Helping ensure sustainable water resources

Wisconsin citizens depend on having an adequate supply of safe drinking water, as well as water resources to support the state's tourism and agriculture industries.

The Center for Watershed Science and Education (CWSE), a partnership between the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the UW-Stevens Point, provides education and resources that make a difference by helping to ensure water resources meet the state's needs.

What we do

The Center for Watershed Science and Education and UW-Extension educators work throughout Wisconsin to:

- Support watershed stewardship.
- Assist citizens with lake, river and drinking water quality problems.
- Promote management strategies for water resource protection.
- Provide water quality assessment and support.
- Prepare students for careers as water resource professionals.

Staff work with concerned citizens, lake and stream associations and stewardship organizations, county conservation and Extension offices, and state and federal agencies. CWSE also maintains the Water and Environmental Analysis Laboratory (WEAL)—a state of the art facility performing dozens of different analyses on water and environmental media.

> "I really appreciated the opportunity to learn about my well and the local groundwater quality."
>
> *—Well water test program participant*

Helping families access safe drinking water

- Nearly 3,500 wells were tested in 2016; 12% of households were above drinking water standards for nitrate—the most common health-related contaminant found in Wisconsin groundwater. Seventeen percent of samples contained coliform bacteria. Homeowners were given information on ways to improve water safety; many took additional steps to protect their families.
- Over 1,200 wells are tested annually with county partners through locally arranged well-water testing, followed by an educational program. Routine testing is recommended for all rural residential well users, though many don't test often enough, if at all.
- 91% of survey respondents from Fond du Lac County who participated in previous county efforts were more likely to report they planned to test their wells, compared to 65% of randomly selected respondents. Only 1 in 10 who participated in a county well-testing program indicated not having adequate information, compared to almost 1 in 4 well owners in the random sample.
- Nearly 200 people brought water samples for nitrate testing to Farm Technology Days and Midwest Renewable Energy Association meeting. Nitrate is a common health-related contaminant for rural

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well users. Individuals received one-on-one counseling about test results and other water quality issues.

- In summer of 2016, 744 households had well water tested through a partnership between UW-Extension and Chippewa County. All received individual test results with customized interpretation and maps of groundwater flow around their wells.
- 60 participants attended an open house where they got answers to their questions about how to correct problems or learn how to protect their drinking water. The testing was part of an inventory of Chippewa County groundwater that will provide educational benefits for all groundwater users in Chippewa County.
- Extension specialists serve as a crucial resource for homeowners experiencing or diagnosing well water quality problems. They communicated with over 500 citizens, addressing individual questions or concerns through phone conversations or email.

Ensuring clean and healthy lakes, rivers and streams

- Citizens, counties and other organizations collected data from 30 lakes. Data was used by citizens and local officials to develop lake management plans.
- Staff and volunteers monitored streamflow monthly for over 80 stream sites across 6 counties. Monitoring ensures better understanding of long-term trends in streamflow that can be used by communities and leaders to manage water resources.

Promoting water literacy

- In 2016, 48 teachers took part in groundwater education workshops and received a groundwater model for their school. Teachers reported using the model with over 1,600 students.
- In 2016, more than 8,000 individuals used the WI Well Water Viewer to learn about well water quality in their community.
- Since 2001, nearly 400 groundwater models have been awarded to Wisconsin schools or nature centers and over 700 educators have participated in trainings. Respondents say students are actively engaged while they use the sand-tank model in the classroom. One participant's response: *The value of this program is endless. Not only have I learned new things, but the students have a better understanding of many concepts, including the desire to take better care of a precious natural resource.*
- Nearly 400 models having been awarded to Wisconsin schools or nature centers since 2001. Around 40,000 students annually benefit from the hands-on, visual approach that these groundwater education efforts provide.

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