

2020

ANNUAL REPORT

GREEN COUNTY LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION

**1627 4th Avenue West
Monroe, Wisconsin 53566
(608) 325-4195**

THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT has three staff members: Todd Jenson, Tonya Gratz, and Austin Loeffelholz

The county staff in conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) federal staff of Jason Thomas, Tony Strenz, and Sarah Strathman (who left and was replaced by Dana Wedig) are located within the same office space. Each agency has some programs they strictly handle; however, most of the programs are shared between each to some degree.

THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMITTEE is the policy making body of the Green County Board of Supervisors responsible for oversight of the Land and Water Conservation Department. The Committee consists of Kristi Leonard, Oscar Olson, Jeff Williams, Nick Hartwig, Erica Roth, and Dudley Timm, FSA Representative.

TOTAL EXPENDITURES for the Land and Water Conservation Department were \$384,654.

TOTAL REVENUES for the Land and Water Conservation Department were \$275,568.

PROGRAM NARRATIVES

Land and Water Resource Management

Green County received money for the installation of conservation practices through this program. \$63,611 was received in bonding revenue for structural practices. The majority of the practices installed were well abandonment, grassed waterways, stream crossings, streambank improvement, and roof runoff. We received \$20,000 from DATCP for the use of writing nutrient management plans. All that DATCP money was used to cost-share 500 acres of nutrient management plans. We also received \$11,471 in transfer funds from Jefferson County to cost-share an additional 287 acres of nutrient management.

Nutrient Management Planning

The department has educated landowners on the importance of nutrient management planning. Once written, the farmer received cost-sharing of \$40.00 per acre. Three farmers were trained to write their NMP, then Covid hit and training stopped.

Tree Planter, Sprayer Rental, and Tree Sales

Tree planter and sprayer rental was coordinated with the DNR forester along with forestry management plans and planting recommendations. The LWCD owns two tree planters that landowners may rent for a nominal fee. The LWCD also owns a dozen tree spuds that are loaned out for the hand planting of trees and shrubs. A tank sprayer and a backpack sprayer are available for grass and weed control when establishing tree and wildlife plantings. We held our annual tree sale. Trees that were sold include: bur oak, red oak, white oak, swamp white oak, sugar maple, white pine, Norway spruce, American plum, black current, shagbark hickory, and serviceberry. Trees were either 1 – 2 feet tall, 2 – 3 feet tall, or 3 – 4 feet tall. 7000 trees were sold plus tree tubes, root gel, and fertilizer packs. Due to Covid, we had the customers drive up to the Pleasant View barn and stay in their vehicle while we placed their order in the back of their vehicle.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and CRP

This program has a \$200 million budget of federal money and \$40 million of state money. This program is designed to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Riparian buffers and filter strips are the two main practices installed. Targeted areas are cropland or pasture within 150 feet on either side of streams. For every \$1 of state money, the federal government pays out \$5. In 2020, twenty-one landowners enrolled in the program with 279 acres. Department staff stake out the buffers and filter strips, GPS them if necessary, write the fifteen year or perpetual contract with the landowner, and do status reviews on the fields after the practice is implemented. Staff wrote 115 CRP and/or CREP contracts and did field verifications for current cover. The department also entered into a new contribution agreement with NRCS for work done on CRP and CREP contracts. This contract lasts for three years and pays up to \$50,000 for the life of the contract.

Invasive Species Control

This year we found eleven more patches of phragmites throughout the county. In working with the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association, a grant was received from the DNR to work on eradication of this wetland invasive plant. Applied Ecological Services was contracted for applying herbicide to the phragmites in the fall. We continue to find patches here and there throughout the county.

Drainage Board

The Land and Water Conservation Department has been working with the Green County Drainage Board. The Drainage Board oversees four districts within the county: District #1 (Juda Branch) developed in 1914, District #2 (Little Sugar River) developed in 1951, Broughton District (Norwegian Creek) developed in 1914, and the Decatur District (Sylvester Creek) developed in 1914. The purpose of creating these districts was to straighten the streams to improve drainage, improve agricultural cropland, and to disperse water as quickly as possible. Currently the Drainage Board is working to have each landowner clear and maintain trees that are on or in the streambank corridor. By rule there is to be a 20-foot-wide grass buffer along the top of the streambank, with no trees growing. This is for access to the drainage district if work needs to be done. A minimal amount of work was done in the districts this year.

Livestock Siting Ordinance

This ordinance was adopted by the County Board in November 2006. This ordinance regulates farms with 500 or more animal units or farms that expand by 20% or more. There are six farms that have gone through the process and received a permit.

