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Yahara WINS partnership exceeds phosphorus reduction goals for third straight year

Efforts prevent 55,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering local waters

MADISON, WI – Local partners prevented 55,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering local water bodies in 2019 as part of the Yahara WINS project, a cooperative effort to reduce algae blooms and other water quality issues caused by excessive phosphorus in waterways.

In the third full year of the project, 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 20-year project. The reduction in 2019 was also higher than the annual reductions achieved in the first two years of the full-scale project.

Project leaders say the reduction demonstrates growing momentum in local phosphorus-reduction efforts, but they emphasize that continued commitment is vital to the project succeeding despite climate change and other challenges.

“With the wet spring in 2019, we experienced historic amounts of water running off the land into our lakes and streams. However, there would have been a lot more phosphorus with that water if it wasn’t for the phosphorus reductions the Yahara WINS partnership achieved,” said Martye Griffin, Yahara WINS president. “The fact that we have been able to go above and beyond our targets in the early years of this project makes me optimistic that our community is committed to and up to the challenge of cleaning our waters, even in the face of more extreme weather.”

Yahara WINS reduces phosphorus by providing funding and assistance to 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 Yahara Pride Farms, a farmer-led conservation group. Dane County reported a reduction of 23,237 pounds; Rock County, 403 pounds; and Yahara Pride Farms, 29,365 pounds.

The Yahara WINS project also encourages creativity in solving water quality challenges. Yahara WINS provides grant funding to projects completed in 2019 that explored new options for preventing and mitigating phosphorus pollution. One project, led by Yahara Pride Farms, allowed dairy farmers to test manure composting, which helps avoid spreading manure at times when runoff risk is high. Another project tested chemical treatment of a stormwater basin to remove phosphorus already in the water.

The combination of tried-and-true and new, innovative practices is helping Yahara WINS partners expand their ability to address the phosphorus challenge. More information is available in the 2019 Annual Report, found at www.madsewer.org/YaharaWINS.

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 webpage, <http://www.madsewer.org/Programs-Initiatives/Yahara-WINS>.