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This is my daughter doing a breastfeeding photo with my granddaughter MaryJane peeking at me, her grandma, behind the camera. My daughter wanted her breastfeeding photo to be in the headwaters of Swamp Creek, which eventually leads to Rice Lake that holds our precious wild rice.

– Tina L. Van Zile, Crandon

**Together** | Marathon County

This image shows a pasture walk sponsored by Cawm Point Farm and EPPIC (a watershed group). I named it “Together,” because it takes everyone to protect our state’s natural resources on people from the not-so-obvious places. One of those places is the farming community. Farmer-led watershed groups are recognizing their role in protecting water.

In this image, progressive farmers, agronomists, environmentalists, and community leaders stand together. Their work is making the difference.

– Matthew Oehmichen, Colby

**On the Water at Siskiwit Lake** | Bayfield County

A beautiful afternoon canoeing with friends, fishing, and enjoying northern Wisconsin.

– Jonah Westrich, Madison

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We recently invited you to share your favorite water images for River Alliance’s annual photo contest based on the theme “HEALING.” We’ve chosen three winners from over 100 entries! Please enjoy the winning images and see the runners up at: wisconsınırivers.org/2020-photo-contest-winners

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It’s been a year since the world came to a screeching halt. So many have lost so much, and there have been lessons I’ll remember forever.

A year without much travel has taught me to appreciate local activity. A year confined to fewer of my favorite places, with fewer of my favorite people, has taught me to embrace the moment. A year with ever-present threats of disease and discord has made me aware of how much more we all deserve. And, a year with rivers, lakes and streams as my first—sometimes only—refuge, inspires me to protect them every day, in every way I can.

I know I am not alone.

On ballots, on farm fields, on Zoom from home, and out on the water in kayaks, local people are working to protect and restore water.

In this issue of WaterWays, Allison tells you how leaders in three Wisconsin counties have taken it upon themselves to demand more from politicians in the Capitol. April ballots will ask voters in Marquette, Portage and Wood Counties to support a right to clean water in Wisconsin. (Learn how your county could take part during a future election cycle!) Mike shares some of the member-nominated farmers across Wisconsin who protect water as a course of business. You submitted farmers from Marshfield, to North Freedom, to Oak Creek who are shifting an industry with persistence and great care for land and water. Ellen shines a light on how you can help stop the spread of invasive species with a little knowledge and a plan. make your own “Un-Wanted List,” and learn how to spot these unwanted visitors in rivers and streams.

Bill shows you how we use the Wisconsin Water Agenda to guide our advocacy. The Agenda’s principles, developed by a team of diverse leaders from across Wisconsin, give policymakers and watershed volunteers a road map to clean water for all.

In our own organization, we’re taking the initiative on race and equity with new resources for our team, and new leaders on our team.

When I take a step back back and look at all that people are doing to protect and restore water, I’m reminded of another lesson I learned a long time ago: engaged and active people are the key to making progress.

All over Wisconsin, members like you are taking action. They’re organizing, and re-imagining. They’re getting their hands and boots dirty to keep water clean.

The rivers kept flowing last year. We’re grateful that so many of you have pushed forward with as much grace and persistence.

No Time Like the Present

By Raj Shukla

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Your Favorite Wisconsin Farmers Who Protect Land & Water

By Michael Tiboris

Knowing your local farmers and buying from those who are committed to clean water is an easy action you can take for clean water. We also want to show these farmers (and their peers) that Wisconsinites care about clean water and will support them for taking a stand to protect land and water.

We invite you to learn more about a few of the farmers recently nominated by River Alliance members and partners:

Cavern Point Farm, run by the Cavadini Family, was nominated by two other farmer members of River Alliance, BJ Farra and Matt Dehmchen, for their vision and commitment to healthy soil and water. Cavern Point, located near Marshfield, raises pastured beef grazing on perennial grass cover.

Karen Mesmer nominated Bula’s Pleasant Valley Farm, near North Freedom. The Bulas are dedicated to regenerative agriculture and the sort of diverse farming system (with beef, sheep, chickens, vegetables, bees, and maple syrup) that defines Wisconsin’s farming heritage.

