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**Dane County Secures \$1.8 Million Grant to Improve Quality of Local Waters**

*Five-year partnership grant for soil and water conservation in the Yahara and Sugar River Watersheds*

**MADISON, WI – May 26, 2021** Dane County Land & Water Resources Department (LWRD) has been awarded a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant for a five-year project totaling over \$1.8 million. The project is a partnership between Dane County, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), Yahara WINS, Upper Sugar River Watershed Association, and Clean Lakes Alliance to work with agricultural producers in the Yahara and Sugar River Watersheds on improving soil health and protecting water quality.

Dane County received a previous five-year RCPP grant in 2015 to address phosphorus in the Yahara Watershed. This second project aims to continue the work in the Yahara Watershed as well as expand the project to the Sugar River Watershed. Agricultural producers located in these watersheds will be able to apply for funding assistance to install conservation practices. At least 70% of the grant funds must be used for this direct financial assistance to producers.

“Clean water and healthy soils are a priority for our community and help ensure our natural resources can be enjoyed for generations to come,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “It takes a committed partnership and collaboration to successfully compete for this federal grant program and have the right people working together to make the project succeed. We are grateful for the support from NACD, USDA, and our partners for making this effort possible.”

Dane County has allocated over \$5 million since 2015 toward water quality and soil health projects in the Yahara Watershed and continues to support efforts going forward. Continuing to work to address water quality in the Yahara Chain of Lakes is important to build on the success of the first RCPP project.

“We are excited to continue our close partnership with Dane County to further these types of watershed-improvement efforts,” says Clean Lakes Alliance Founder and Executive Director James Tye. “Securing the RCPP grant is a big win for our community, and will undoubtedly help accelerate progress toward achieving healthier lakes and cleaner water.”

In addition to continuing work in Yahara, this grant will now allow work and funding to extend to agricultural producers in the Sugar River watershed building new partnerships and protecting valuable fishery and recreational waters of the Sugar River.

Bringing partners together to address large-scale community issues is an important focus of the grant. Partnering with MMSD and Yahara WINS helps bring additional resources to the project and builds on existing networks for continued success.

“The additional resources available for projects in the watershed as part of the RCPP grant will be invaluable to help further advance improvements to soil health and reduce runoff,” said Martye Griffin, Director of Ecosystem Services at MMSD and President of Yahara WINS. “It will also allow current resources available in the watershed to be leveraged even further to see more activities in the landscape leading toward the outcomes we want—clean water.”

In addition, Dane County has been awarded a National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) staffing grant for approximately \$150,000 for one year to assist with administering federal cost-share funding programs. This award is a continuation of an existing grant but will be helpful as the new RCPP project ramps up.

#### **About Dane County Land & Water Resources Department**

The Dane County Land & Water Resources Department works to protect and enhance Dane County’s natural, cultural, and historic resources. It provides the county’s residents with a broad array of accessible, high quality resource-based recreational services and facilities, and supports residents, communities, local governments and other agencies and organizations in their resource management and protection activities.

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