Tell Us About Your Favorite Local Farmer Who Cares for Land & Water...

As Wisconsinites we’re proud of our farming heritage. And how farmers manage their soil and water has a big effect on the quality of drinking water and the health of our aquatic ecosystems. River Alliance wants to hear about your local farm and farmer. Do you know a farmer who is working to protect our shared water resources while producing the food that has sustained us all through a tough year? Tell us about your favorite farmer so we can celebrate them and champion Clear Water Farmers!

1. Email us at info@wisconsinrivers.org using the subject line “Farm Nomination.”
2. Tell us the name of the farmer/farm, why you’re nominating them and how they protect the land and water. Be sure to include your name too!
3. Winning submissions will receive a River Alliance t-shirt, and we will feature your farmer’s work and farm to the River Alliance membership statewide.

More colors & styles online: www.riveralliance.org
River Alliance Gifts make the perfect gift!
Now what? A contentious election has come and gone. So many challenges on so many fronts have emerged in 2020. The future feels far from certain.

One thing we’ve all come to recognize is that clean water makes life beautiful in Wisconsin, especially during the toughest times. Over the spring and summer, I spoke with many members dreaming of getting out on the water to find respite from pandemic stress. Some still managed distanced fishing outings and paddling trips. Many folks described the peace that sitting near their local waterways brought. And, over a hundred people around the state joined forces and put on masks to check local waters for harmful aquatic invasive species.

You just can’t Wisconsin without clean water. It’s worth protecting and we have to act fast.

More than half a million people in Wisconsin cannot drink their water. Nitrates and bacteria foul huge swaths of the state. Lead pipes taint drinking water and put people in 90 communities at risk. PFAS “forever chemicals” threaten the waters of cities from Marinette to Madison. Still more communities face tourist losses because local waterways are clogged with algal blooms that thrive due to agricultural runoff. Sadly, misguided new laws mean mining pollution could destroy our most precious places. We’re glad Governor Evers and the State Assembly talked a lot about water last year. Unfortunately, little has come of it. Of the 13 bills that sprung from the Speaker’s Water Quality Task Force, none received so much as a vote in the State Senate.

Luckily, we have new chances to make progress. The state is poised to set a new biennial budget next summer. Right now, it is up to us to remind the governor and the legislature how vital clean water is to Wisconsin.

River Alliance is proud to announce Clean Water Now, a campaign to keep water a priority in Wisconsin. It’s the first step to realizing the Wisconsin Water Agenda we shared this summer. You are the biggest reason the Clean Water Now campaign will succeed.

With gridlock and discord carrying the day in Madison and Washington—more than ever before—it will be up to local leaders like you to organize your friends and neighbors and do the hard work to protect and restore water. River Alliance will give you the tools and training you need. This issue of WaterWays tells you how you can use your voice, grow this movement, and help fund the changes we need. Read on to learn some of the specifics of the Clean Water Now campaign and sign up for updates on the new Clean Water Now website.

The path ahead will be winding, just like everything else nowadays. I know that if we go together, we can go far.

You Can’t Wisconsin Without Clean Water

By Raj Shukla

River Alliance is proud to announce Clean Water Now, a campaign to keep water a priority in Wisconsin. It’s the first step to realizing the Wisconsin Water Agenda we shared this summer. You are the biggest reason the Clean Water Now campaign will succeed.

With gridlock and discord carrying the day in Madison and Washington—more than ever before—it will be up to local leaders like you to organize your friends and neighbors and do the hard work to protect and restore water. River Alliance will give you the tools and training you need. This issue of WaterWays tells you how you can use your voice, grow this movement, and help fund the changes we need. Read on to learn some of the specifics of the Clean Water Now campaign and sign up for updates on the new Clean Water Now website.

The path ahead will be winding, just like everything else nowadays. I know that if we go together, we can go far.

