



WISCONSIN  
WATER AGENDA

## Announcing the Wisconsin Water Agenda!

For over a year, River Alliance of Wisconsin has brought some of the brightest and bravest advocates together to imagine a better way to protect and restore water. They've melded science, Badger spirit and common sense to lay out a framework for a vibrant, healthy clean water economy.

River Alliance recognizes that our state needs innovative, lasting and comprehensive solutions to our water problems. Open this issue to see the 12 elements of the Water Agenda, then please join us at one of our online events in August. Share your thoughts & learn how YOU can get involved.

### JOIN US ONLINE: Introduction to River Alliance's Wisconsin Water Agenda

- Tuesday, August 18th 7pm
- Thursday, August 20th 12:30pm

Register at: [wisconsinrivers.org/events](http://wisconsinrivers.org/events)

Mink River  
[Photo courtesy Jon Reddin.]

**SNAPSHOT DAY**  
Saturday, August 15, 2020

Help protect a river or lake near you!  
Join us for a statewide search for aquatic invasive species.  
Social distancing and COVID-19 precautions will be in place.  
FREE event - All ages, no prior experience required

To register, visit:  
[wisconsinrivers.org/events](http://wisconsinrivers.org/events)

Hosted by River Alliance of Wisconsin with:  
University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Wisconsin National Water Research Institute

NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
MADISON, WI  
PERMIT NO.  
537

Online at [www.wisconsinrivers.org](http://www.wisconsinrivers.org)  
Postmaster: Dated Material  
Address Service Requested

147 S Butler St., Suite 2  
Madison, WI 53703  
[www.wisconsinrivers.org](http://www.wisconsinrivers.org)  
[info@wisconsinrivers.org](mailto:info@wisconsinrivers.org)  
608-257-2424



## STAFF



**RAJ SHUKLA**  
Executive Director



**KAREN BEDNAR**  
Development Director



**BILL DAVIS**  
Senior Legal Analyst



**CATHY DOW**  
Business Manager



**DANIKA LAINE**  
Communications Director



**MICHAEL TIBORIS**  
Clear Water Farms Director



**ELLEN VOSS**  
La Crosse Area AIS Manager



**ALLISON WERNER**  
Policy & Advocacy Director

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**MARY ELLEN VOLBRECHT**  
Chair | Madison

**SHELLY GRADWELL-BRENNEMAN**  
Vice Chair | La Farge

**LYNNE DIEBEL**  
Secretary | Stoughton

**WILLIAM VAN HAREN**  
Treasurer | Verona

**NATALIE DEIBEL**  
Madison

**DAVID FOWLER**  
Franklin

**KRISTIN SCHULTHEIS**  
Milwaukee

**BRIAN SHOUP**  
Cottage Grove

**ZACH WOOD**  
Madison

**CONSULTANTS & COORDINATORS**  
Jim Fossum  
Jaclyn Lucas

**DESIGN & LAYOUT**  
designCraft Advertising  
Madison, WI

**PRINTER**  
Thysse Printing  
Oregon, WI

WaterWays is a publication of the River Alliance of Wisconsin. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of our funders. Articles are invited for consideration.



# A New Path to Clean Water in Wisconsin

By Raj Shukla

There is an undeniable feeling that we are at a breaking point.

Our planet is in peril. Our politics are polarized. Our policy solutions have proven to be inadequate. Unfortunately, many people have given up on the very idea that we can solve big problems together.

But not you, one of the thousands of River Alliance of Wisconsin members committed to clean water for all—white, Black, brown, rural and urban alike. You have spoken out and forced leaders to take notice of the growing threats to our rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater.

Despite words and attention from Governor Evers on down through the state legislature, we've seen precious little momentum. It seems clear that our leaders need a little help.

I am proud to announce a new path to clean water in our state: the Wisconsin Water Agenda.

The Wisconsin Water Agenda is a road map for how we can protect and restore water for years to come.

We sure do need it. Dozens of Wisconsin communities have drinking water tainted with pollution from industrial fertilizers

and lead pipes. Algal blooms threaten to smother a tourism industry already reeling from COVID-19. Brown water events are still too common—with over 100 last year alone. And with each passing day, new dangers like PFAS seep into the waters we rely on.

