

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 and streams.

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;

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- Consider the following topics in their meetings: the status of Dane County’s phosphorus budget, results from water quality monitoring, compliance with current Wisconsin’s farm conservation standards and agency rules and policies, agricultural business perspective on nutrient management, successful farmer-led initiatives, manure quantity as it relates to crop needs and the Dane County land base, land use and development trends in Dane County, cost-sharing available to help farmers meet water quality goals, innovative approaches to manure management, developing a “Green Tier” certification model for farms in Dane County, and the status of the farm conservation standards in Dane County and action steps to increase compliance;
  - Review and advise on county programs, budget items, and policies that can be created or modified to aid this effort; and
  - Develop cost-sharing proposals for capital investments directed at phosphorus reduction.
  - If appropriate, make recommendations for county ordinance amendments relating to manure management.

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

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

122 Representative, Yahara Pride Farms

123 Representative, Yahara Lakes Association

124 Representative, Clean Lakes Alliance

125 Agricultural Farm Advisor or Extension Agent

126 USGS or UW scientist with relevant research

127 1 Members, Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee

128 Member, Land Conservation Committee

129 Member, Lakes and Watershed Commission

130 At large member, Dane County Board of Supervisors

131 Director, Yahara WINS

132 Director, Dane County Department of Land and Water Resources

133 2 at large members, at least 1 of whom is a farmer

134 Advisory, non-voting representative, Department of Natural Resources

135 Advisory, non-voting representative, Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection

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

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

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