

DANE COUNTY LAKES & WATERSHED COMMISSION 2026 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

The Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission's charge is to protect and improve water quality and the scenic, economic, recreational, and environmental value of Dane County's water resources. We enjoy boating, fishing, and paddling on the 69 lakes and ponds and the 52 rivers and streams. In addition to recreational activities, our waters also support industry and agriculture. Our groundwater resources are critically important for the approximately 560,000 residents who depend on it for clean drinking water. The Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission (LWC) recommends the following investments be part of the 2025 Dane County Budget. These investments build on current programs and leverage contributions of partners, including our cities, villages, and towns; the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District; other private sector land and water managers; citizen volunteers; and others.

Beach Health Monitoring, Education and Public Notification. Public Health Madison and Dane County (PHMDC) monitors our lakes and shoreline waters for high levels of pathogenic bacteria (*E. coli* and *Salmonella*) and blue green algae (*Cyanobacteria*) so that beaches can be closed when unsafe levels of these organisms are present. Cyanobacteria produce multiple toxins which are highly toxic to humans and pets. *E. coli* and *Salmonella* cause intestinal infections which vary from very mild to life threatening. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. Cyanobacteria are naturally present in the water and soil. *E. coli* and *Salmonella* enter our streams and lakes through runoff containing animal waste. These outbreaks occur as a result of heavy rainfall or high temperatures and require more frequent sampling to ensure that the public is properly notified.

- 1) As requested in the 2024 Lakes and Watershed Commission Budget Recommendations, the LWC recommends that the county (either alone or in partnership with appropriate municipalities) continue to provide the necessary funding to conduct the monitoring of our public beaches and communicate their status of either being open or closed. It also recommends allocating \$30,000 for the implementation of a pilot project, in collaboration with the Clean Lakes Alliance, for testing the implementation of beach monitoring signs at up to four public beaches. Beach monitoring signs were requested in the 2024 Lakes and Watershed Commission Budget Recommendations. Provide \$18,000 in funding for increased monitoring of public beaches.***

PFAS Testing. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a human-made contaminant as they are harmful "forever chemicals" that build up in the body and environment over time and have serious health effects. Because of significant health risks associated with PFAS, it is important that both Public Health and Environmental officials have a good understanding of how wide-spread PFAS contamination is of both surface and groundwater throughout the county. Recommendations for PFAS awareness and interdiction will vary depending on the source and location of the contaminant.

Equally important is the engagement and education of the communities affected by PFAS contamination. The WDNR advises limiting consumption of fish caught in the waters of the Yahara Chain from Starkweather Creek downstream to the Rock River. Prioritization should be given to messaging and signage targeting areas that are heavily fished with all public outreach materials provided in multiple languages (English, Spanish, and Hmong).

- 2) The LWC recommends continued support for County related PFAS activities including increased testing, monitoring, outreach, and education. It also recommends the continued funding for private water well PFAS testing for eligible households and the continued testing and monitoring of PFAS in County Park wells.***

Flooding and Lake Management. With climate change predicting more frequent and intense rain events in the future the management of our lake and water resources will become more important. This was most evident in the flooding experienced in 2018 and 2019. The management of water levels, invasive species, aquatic plants, and sediment removal all play a significant role in providing recreational opportunities for the community while helping mitigate the adverse impacts of these future rain events.

- 3) The Lakes and Watershed Commission asks that the county continue to address flooding of the Yahara Chain of Lakes by providing the funding needed to operate and maintain the county purchased dredging equipment, aquatic plant harvesting equipment, and implementing the lake management programs. It also recommends: to***

continue ongoing communications with the Ho-Chunk Nation;; and to make the GPS location of harvesters and barges available, in real time, on the Land and Water Resources website.

Phosphorus Pollution. In 2020, 46 bodies of water in Dane County did not meet water quality standards because of phosphorus pollution. Excess phosphorus is recognized as the primary pollutant. Wisconsin is one of the first states to have a numeric phosphorus water quality standard for lakes and streams and is the only state to include an innovative, regulatory compliance option, called Watershed Adaptive Management.

- 4) The LWC recommends the continued support and implementation of the Continuous Cover Program, Urban Water Quality Grant Program and other conservation programs that reduce the delivery of phosphorus to nearby surface waters. Continued support for the Yahara CLEAN (Renew the Blue) and Yahara WINS efforts is also recommended.*

Chloride Pollution. Average annual chloride levels in groundwater have increased rapidly in the last 20 years. Today, thanks in part to the work of the multi-agency Wisconsin Salt Wise partners there is expanded public awareness that salt use applied to roadways, parking lots, sidewalks and driveways and inefficient water softeners have markedly increased chloride levels in area lakes, creeks, marshes and groundwater. Strengthening the message and continuing to educate salt applicators can have significant impacts on reducing chloride pollution.

- 5) The LWC recommends continued support for certification and training of Dane County maintenance professionals that remove snow and apply salt. It also recommends the continued coordination of Dane County and Salt Wise staff on outreach and education efforts.*

Community Outreach and Education: Continued outreach and education programs is critical for the future of our lakes and water resources. Benefits from these programs include; increased connection to, and stewardship of, the Dane County Park system and the natural environment as a whole; increased appreciation of lakes and understanding of issues such as water quality, conservation, and supply; increased access to and instruction in open water recreation and safety; and encouraging curiosity and feelings of joy about the natural world and especially Dane County lakes and parks.

- 6) The LWC recommends maintaining funding for the Dane County Land & Water Resources Department Youth and Education Programs.*

Lake Safety: The Dane County Sheriff's office provides deputies to patrol the lakes, enforce safe boating regulations, and respond to emergencies.

- 7) The LWC recommends continued funding of Lake Patrols from May 15th to September 15th to reduce response time to emergencies and to enforce no-wake zones and no-wake periods. Patrols should be on each of the four lakes during weekends and holidays. It also recommends funding the Capital Request of the Marine and Trail Enforcement Bureau of the Dane County Sheriff's Department for Dive Team Equipment.*