

# THE WONDERFUL WATERS OF WISCONSIN

## YEAR 1

2022 → 2030

## Protecting our Healthy Watersheds and High-Quality Waters (HWHQW)



## INTRODUCTION

The [Healthy Watersheds, High-Quality Waters \(HWHQW\) Action Plan](#) provides a road map through 2030, for how to strike a balance between the restoration and protection of water resources, all while emphasizing and celebrating the Wonderful Waters of Wisconsin. To borrow from a familiar saying, the initiative is all about using an ounce of prevention to avoid needing a pound of cure. The HWHQW Action Plan includes a series of actions that the department and a wide range of partners can use to achieve shared goals and objectives.

After identifying [where Wisconsin's healthiest waters are](#), [engaging partners groups](#) in defining next steps, and launching the plan, a year of work has gone by. This document highlights some of the progress made during that time, including steps that the department has taken, as well as successes of community partners who are championing healthy waters protection in the state.

Explore the links below to see how far we've come!



The department's efforts have established Wisconsin as a nationwide leader in water resource protection planning. States like California, Michigan, and Vermont, agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Park Service (NPS), and regional partnerships like the Chicago Wilderness Alliance have asked to learn more about Wisconsin's science-based, practical approach of organizing for action.

**"Wisconsin's HWHQW statewide initiative serves as a model for other states** and clean water partners looking to build and launch a scientifically-based, partnership-driven effort to protect healthy waters and watersheds. The Year 1 accomplishments, in fact, reflect years of careful planning and coordination between the DNR and its partners that have laid a strong foundation for future successes."

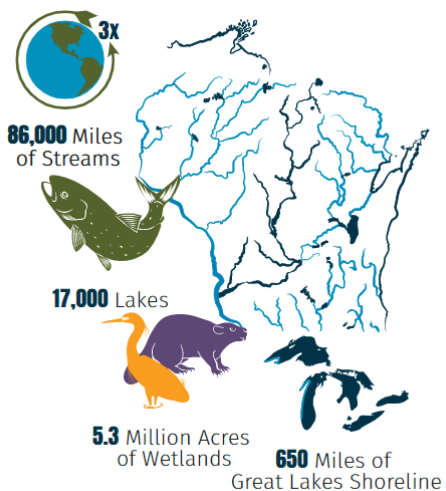
- Steve Epting

**EPA Healthy Watersheds Program Coordinator**



Photo by Andy Manis, provided by the Wisconsin Union

**ON, WISCONSINI!**



Wisconsin's plentiful water resources are an asset. Not only do high-quality waterbodies tend to have higher real estate values and thus contribute more to the tax base, but it also costs less to protect them than to restore polluted water.

Our lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands generate major recreational and economic interest; **anglers alone spend \$1.7 billion annually in Wisconsin**. With numbers like that, it's no wonder Wisconsin's outdoor recreation Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has increased almost twice as fast as the total GDP growth rate.

## OBJECTIVE ONE

Increase Capacity to Provide Technical Assistance

- ✓ Updated online viewer launching in summer 2023 with training opportunities to follow
- ✓ All data, including GIS files, available for download
- ✓ Other conservation planning tools linked to website
- ✓ DNR Project Position created to support Action Plan objectives



To date, 2,853 High-Quality Waters, including lakes, streams, rivers, and wetlands, have been identified in Wisconsin

## OBJECTIVE TWO

Leverage and Adapt Existing Program Tools to Achieve Results

- ✓ Received EPA approval to create a watershed protection plan template – the flip side of a 9-Key-Element Plan for restoring impaired waters
- ✓ Integrated HWHQW into other statewide and partner planning efforts, including: DNR Property and Master Planning and Local-Level Comprehensive Planning
- ✓ The inaugural Green Tier Connections Event featured HWHQW



Healthy Waters team members presented at 40 events, including conferences, workshops, and partner meetings or webinars.

## OBJECTIVE THREE

Increase Utilization of Funding for Protection

- ✓ Surface Water Grant, Urban Non-Point Source Grant, and Targeted Runoff Management Grant ranking criteria updated to include HWHQW protection priorities
- ✓ DNR awarded multiple Surface Water Grants to county and lake association partners who are using HWHQW for monitoring and land protection planning
- ✓ The Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership awarded Minnesota a grant to work with Wisconsin and Michigan to share forested watershed conservation strategies and lessons learned and to develop a multiple-state funding vision



Approximately \$200,000 in 2023 Surface Water Grant funding invested in community-based lake management projects with HWHQW actions and strategies.

## OBJECTIVE FOUR

Increase External Awareness

- ✓ Initial brand strategy and communication plan developed, including 2023 Progress Report
- ✓ Fisheries program is leading cross-program effort to create public access database/map, including platted accesses



A recent [Survey of Wisconsin Voters](#) showed 84% of respondents answered that protecting water quality in rivers and streams is Extremely /Very Important.

Working together, we can protect our healthy waters, and it is only in partnership that we will find lasting success. Here, we spotlight examples of others' good work to protect the Wonderful Waters of Wisconsin.



[Grindstone Lake Foundation](#) in partnership with the [Grindstone Lake Association](#) received a 2020 Surface Water Grant for land acquisition to purchase a former [cranberry operation](#) along Grindstone Lake, a High-Quality Water in a protection priority watershed. Their entirely grass-roots team of passionate volunteers is now making plans to restore wetlands on the site to maximize ecosystem services like fish and wildlife habitat, scenic beauty, and flood resiliency.

A forward-thinking partnership between private landowners and [Landmark Conservancy](#) marks the first official HWHQW permanent land protection effort! Landmark Conservancy has 221 conservation easements and over 41,000 acres protected. Their strategic conservation focus uses The Nature Conservancy's Conserving Nature's Stage planning tool, and properties are further evaluated with HWHQW.

This spring [Jim and Kate Weinert generously donated](#) 222 acres of forested land to Landmark Conservancy. The land is in a statewide HWHQW watershed protection priority that includes high-quality Spider Lake, Sawyer County, and connects county forest and a state natural area.



Landmark's Rick Remington (left) and Jim Weinert (right) on Spider Lake.



The [Northwoods Land Trust](#) has protected over 80 miles of shoreline and 15,000 acres of land and was the first organization to integrate the HWHQW modeling and assessment results into their land protection planning priorities. More recently, they worked with Vilas County Lakes & Rivers Association on [Permanent Shoreland Protection](#) Tool outreach, including a workshop with shoreland property owners.

[The Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission \(SEWRPC\)](#) utilized the HWHQW modeling & assessment results to update their [Regional Natural Areas Plan](#) with customized aquatic area priorities for protection through partnerships with land trusts and local governments, and they will facilitate inclusion of HWHQW into local comprehensive planning efforts. SEWRPC also received a DNR surface water grant to increase community collaboration to protect high-quality lakes in Waukesha and Walworth Counties.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Visit our website to learn more! <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater/HQW.html>