



1610 Moorland Road • Madison, WI 53713-3398 • P: (608) 222-1201 • F: (608) 222-2703

NEWS RELEASE

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Contacts:

- Martye Griffin, Yahara WINS Executive Committee President, 608-709-1813, marting@madsewer.org
- Kim Meyer, Watershed Programs Coordinator, 608-334-6259, kimm@madsewer.org
- Amanda Wegner, Communications & Public Affairs Manager, 608-709-1891, amandaw@madsewer.org

Yahara WINS prevents nearly 62,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering local waters in 2020

Yahara WINS exceeds its annual reduction goals for fourth consecutive year

MADISON, WI – Local partners prevented 61,823 pounds of phosphorus from entering local water bodies in 2020 as part of Yahara WINS, a cooperative effort to reduce algae blooms and other water quality issues caused by excessive phosphorus in waterways.

“Yahara WINS is an innovative approach to keeping phosphorus on the land and out of our waterways,” says Martye Griffin, Yahara WINS president. We are still early in this 20-year project, but these early wins show that we are on the right track to making a difference in the quality of our local waters.”

In 2020, the program’s fourth full year of implementation, Yahara WINS again exceeded its phosphorus reduction goal for the year, placing it on track to achieve the yearly phosphorus reductions necessary to meet goals set by the end of the project. The reduction in 2020 is the highest annual phosphorus reduction to date.

In addition, a record number of farmers in the watershed signed up for cost-share to implement conservation practices through Yahara Pride Farms (YPF), a project partner that receives funding from Yahara WINS. With the addition of 18 new farms in 2020 (a net increase of 11 from 2019), 56 farms implemented one or more conservation practices with the help of YPF cost-share.

“Last year brought a lot of change and uncertainty, but one thing that remained constant — even grew — was local commitment to protecting our waters,” says Kim Meyer, watershed programs coordinator for Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, who helps facilitate WINS efforts. “In 2020, conservation practices continued to gain popularity among local farmers, helped along by early leaders who demonstrated how these practices can work on their farms. This interest, plus the growing amount of phosphorus we are keeping on the land with each year of the project, is evidence that local leaders and partners are up to the challenge of protecting our waters.”

Yahara WINS reduces phosphorus by providing funding and assistance for the implementation of practices that keep phosphorus on the land, preventing it from running off into nearby waterways. Most of these practices take place in agricultural settings and are supported by county conservation departments and YPF.

In 2020, Dane County reported a reduction of 20,150 pounds but is also contributing to phosphorus reduction through other actions outside of Yahara WINS, such as its Suck the Muck project and conservation land acquisition. Other phosphorus reductions in 2020 include 3,247 from Rock County, up from about 400 in 2019; and Yahara Pride Farms kept 39,950 pounds of phosphorus on the land, up about 10,000 pounds from the prior year. Columbia County is newer partner in the project and is continuing to build out its program.

The Yahara WINS project also encourages creativity in solving water quality challenges by providing grant funding. Innovative ideas funded by grants in 2020 included a project studying aeration of beef cattle manure, which showed that the technique was capable of settling out 90% of the manure's phosphorus content; after settling, the phosphorus can then be recovered for other uses. Another funded project tested an innovative approach to cover cropping, a practice that helps reduce runoff.

Learn more about Yahara WINS and read the 2020 annual report on the project's new website at www.yaharawins.org.

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Project background

The Yahara Watershed Improvement Network, known as Yahara WINS, is a groundbreaking initiative to achieve clean water goals for the Yahara Watershed. In this effort, community partners, led by Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, are collaborating on a strategy called watershed adaptive management in which all sources of phosphorus in a watershed work together to reduce phosphorus. The effort began in 2012 as a pilot project and transitioned to a full-scale effort in 2017.

The 20-year adaptive management project aims to achieve permit requirements and regional Clean Water Act goals identified through the Rock River Total Maximum Daily Load by 2036. To accomplish these goals, the group facilitates partnerships, conducts outreach, pools resources to fund phosphorus reducing practices in the watershed, analyzes stream samples and works with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to address regulatory needs for the project. For more information and to view a copy of the annual report, check out the Yahara WINS website at www.yaharawins.org.