An Upwelling of Support

By Karen Bednar

Right now, many lakes are undergoing turnover. Dr. Jay Austin of the University of Minnesota’s Large Lakes Observatory describes it as a time when the water column thoroughly mixes together before the freeze. In many lakes, this mixing happens in the spring, and again in the fall as the surface layer of the water becomes denser with the overlying air temperature change. Lake Superior’s turnover is roughly in December, whereas a smaller lake may have started mixing in October.

One of the amazing things about fall turnover is the upwelling of an abundance of nutrients and a redistribution of oxygen throughout the water column. A fantastic response of life ensues. It is a nourishing time for the whole ecosystem before winter sets in.

We too recognize what is nourishing our lives: connection to one another and connection to nature. And through these times of change, what is constant?

If you got out hiking or paddling this fall you can guess what I am alluding to. Water can provide that respite we can count on. The work you support at River Alliance protects and restores our waters. The waters you can rely on.

We rely on you. We are looking to you for an upwelling of support this giving season. If you are preparing for your year-end gift, consider making an additional donation this year by pitching in now with a gift or setting up the stability of a recurring gift online.

Visit: wisconsinrivers.org/donate

You are empowering people to protect and restore water so it can continue to be a resource we can count on. Please be as generous as possible, as the water is to us. Your contribution of any amount makes a difference. Thank you!
What is the Clean Water Now Campaign?

By Allison Werner

As you know, and as Raj mentioned, almost everything we love about Wisconsin depends on clean water, and yet Wisconsin’s waters and communities are at risk. Farming, fishing, boating, swimming, and clean water for drinking—not a day goes by without needing water. But, you also know that too many Wisconsinites cannot drink, swim in or eat fish caught in our waters. Clean water is essential for the entire state, including our economy, but not enough is being done. We need a new way to make change.

For years and years, Wisconsinites like you have been asking elected leaders to take action to clean up and protect our waters. We applaud Governor Evers and the legislature for focusing on water issues recently. Last year was both the Year of Clean Drinking Water and the year the Speaker’s Water Quality Task Force (WQTF) traveled across the state to hold public hearings.

There’s not a community in the state that isn’t facing some water issues that impact water quality and water quantity. These issues impact everyone, from farmers, to young children, to business owners. At the WQTF hearings there was testimony from:

• Farmers about the innovative practices they want to continue to implement to increase their stewardship of the land and water. Other farmers shared the horrific stories of their animals getting sick and dying due to the PFAS levels in their water.

• Business owners who lose customers when toxic blue-green algae blooms stink up their lakes and leave green slime on their boats.

• Families that can’t drink their water because of the amount of lead, nitrates, bacteria, or PFAS in their tap water.

The proposals from the WQTF fell short and the Senate never took action on the legislation that was put forth. The new calendar year will provide an opportunity to introduce new legislation to address the top water quality issues raised during the WQTF hearings. It is time to elevate these issues to the level of priority they deserve. Our leaders need to know that we believe clean water is a right that all Wisconsinites deserve and that we want meaningful actions now.

We know from our work across the state and our many partners that access to clean water is a bi-partisan issue. River Alliance is launching the Clean Water Now campaign to empower Wisconsinites to raise the volume on critical water issues. The Clean Water Now campaign is a county-level, non-binding referendum to show unity around the pressing need to address critical water issues. It is an opportunity to let Wisconsin’s policy leaders know that having clean water is an issue that voters across the state want them to provide.

County by county—on ballots in April 2021 and beyond—Wisconsinites will demand Clean Water Now. The referendum question is simple: Should the State of Wisconsin establish a right to clean water to protect human health, the environment, and the diverse cultural and natural heritage of Wisconsin? The answer is: YES!

This campaign is also about protecting the diverse cultural and natural heritage of Wisconsin. Think back to your childhood memories and family traditions. Many likely involved the waters of Wisconsin.

The 12 tribal nations in Wisconsin are deeply connected to the waters in Wisconsin. Their cultures require access to clean water for ceremonies, sustaining wild rice, fishing, and more.