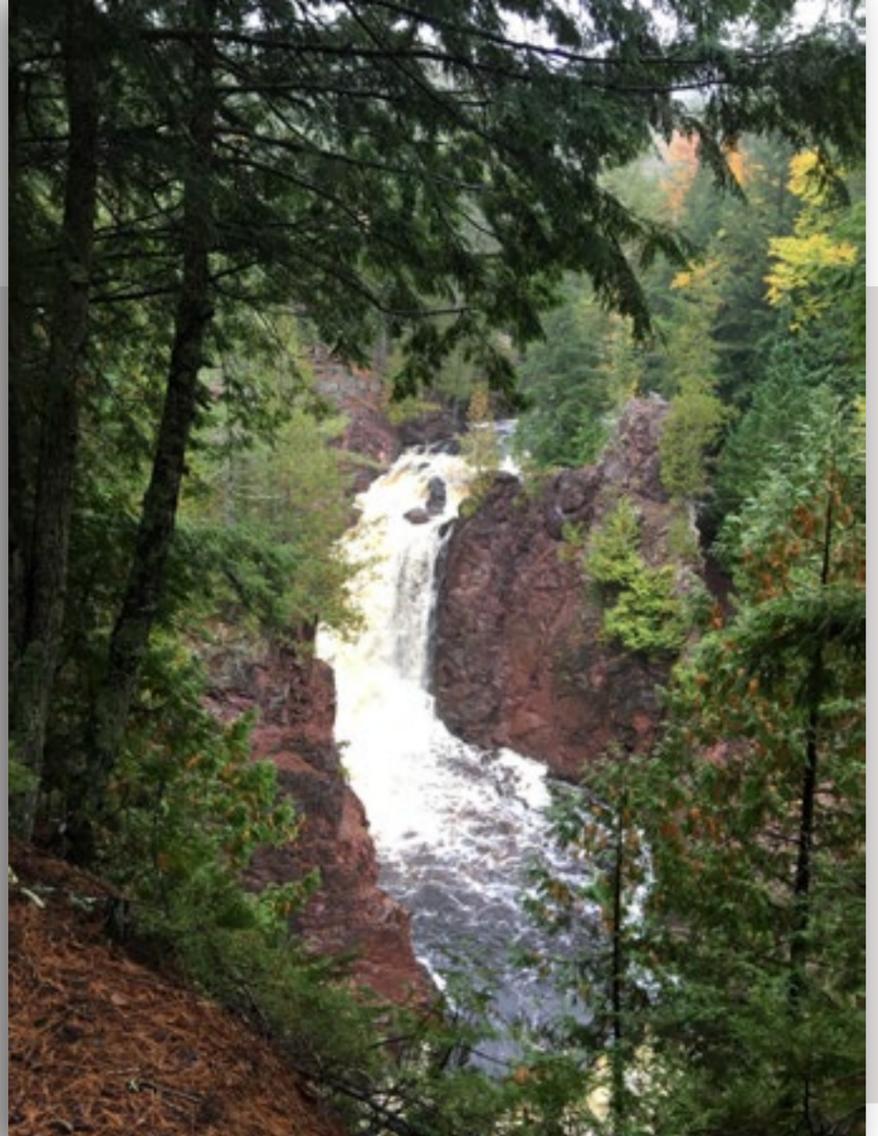
It's also how the state can recapture its legacy as a conservation leader. The need for water grows as the world warms. Wisconsin has an opportunity to chart the way ahead for all the Great Lakes states.

But, we need vision and passion to see us through. The Wisconsin Water Agenda is the vision.

As for the passion, that's up to you. Our success, like the health of rivers we so adore, relies on your energy and

commitment. We invite you to learn and be a part of the ideas we've laid out.

**Join us to empower everyone to protect and restore water through the Wisconsin Water Agenda.**



The Bad River in Copper Falls State Park [Photo courtesy Cathy Dow.]

