

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

GREEN COUNTY LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION

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THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT has three staff members: Todd Jenson, Tonya Gratz, Austin Loeffelholz (who left in October), and was replaced by Tess Wallner (in December).

Our mission: Help others to keep the soil on the fields, and the manure out of the streams and groundwater.

Our methods: Education, technical assistance, and administering government programs that wisely encourage conservation.

The county staff in conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) federal staff of Jason Thomas, Tony Strenz, Meaghan Rafferty, Dana Wedig (who left in September) and Ashley Letcher (started in December) 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.

PROGRAM NARRATIVES

Land and Water Resource Management

Green County received money for the installation of conservation practices through this program. \$61,750 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 also received \$11,845 in DATCP reserve funds to solve manure runoff issues on one farm. 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 \$3,978 in transfer funds from Clark County to cost-share an additional 99 acres of nutrient management.

Nutrient Management Planning

The department has educated landowners on the importance of nutrient management planning. Once written, the farmer receives cost-sharing of \$40.00 per acre. Three new farmers were trained to write their NMP, plus numerous alumni.

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, Colorado spruce, American plum, red osier dogwood, American hazelnut, common ninebark, black walnut, and American arborvitae. Trees ranged from 1 – 3 feet in height. 9,850 trees were sold plus tree tubes, root gel, and fertilizer packs. Due to Covid precautions, 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. CREP 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 2021, seventeen landowners enrolled in the program with 182 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 61 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 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.



Youth Conservation Days

A youth conservation day was held at Honey Creek Park in Monroe after being cancelled for three seasons. It was a fall program for fifth grade students. Approximately 100 students took part in the event. Students learned about soil, forestry, water invertebrates, fish management, prairies, watersheds, soil and water conservation, aquatic invasives, wildlife calls, bee keeping, Indian artifacts, and wildlife management.

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, none in 2021.

Youth Poster Contest

There is an annual poster contest for youth to participate in, ages K – 12. 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. Two posters received first at the area contest and were sent on to the state competition. One of these posters also won the state contest and was sent on to the national contest (as seen to the right).



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 twenty pits in 2021. We also found one illegal pit- non-permitted and built into bedrock. This pit was subsequently properly abandoned. In one other visit, the landowners requested assistance in planning for a leachate runoff system for their bunk silos, which they then constructed on their own.

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. 12 wells were properly abandoned in 2021. The Land and Water Conservation office has developed a tracking system and has records of 1331 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 78 new wells in 2021. 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 20 tags for deer hunting based on excessive damage.

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 2021, 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 new landowners wish to participate in this program, they 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.

Land Judging Contest

Green County hosted the annual contest at the Nate Hare farm southwest of Monroe. Participating schools were: Belmont, Black Hawk, Cassville, Cuba City, Evansville, Juda, Lancaster, Monticello, Pecatonica, Potosi, and River Ridge. A total of 101 students participated in the contest. The students reviewed four soil pits and evaluated soil properties, estimated slope, ranked land classes, and recommended conservation practices in the contest. This contest is co-sponsored by the Monroe Moose Lodge, who provides lunch for everyone, and Rufer and Son Excavating, who dig the soil pits for free. A video was created and posted to the department's website to teach others how to land judge in Wisconsin. We also co-hosted the Southwest Wisconsin contest with Grant and Lafayette counties. This year's event was held at Marvin and Linda Delzer's farm, just north of Attica. Schools participating were from: Black Hawk, Burlington, Cuba City, Fennimore, Juda, Lancaster, Monticello, Pecatonica, Potosi, and River Ridge. A total of 105 students participated in this contest.



Farmers of the Sugar River

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) awarded a Producer Led Watershed Protection grant to this group of farmers. They have been busy teaching other farmers and the public about no till, cover crops and other ways to minimize soil erosion. The structure of the group is that a board of 7 farmers plan events for farmers to learn from. There are no memberships or dues. Farmers are welcome to join one or all events. In order to participate in conservation practice incentive payments, farms must be located within the watershed. DATCP awarded the group a grant of \$14,700 for 2021. The group paid for 5 people to “attend” the virtual No Till Conference and also paid a teacher’s tuition to learn from Understanding Ag’s Regen Ag 101 class. There was an in person and virtual meeting on January 7 that a panel of four farmers talked about their experiences planting green and answered questions for 24 attendees. At least 24 people joined virtually to Rick Clark and Erin Silva speaking at the Dodge County Soil Health Expo on February 10. There was a virtual meeting on February 26 for a chance to discuss soil health test results from prior sampling. On April 6 was a cover crop field day at the Coplien Farm just north of Juda on County S that 28 people attended. On May 26 there was a pop-up field day showcasing planting green and roller crimping. On July 13 there was a soil structure field day at Nick Faessler’s farm that 33 people witnessed a rainfall simulator and soil pit. On October 27 the group held a follow up to the pop-up field day, harvesting corn and drilling another cover crop. Incentive payments were offered again this year for cover crops, planting green or roller crimping, soil health testing and some constructed conservation practices. \$21,008 was paid to 21 farmers for implementing conservation practices.



HISTORY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

	2021	2020	2019	2018
Feet of Grassed Waterways	8625	6989	13,092	4105
Feet of Streambank Improvement	8473	13,225	21,887	9101
Rock Crossings	7	4	5	2
Roof Runoff Systems	2	1	2	1
Fence	0	13,491	8870	8461
Feet of Animal Trails	67	0	1650	0
Well Decommissioning	12	29	26	35
Well Permits	78	114	86	79
Manure Storage Structures	0	1	1	2
Shallow Wildlife Ponds	2	0	1	5
CREP contracts	17	21	18	17
Acres of Filter Strips	182	279	198	103
Acres of Cover Crops cost-shared	2279	5927	5010	6815
Acres of Trees and Shrubs	34	33	25	25
Trees Sold	9850	7000	9390	7290
Acres of Nutrient Management	36,892	29,613	32,972	30,712
Radio Programs	52	51	52	52

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

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Jenson
Green County Conservationist