Caver Point Farm on Washington Island, Door County
[Photo courtesy D. Geiwitz]

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Sandy Raduenz and David Kozlowski of Pinehold Gardens, nominated by Melissa and Jay Warner, have been running a CSA for more than 25 years in Oak Creek. They use drip irrigation on their vegetables to conserve water and keep their soil out of the creek.

In the coming months we’ll be featuring the work of more Clear Water Farmers for you to see— with videos, stories, and transparent commitments to protect Wisconsin’s water. The nominated farms included a large diversity of sizes and production systems, showing us that water protection can be a central feature of a successful farm!
In our last issue we announced the Clean Water Now referendum. Today, we are excited to announce that Wood, Portage and Marquette Counties are taking the lead. Voters in these counties will have the clean water referendum question on their April 2021 ballots.

Clean Water Now is a statewide, multi-county, multi-year referenda campaign to demand the right to clean water in Wisconsin. Voters in Wood, Portage and Marquette County will be the first to have the chance to voice their support for clean water for all when they vote on April 6th. Local leaders are lining up to follow suit in more counties across the state during the next election cycle. These counties, like most in Wisconsin, have faced water quality challenges for years. Leaders and county board supervisors have asked the legislature for assistance before, but as of today, they are still waiting for these leaders to take real action.

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!

Wood, Portage and Marquette Counties are Taking the Lead for Clean Water!

By Allison Werner

Support the Campaign

There are several ways you can get involved and support the Clean Water Now Campaign.

LEARN MORE: Start by going to voteforcleanwater.com to learn more about this effort. Sign up for Clean Water Now email updates and let us know if you want to be a local leader in your county.

DO YOU LIVE IN WOOD, PORTAGE, OR MARQUETTE COUNTY? Know someone who does? Make sure to Vote for Clean Water on April 6th. Learn more at: voteforcleanwater.com

VOLUNTEER (FROM HOME!): If you’d like to volunteer for the campaign, just send an email to Allison Werner at awerner@wisconsinrivers.org. Volunteer opportunities include reaching out to voters in Wood, Portage, or Marquette Counties via email, phone and/or text.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT: You can purchase a Clean Water Now t-shirt to show your support for Clean Water Now. See all styles at: bonfire.com/clean-water-now

PLAN FOR 2022!

If you think your county board would support putting this question on the ballot in 2022, we’d love to hear from you. Please reach out to Allison Werner, if you have questions about the Clean Water Now campaign: awerner@wisconsinrivers.org

The Marquette County Referendum Will Let Our Legislators Know How Important Clean Water Is & That We Need to Act!

Al Rosenthal
Marquette County Board Supervisor

Too Many Things Hinge Upon Water Availability & Quality for Us to Not Find Ways to Work Together, Problem Solve, & Think Creatively...

Chris Holman
Portage County Executive

On April 6th, [Wood County] Residents Can Affirm Their Desire to Protect Our Most Precious Natural Resource...

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Wood County Supervisor
The Wisconsin Water Agenda: A Living Document

By Bill Davis

It has been a little more than a year since we started working on the Wisconsin Water Agenda, and what a year it has been. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we've made progress we're excited about. Working with our Core Team, we identified 12 necessary elements of an integrated, comprehensive water management system that could meet the water challenges we face, and prevent new ones. But these elements are just broad descriptors, so what have we been doing since to make the Wisconsin Water Agenda real? The short answer is lots. The Agenda is a living document for the River Alliance that guides our ongoing and future work in a variety of ways. Here are a few examples. First, we have turned the Agenda elements into a set of policy "screens" that we now use to evaluate legislative, administrative or corporate proposals. So, this helps us determine how a particular bill gets a "thumbs up" or, a "thumbs down" from River Alliance. Second, the Clean Water Now referendum campaign is, in part, an effort to bolster the water ethos element of the Water Agenda. Finally, I am currently focused on what it would look like to operationalize the Watershed and Decision-making elements of the agenda. I am working with various partners to get into the weeds of what a new system would actually look like. We are not looking at what is possible now, but what would be needed to succeed. If we know where we want to end up, we can determine the steps to get from where we are to where we need to be. We will continue to keep you informed and involved in this work!

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