## Creating the Wisconsin Water Agenda

A note from Mary Ellen Vollbrecht, Board Chair and Core Team member

I've spent my life working on—and playing in—Wisconsin's waters. As a kid I routinely risked scolding for coming home soaking wet after playing in Fish Creek in Ozaukee County. The other stream of my childhood memories is the concrete-lined Kinnickinnic River on South 7th Street in Milwaukee.

No matter where, rivers and lakes drew me in. They led to my career, mostly at the Department of Natural Resources, working to protect water.



Today, even in water-rich Wisconsin, we confront serious water issues from nitrate in drinking water, flooding, over-pumping, and emerging contaminants like PFAS. These are big problems. They must be addressed to protect our health and our waters.

It's not that we haven't tried to fix these water issues. Laws have been passed and money

has been spent. But the water problems we are facing now demonstrate serious gaps and flaws in our laws and programs. Our laws were largely passed in response to single water problems.

The result is that we do not have a comprehensive or integrated system of water management.

Since its inception, River Alliance has worked to empower people to protect our waters, so I was excited when the River Alliance initiated the Wisconsin Water Agenda project.

I've been delighted to serve on the Core Team for the project. Over the last eight months the Core Team (see list at right), River Alliance staff, and others have developed 12 elements to describe a system for achieving our human health and ecological goals.

Now the hard work begins—putting the elements into operation.

**We look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead to make this new model real.**

## Meet the Core Team

The Wisconsin Water Agenda was informed by the robust deliberations of our Core Team, a diverse group of individuals from around the state with wide-ranging experience and expertise on water issues and social change.



Members of the Wisconsin Water Agenda Core Team include:

- **Gary Besaw** | Former Tribal Chair, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- **Sam Breidenbach** | President, TDS Custom Construction
- **Brenda Coley** | Co-Executive Director, Milwaukee Water Commons
- **Sharon Dunwoody** | Professor emerita, Journalism and Mass Communication, UW-Madison
- **Jane Elder** | Executive Director, Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters
- **Kevin Fermanich** | Professor in the Geoscience Department, UW-Green Bay
- **Dave Fowler** | Senior Project Manager, Assoc. of State Floodplain Managers; former staff at Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
- **Kathy Lake** | Manager of Pollution Prevention Program, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District
- **Kriss Marion** | Circle M Market Farm
- **Bob Martini** | Wisconsin's Green Fire, former WI DNR staff
- **Richard Monette** | Professor of Law at University of Wisconsin Law School; Director, Great Lakes Indian Law Center
- **Mary Ellen Vollbrecht** | River Alliance board Chair, former WI DNR staff

The Water Agenda also builds upon previous work that has been done in our region, including the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, Waters of Wisconsin; the Future of Farming, Shifting Currents, and Food, Land and Water; and others.

# The Wisconsin Water Agenda

## A new path to clean water in Wisconsin

If we want to protect our health and economy we need a better way to manage our water resources.

In the face of Wisconsin's water problems, there are three questions to consider:

1. How can we help people who are dealing with water issues in Wisconsin right now?
2. How can we best use our current laws to protect people and prevent further harm to water and communities until a better system is in place?
3. What does a new system look like that can achieve our vision of clean water for all?

To address the third question, River Alliance of Wisconsin has initiated the Wisconsin Water Agenda. In defining a new path to clean water, our Core Team identified the following 12 elements for clean water in Wisconsin.

## WISCONSIN WATER AGENDA



Mink River  
[Photo courtesy  
Jon Reddin.]

## 12 Elements for Clean Water in Wisconsin

A new system for managing our water must:

### 1. Embrace a single, statewide goal.

Our water resources are affected by many entities, each with its own goals. We need one overarching goal that drives the entire system.

### 2. Strengthen our statewide value for water.

Clean and abundant water is part of our identity as Wisconsinites. We must take pride in it and value it. A new system will only succeed if we can highlight our state's heritage and traditions around water. A new system can also create new traditions and rituals around water as needed.

### 3. Engage ALL stakeholders and be inclusive.

For too long certain groups of people have been left out of decision-making processes when it comes to water, especially Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). In a new system, decision making must be collective and require *effective* engagement of all stakeholders. A new system must be inclusive, equitable, fair, and comprehensive.

