wisconsin’s farm conservation standards practices and
78 policies for farmland management in Dane County;
- 79 3) Sharing information and generating guidance and input to county policymakers on the
80 most effective means of removing phosphorus from our waters to achieve phosphorus
81 water quality standards, and
- 82 4) Creating a report within 12 months with findings and recommendations to be presented
83 to: Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee, Land Conservation
84 Committee, and Lakes and Watershed Commission.

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86 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Task Force should:
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- 88 • Consider the findings of the University of Wisconsin Water Sustainability and Climate
89 project and from the UW study, *Evaluation of Manure Storage Capital Projects in the*
90 *Yahara River Watershed*, that high animal density in the Upper Yahara sub-watershed is
91 creating manure phosphorus applications that are greater than can be removed through
92 crop uptake, leading to an increase in soil phosphorus concentration and increased
93 edge-of-field phosphorus losses in runoff events;
- 94 • Consider the research completed as part of the UniverCity of Dane project on water
95 quality and nutrient management;
- 96 • Identify and address agency or programmatic barriers to successfully achieving water
97 quality standards;
- 98 • Identify and incorporate as possible, the top water and agricultural economic
99 opportunities related to efforts to clean up the waters;

- 100 • Incorporate funding opportunities to address agricultural land conservation and urban
101 runoff, including local, state, and federal agency funds, new market opportunities,
102 pollution trading markets, and more;
- 103 • Consider the following topics in their meetings: the status of Dane County’s phosphorus
104 budget, results from water quality monitoring, compliance with current Wisconsin’s farm
105 conservation standards and agency rules and policies, agricultural business perspective
106 on nutrient management, successful farmer-led initiatives, manure quantity as it relates
107 to crop needs and the Dane County land base, land use and development trends in
108 Dane County, cost-sharing available to help farmers meet water quality goals, innovative
109 approaches to manure management, developing a “Green Tier” certification model for
110 farms in Dane County, and the status of the farm conservation standards in Dane
111 County and action steps to increase compliance;
- 112 • Review and advise on county programs, budget items, and policies that can be created
113 or modified to aid this effort; and
- 114 • Develop cost-sharing proposals for capital investments directed at phosphorus
115 reduction.

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117 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that membership of the committee will be as follows:

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119 The following members will be appointed by the County Board Chair:

- 120 Representative, Yahara Pride Farms
- 121 Representative, Yahara Lakes Association
- 122 Representative, Clean Lakes Alliance
- 123 Representative, Agricultural Business
- 124 Representative, Department of Natural Resources
- 125 Representative, Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection
- 126 USGS or UW scientist with relevant research
- 127 2 Members, Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
- 128 Member, Land Conservation Committee
- 129 Member, Lakes and Watershed Commission
- 130 Director, Yahara WINs
- 131 Director, Dane County Department of Land and Water Resources
- 132 2 at large members

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134 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this new task force will create a report that builds upon action
135 to date and new research, to include a work plan with budget implications, to the Environment,
136 Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, Land Conservation Committee and Lakes and
137 Watershed Commission within one year of its initial meeting and the Task Force will sunset in
138 December 2018.

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140 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that staff support will be provided by UW-Extension, including
141 facilitation of meetings and posting of agendas and minutes, and content-specific support will be
142 provided by the Land and Water Resources Department and UW Extension.

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144 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors authorizes per diem
145 and mileage payments for all members of the Healthy Farms, Healthy Lakes Task Force on the
146 same basis and under the same polices as other Dane County bodies that receive per diems
147 and mileage.