

2022 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, and Tess Wallner.

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, Ashley Letcher, Kristin Fischer, and Emily Colson, 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, Jeff Williams, Nick Hartwig, Sue Nelson, Peg Sheaffer, and Dudley Timm.

PROGRAM NARRATIVES

Land and Water Resource Management

Green County received money for the installation of conservation practices through this program. \$65,500 was received in bonding revenue for structural practices. The majority of the practices installed were well abandonment, grassed waterways, stream crossings, and streambank improvement. We also received \$75,201 in DNR Notice of Discharge 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 \$8037 in transfer funds from Burnett County to cost-share an additional 201 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. No new farmers were trained to write their NMP, but numerous alumni updated their plan.

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. Our office reached out to all the local schools, to see if a class or an individual would be willing to do some repairs to the planters. They both need to be cleaned and repainted, one needs a new seat, and the other needs new hydraulic hoses. No schools responded to our request. 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, apple, American plum, common ninebark, black walnut, and American arborvitae. Trees ranged from 1 – 4 feet in height. 8390 trees were sold plus root gel and fertilizer packs.

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 2022, 4 landowners enrolled in the program with 28 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 28 CRP and/or CREP contracts and did field verifications on 79 contracts 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. Resource Environmental Solutions was contracted for applying herbicide to the phragmites to six different new sites in the fall. We continue to find patches here and there throughout the county. Our staff was introduced to a new invasive, Johnsongrass. It has not yet been determined how to confront this beast. It is considered one of the top ten worst invasive weeds in the world. (Pictured at right)



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 2022.

Youth Conservation Days

Three youth conservation day were held at Honey Creek Park in Monroe. Approximately 200 fifth grade students took part in the events held in May and October. We also had a makeup day for Monroe sixth graders, who missed out on the event due to Covid. Approximately 180 students attended that 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.



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. Five landowners were issued a total of 40 tags for deer hunting based on excessive damage.

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.

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. In the state contest, one poster received second place in their division, and the other received third place. The theme was Healthy Soil, Healthy Life.



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 receiving a permit, since they were installed before the permitting system started. The goal is to inspect approximately twenty per year and be on a five-year cycle. We inspected 17 pits in 2022.



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. 39 wells were properly abandoned in 2022. The Land and Water Conservation office has developed a tracking system and has records of 1370 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 92 new wells in 2022. New wells are located by GPS and inspected by staff.

Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC)

WiWiC is a state-wide collaborative effort led by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in partnership with Renewing the Countryside, the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, and Wisconsin Farmers Union. A three-year project is funded by the USDA-NRCS, brings together Wisconsin women landowners to connect and learn about conservation practices, resources, and funding opportunities. Tonya walked farms with 18 women landowners to give them ideas of opportunities of how to improve their land and resources of how to get practices applied. After the walkover, she wrote a conservation plan for each landowner. Our office is reimbursed \$500 for each plan. Some of the money will be used to put on a Women's Summit in 2023.

Land Judging Contest

Green County hosted the annual contest at the Fran and Sandy Donny farm just north of Monroe. Participating schools were: Black Hawk, Cassville, Cuba City, Dodgeville, Evansville, Fennimore, Juda, Lake Mills, Lancaster, Milton, Monticello, Mt. Horeb, Pecos, Potosi, Prairie du Chien, River Ridge, Seneca, and Shullsburg. A total of 135 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. We also co-hosted the Southwest Wisconsin contest with Grant and Lafayette counties. This year's event was held south of Darlington. Schools participating were from: Belmont, Black Hawk, Cuba City, Dodgeville, Fennimore, Juda, Lancaster, Monticello, Potosi, Prairie du Chien, Shullsburg, and Wauzeka-Suteben. A total of 133 students participated in this contest.



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 2022, there were 26 landowners in Green County that participated in the program. Approximately 4240 acres are enrolled. Two 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.

Farmers of the Sugar River

The group was awarded a \$22,000 grant from DATCP for 2022. A roundtable chat was held at Toeffer's in New Glarus on January 27, with 14 people attending. The annual meeting was February 15th at the Albany Lions Club. Keith Berns and Rodrigo Werle were the guest speakers. 85 people attend the meeting. March 2nd, 7 people attended a meeting to talk about research and demonstrations they were considering on their farm. Later in the spring, three farmers were interviewed about no-tilling and their planter adjustments by Tonya Gratz and Dan Smith. A round robin field day was held on June 14 at four farms for 20 people looking at planting into covers and interseeding covers into corn. On August 17, Governor Evers and DNR Secretary Cole made a quick visit to the watershed and spoke to a couple of members. We hosted two pasture walks pop-up style on September 9th with hosting farmers: Bryce and Jen Riemer (had 12 farmers come) and Bert and Trish Paris (had 8 farmers show up). Corn silage was harvested so there was a pop-up field day to see how the interseeding turned out on September 14th at Wengers with 12 people attending. To cap off the year, 20 people toured two important local businesses: Honey Creek Feed Mill and Badger State Ethanol on November 29th. Incentive payments were paid to 18 farmers in the sum of \$14,334.25 for planting cover crops, no-tilling (most were planting green), constructing a waterway and grazing covers. A little more than \$4000 was spent on putting on meetings, workshops, and attending conferences. In the fall, we collected and sent in 16 biomass and matching soil samples to be analyzed for nutrient content. This data will be presented at the 2023 annual meeting in February.



HISTORY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Feet of Grassed Waterways	5215	8625	6989	13,092
Feet of Streambank Improvement	3217	8473	13,225	21,887
Rock Crossings	2	7	4	5
Roof Runoff Systems	2	2	1	2
Fence	23,214	0	13,491	8870
Feet of Animal Trails	120	67	0	1650
Well Decommissioning	39	12	29	26
Well Permits	92	78	114	86
Manure Storage Structures	1	0	1	1
Shallow Wildlife Ponds	0	2	0	1
Wetland Restorations	3	4	2	0
CREP contracts	4	17	21	18
Acres of Filter Strips	28	182	279	198
Acres of Cover Crops cost-shared	1299	2279	5927	5010
Acres of Trees and Shrubs	28	34	33	25
Trees Sold	8390	9850	7000	9390
Acres of Nutrient Management	34,247	36,892	29,613	32,972
Radio Programs	52	52	52	52

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

Todd Jenson
Green County Conservationist