### 4. Manage water as it exists in nature.



All water is connected, and what we do on the land affects our waters. Nature does not distinguish between surface water and groundwater, for example, but our current systems do.

A new system should be structured around the water cycle and its limits for a given area. A new system must also consider cumulative impacts, not just individual acts in isolation.

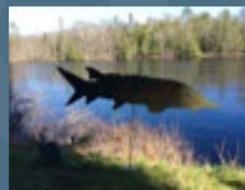
### 5. Prevent threats to people, plants and wildlife.

Our current system treats chemicals, such as PFAS as "innocent until proven guilty." Substances can be created and used for decades until harm is discovered. In a new system we must require that industry test substances *before* they enter into commerce to ensure that they are not harmful to living beings or ecosystems. Potential harm should be avoided, not just minimized or mitigated.

### 6. Connect benefits and harm.

In too many instances, a few entities make a profit, while the public bears the risk and harm. Sulfide mining is an example. A new system must allow the public to consider the benefits and risks of an activity that influences water resources.

### 7. Emphasize education about water for all ages.



As Wisconsinites, we deserve to know more about our water resources. A new system will incorporate education (in school and beyond) about the water cycle, the history of water use in Wisconsin, the cultural significance of water, and the health benefits of access to water.

### 8. Focus on the causes of an issue, not the symptoms.

When it comes to water issues, quick fixes are not sustainable. For example, providing filters or bottled water for those with contaminated wells does nothing to fix the root cause of the problem. A new system must invest in fixing the root causes.

### 9. Regenerate and restore.



We have come to accept practices that damage our water supply, health, and environment. We can no longer continue this approach and maintain our quality of life and economy. A new system must rebuild and restore our natural systems.

### 10. Be sufficiently funded.

A new system will require sufficient, sustained resources. These resources must be protected from the whims of politicians.

### 11. Adapt and be flexible.

A "one and done" system is not adequate over time. Our current system takes far too long to adapt as new knowledge and issues emerge. A new system must be able to adapt quickly to prevent damage and expense.

### 12. Generate knowledge to solve problems.



A successful system must evaluate what we don't know and look ahead. Building on the Wisconsin Idea—that research should be used to improve health, benefit the public, and solve problems—a new system will require that we generate and share new information with stakeholders. This will allow us to make informed decisions for our waters and communities.

### Get Involved

If these goals inspire you, we invite you to join us on the path to clean water in Wisconsin. We will make the next steps clear and easy, and we welcome your input!

**Sign up now for Action Alerts and updates on the Wisconsin Water Agenda.**

[wisconsinrivers.org/newsletter-signup](https://wisconsinrivers.org/newsletter-signup)



## New Zealand Mudsnails & Angling During COVID-19

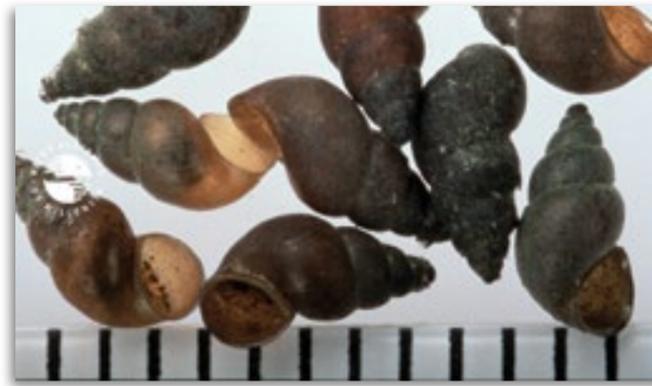
By Ellen Voss

Luckily for all of us who prefer to recreate in and on water, outdoor activity is considered essential. But there's a worrisome link connecting coronavirus to the health of Wisconsin's waters. Added recreational pressure may inadvertently hurt the rivers and streams we all love by leading to the spread of an invasive species.

During the pandemic, there has been a noticeable uptick in the number of visitors to many of Wisconsin's trout creeks, notably Black Earth Creek (one of the six streams in our state known to contain New Zealand mudsnail (NZMS). Hypothetically, if you fished Black Earth Creek and a

NZMS attached itself to the bottom of your boot without you realizing it, you could unknowingly transport a snail (that could potentially start a new population) if you fished in a different mudsnail-less stream the next day (or even three weeks later).