Youth Poster Contest

There is an annual poster contest for youth to participate in. Forty-two posters were submitted in four of the five age categories. The top poster in each category was sent to the Southern Area Association for judging in the area event. One poster received first at the area contest and was sent on to the state competition. This poster also won the state contest and was sent on to the national contest.

Manure Storage Inspection

This program was implemented for the inspection of all manure storage structures in Green County. There are approximately 110 storage structures in the county, with 44 of them never having gotten a permit, meaning they are more than twenty years old. The goal is to inspect approximately twenty per year and be on a five-year cycle. We inspected eight pits.

Private Water Systems Ordinance

This ordinance requires the owner of a private water well that has not been used in three years to properly abandon it. 29 wells were properly abandoned in 2020. The Land and Water Conservation office has developed a tracking system and has records of 1314 wells that have been properly abandoned to date. Every fall, landowners who have old, unused wells that are discovered, are sent a letter offering cost-sharing to fill in the well. After three years and three letters, if the landowner has still not done anything to remedy the situation, the matter is then turned over to Corporation Counsel for legal action. This is probably the most cost effective and beneficial practice we have for water quality. In 2008 the County Board adopted a change to the ordinance to include new wells. This would ensure the proper placement of these wells. Permits were issued for 114 new wells in 2020. New wells are located by GPS and inspected by staff.

Wildlife Damage Abatement

This program is funded by the DNR's \$12 bonus deer permit system, as well as, \$2 from every hunting license sold, and is administered by USDA-WS (Wildlife Services). Landowners can file for crop damages from deer, turkey, geese, and bear. Fencing and/or pyrotechnics are available through this program to keep the identified species away from crops. If that does not work, hunting of the species may be recommended. Three landowners were issued a total of 35 tags for deer hunting based on excessive damage. For the first time ever in Green County, a bear damage claim was paid out for damage done to beehives.

Groundwater Awareness Week

This program was cancelled for this year due to Covid

Youth Conservation Days

This program was cancelled for this year due to Covid. The staff made and requested other cooperating agency staff to create video resources for teacher/students in lieu of conservation days. The videos were posted on our you tube channel and website.

Farmland Preservation/Working Lands Initiative

This program is administered by Green County for DATCP. Landowners collect income tax credits for agreeing not to develop their land, to limit soil erosion, meet manure handling standards, and to develop a nutrient management plan. In 2020, there were 28 landowners in Green County that participated in the program. Approximately 4300 acres are enrolled. Four landowners have modified their contract to get a base tax credit of \$5 per acre per year. The Working Lands Initiative replaced the Farmland Preservation Program on July 1, 2009. Landowners who have an existing contract will continue to get tax credits until the contract's expiration date. If they wish to participate in this program, landowners will need to be in an Ag Enterprise Area or the township to be exclusive ag zoned. To create an Ag Enterprise Area landowners would need to submit an application to DATCP. This application needs to be from at least five contiguous landowners with control of at least 1000 acres. Once the Ag Enterprise Area is approved, the individual landowners could enter a 15-year contract and receive a \$5/acre tax credit each year

Farmers of the Sugar River

This is a producer led watershed organized by local farmers. Our department is a collaborator with the group and manage their funds. In January they held a roundtable meeting. In February, some of the members attended the Wisconsin Cover Crop Conference. Also, in February was their annual meeting at the Albany Lions Club. The shop talk meeting scheduled in March was cancelled due to Covid. In June they held two pop-up soil health testing gatherings at Dennis Miller's and Alvin Francis's farms. In July they held a pop-up gathering at Jerry and Barb Daniels for cover crops. In August Bob Zurfluh held a farm tour. Incentive payments were given out to ten farmers for soil health testing, thirty famers for cover crops or planting green, and three farmers for grassed waterways. Fifteen new farmers participated in the group.

Land Judging Contest

Contests were cancelled this year, due to Covid.

HISTORY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

	2020	2019	2018	2017
Feet of Grassed Waterways	6989	13,092	4105	7419
Feet of Streambank Improvement	13,225	21,887	9101	8864
Rock Crossings	4	5	2	4
Roof Runoff Systems	1	2	1	4
Fence	13,491	8870	8461	23,148
Feet of Animal Trails	0	1650	0	1867
Well Decommissioning	29	26	35	17
Well Permits	114	86	79	64
Manure Storage Structures	1	1	2	1
Shallow Wildlife Ponds	0	1	5	4
CREP contracts	21	18	17	23
Acres of Filter Strips	279	198	103	303
Acres of Cover Crops cost-shared	5927	5010	6815	4575
Acres of Trees and Shrubs	33	25	25	30
Trees Sold	7000	9390	7290	7410
Acres of Nutrient Management	29,613	32,972	30,712	25,245
Radio Programs	51	52	52	26

If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Jenson
Green County Conservationist