Farming is also part of Wisconsin’s heritage. Being good stewards of the land and water is what many farmers aspire to do. They know their cows and other livestock need clean water and their families do too. Many farmers are implementing practices like cover crops to help reduce their impact on our waters.

We know people across Wisconsin will say "Yes!" with their votes. When they do, the powers that be will all have more reasons to ensure that our water is truly cherished. Clean Water Now will help bring more people into our movement to ensure decision makers make water a top priority in Wisconsin.

There are several ways you can support the Clean Water Now campaign. Start by going to voteforcleanwater.com to learn more about this effort. From the website you can sign up for updates. There are several ways you can support the Clean Water Now campaign: awerner@wisconsinrivers.org.
Volunteer Success During COVID-19

By Ellen Voss

On August 15th, 150 dedicated volunteers from all over Wisconsin donned their masks, rolled up their sleeves, and grabbed their garden rakes and old coffee cans to search for aquatic invasive species (AIS) in their favorite rivers and lakes.

This statewide AIS scavenger hunt is known as Snapshot Day, and this event has become an annual summer tradition for many across the state. Organized by River Alliance of Wisconsin in coordination with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and UW-Madison Division of Extension, this one-day statewide initiative provides a treasure trove of invaluable data to the WDNR that guides future prevention efforts and management plans. This early detection effort is vital for identifying new invaders and monitoring the movements of existing invasive populations in waterbodies throughout Wisconsin.

Not even a pandemic could prevent Wisconsin’s enthusiastic volunteers from pitching in to protect the rivers and lakes they love. In total, 150 volunteers led by 22 site leaders from partner organizations monitored 201 sites at 24 different locations all over Wisconsin!

While Snapshot Day itself is only a one-day event, the planning and preparing take several months. And back in March, the question as to whether a 7th consecutive year of this important monitoring event could or should happen in the midst of a pandemic was on the table. Luckily, with some creative programming tweaks, an abundance of safety precautions, and the support of willing and enthusiastic volunteers and site leaders, Snapshot Day 2020 not only occurred, but was a rousing success.

What’s it like volunteering during a pandemic? Sheila Leary with the Friends of Cherokee Marsh in Madison shared this:

“It was thrilling to see the enthusiasm and dedication of volunteers from teens to septuagenarians, despite masking and rain showers!”

Site leader Marina Steiner added, “It’s humbling to see what can be accomplished with hard-working and dedicated leaders, volunteers, and organizers in such a unique year!”

The data collected during this year’s event are still being verified by experts, but fortunately, many Snapshot Day sites reported no “new” findings of invasive species that had not already been previously documented.

While “nothing new to report” may seem anticlimactic in some ways, it’s good news for our waterways, and the Snapshot Day experience also serves as an invaluable outreach tool. Armed with ID skills and knowledge to share about preventing the spread of AIS, the hope is that newly trained volunteers will go forward with a new appreciation for the water they love and become lifelong advocates. This is a different kind of success story and one that demonstrates how important volunteers are to the protection of Wisconsin’s waters.

Thank you to ALL of the 2020 Snapshot Day volunteers and partners for their continued efforts to protect Wisconsin’s waters!

ICYMI: River Alliance’s Wisconsin Water Agenda

As thirty-year plus veteran of the DNR, and Core Team member, Bob Martini put it, “This effort by River Alliance is the most comprehensive approach in the past 45 years to update the concept of the Clean Water Act and undo the uncoordinated, and often regressive actions, taken by the legislature since 1972.”

See the 12 elements needed for clean water in Wisconsin: wisconsinrivers.org/wisconsin-water-agenda

GOODBYE:

JACLYN LUCAS

A great big thanks to Jaclyn Lucas who joined our team for the second year in a row to help make the annual Snapshot Day a success. Jaclyn’s organizational skills, diplomacy, and AIS knowledge were a big part of why Snapshot Day was so successful. Jaclyn also worked to update our Local Groups directory information—an important task to help people around the state connect with their local water protection groups. We wish you the best of luck in your next adventures, Jaclyn!