But small actions have profound impacts, and things like covering your mouth and washing your hands have been incredibly effective in combating coronavirus. Likewise, simple steps that take almost no time are invaluable for keeping New Zealand mudsnail contained like taking a close look at your boots and waders before and after you go fishing, and brushing things off for good measure.



New Zealand Mudsnails

We're all doing everything we can to keep the more vulnerable members of our society safe during this unprecedented time. Let's do the same for our vulnerable rivers and streams that rely on us to protect them.

Read more at: [wisconsinrivers.org/nzms-covid](https://wisconsinrivers.org/nzms-covid)



## Ways to Give in 2020

By Karen Bednar

Did you know that there are **new incentives to enhance charitable giving in 2020?**

Find what works best for you for your donation to protect and restore water.

A gift to River Alliance automatically enrolls you in membership and supports the mission to empower people to protect and restore water. In 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act changed some limitations on charitable giving to drive more funds to charities during this difficult economic time.

**Make a gift on our website or mail a check.** Visit [wisconsinrivers.org/donate](https://wisconsinrivers.org/donate) or return the enclosed envelope. *New this year:* Taxpayers who do not itemize their deductions can take a one-time deduction of up to \$300 for gifts made to charitable organizations.

**Consider a major gift.** If you are considering giving a major gift during your lifetime, there has never been a better time than now. In a typical year, individuals can only take a charitable deduction of up to 60% of their adjusted gross income, even if they donate more. For 2020, individuals can take a charitable deduction of up to 100% of their adjusted gross income.

**Do you own a business and does your business depend on clean water?** Join our Clear Water Business Consortium. To be a partner, make a donation. In 2020, corporations may deduct charitable gifts up to 25% of the business's taxable income, compared to 10% in the past.

### Learn More

Contact Development Director, Karen Bednar at [kbednar@wisconsinrivers.org](mailto:kbednar@wisconsinrivers.org) or **608-257-2424 x 116**. Contact a qualified financial advisor for how the CARES Act may grow the incentives for your support this year.



## Support Farmers & Clean Water During COVID-19

In the midst of COVID-19 we're thinking about food, farms, and water. Our Clear Water Farms Director, Michael Tiboris, has written a series of blog posts that share how you can support farmers and clean water during this time.

Read more at: [wisconsinrivers.org/category/clear-water-farms](https://wisconsinrivers.org/category/clear-water-farms)

## WELCOME TO THE BOARD:

### NATALIE DEIBEL

River Alliance is honored to welcome Natalie Deibel to our Board of Directors. Natalie currently serves as the Executive Director of Focus Counseling, Inc., a behavioral health and homeless services agency in Dane County. Both her current work in behavioral health, and her previous career as a mental health officer with the City of Madison Police Department, have underscored the ways in which Wisconsin's most underserved individuals cannot freely access our state's most precious gift: natural resources. As a result, she has become even more passionate about ensuring a truly just, sustainable future for all, particularly in the face of the accelerated effects of global warming.



### ZACH WOOD

Zach has been passionate about Wisconsin's waters since his first angling excursion at the age of three. Since then, he has spent four years representing the neighborhoods around the UW-Madison campus on the Madison Common Council. During his time on the Council, Zach prioritized responsible land use and sustainability, and is particularly proud of his work around Madison's commitment to 100% renewable energy. Additionally, Zach has staffed legislators in the Wisconsin State Senate and Assembly and has worked in communications for Wisconsin state agencies and nonprofits around Madison. River Alliance is proud to welcome Zach to our Board.



## GOODBYE:

### NATALIE DUTACK



Natalie left her mark on River Alliance as our Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) & Watershed Groups Manager.

With enthusiasm and humor, Natalie revamped our AIS programs for the last two years. We are grateful for all of the wader wash stations inventoried and built, Snapshot Day coordination, and our new work with Midwest Conservation Dogs. Natalie's work has been recognized by the Wisconsin Invasive Species Council. She recently received an Invader Crusader Award. Thanks for all of your hard work Natalie. We wish you all the best in Milwaukee County.