



RIVER ALLIANCE of WISCONSIN

Protecting and Restoring Wisconsin's Water is an Urgent Priority

There is a bipartisan consensus, both [within the State Legislature](#) and with [large majorities in the general public](#), that water protection is a top priority. Yet, actual legislative progress on the issue [has been inadequate](#). The new legislative session is an opportunity to address the urgent water protection issues Wisconsinites overwhelmingly agree about. We have a budget surplus that can restore past funding cuts and provide Wisconsinites the clean water they deserve.

Here is a list of key items that could be accomplished right now.

Restore Political Integrity and Democracy

It matters how decisions are made. When the public's voice is intentionally excluded from the process they are not treated fairly. Major changes to our laws over the last few years have allowed the Legislature to avoid any real public input on the laws that influence their lives; sometimes introducing and passing a law within the span of a week. The Legislature controls the rules and they could do better by the people of Wisconsin.

- Change [legislative process rules](#) to require more time and [opportunities for public input](#), and do this in places outside of Madison and outside of regular business hours.
- The Senate must act on the Governor's appointments to secretarial positions and the DNR and DATCP boards. Failing to do this hurts the Legislature's credibility and undermines the will of the people who voted for the winning gubernatorial candidate.

Protect us from PFAS Contamination

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are a family of approximately 12,000 individual chemicals which are harmful to humans at extremely low concentrations and are very difficult to remove from the environment or destroy.

- Prohibit PFAS substances from use to [bring Wisconsin in line with peer states](#).
- Use [existing laws to set and enforce standards](#) that would minimize exposure.

Expand the Contaminated Well Compensation Program

More than 100,000 Wisconsinites have contaminated household wells. The Well Compensation Program, though updated by [Assembly Bill 728](#) in 2021, still has significant limitations that are barriers to achieving universal access to safe drinking water in Wisconsin.

- Permanently update the Well Compensation Program's eligibility criteria to follow the criteria currently being used by the [DNR's temporary, ARPA-funded, well compensation grant program](#).
- Raise the income threshold to \$100,000, and consider contaminants beyond nitrate by changing the language of the bill to read "one or more substances of public health

concern greater than or equal to a primary maximum contaminant level established in ch. NR 809, Wis. Admin. Code or an enforcement standard established in ch. NR 140, Wis. Admin. Code.”

Prevent Nutrient Pollution of Ground and Surface Water

The high levels of nitrate and phosphorus in our water are bad for our bodies and the health of Wisconsin's waters. We need to be able to have a profitable, diverse farm economy and protect clean water at the same time.

- Fund extensive private well testing, with emphasis on daycare facilities and schools. [Aggregate with existing sources and share it with the public](#) who have a right to know what's in their water.
- Allocate [federal funding](#) to wastewater utilities and MS4 permit holders to [help them remove more phosphorus](#) from water before discharging it to the environment.
- Nutrient management plans, though [required by law](#), are [only filed by about 1/3 of the state's farms](#). Remove them from cost share, adequately fund staff to receive and enforce them, and make compliance information publicly available.
- Use a combination of higher (and facility-size-adjusted) [CAFO fees](#) and budget increases to adequately fund DNR and DATCP CAFO programs so that permits can be granted in a timely way and properly enforced.

Protect Public Lands

Wisconsin's public lands, state parks, forests, and natural areas are at the heart of what makes our state the incredible place that it is. They deserve our protection.

- Repeal [2017 Act 134](#) which stripped protections from wetlands and allows mining companies to escape responsibility for cleaning up environmental damage.
- Raise funding for the [Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program](#) and require that Joint Finance Committee objections to project funding be public, not anonymous.

Improve Flood Mitigation and Resilience

Climate change and chronic underinvestment in infrastructure mean that Wisconsin life and property are at significant risk from flooding. Responding after disasters occur is far more costly than preparing for them.

- Protect Wisconsin homes by maintaining the [current state floodplain management standards](#) and not relaxing them down to the FEMA minimums.
- Reinstate the 25% match for local communities, instead of the current 50%, for the state [municipal flood control grant program](#) and increase its funding so that smaller and rural communities can access funding.

End Lead Contamination of Drinking Water

Tens of thousands of buildings in Wisconsin still have lead lateral water pipes. This is dangerous, particularly for children, and the fix is easy: replace these pipes. Federal money is available to do this now.

- [Use federal funding](#) and the state budget surplus to subsidize or fully cover the cost of all lead lateral removals.

- Target funding to places with the highest concentration of buildings with lead lines to ensure that funds are used efficiently and stretched as far as possible.

Restore a Fair Administrative Rules Process

The Legislature's job is to pass laws. The job of the Governor and the executive agencies is to implement and enforce those laws. But a series of changes made by the Legislature in 2011 has made it functionally impossible to update or enact new rules that protect public health.

- Remove or at least extend the arbitrary 30-month deadline for rulemaking created by [2017 Act 39](#).
- Restore [section 227 within Act 57](#) (the REINS Act) to its 2009 version, repealing the 2011 changes which put arbitrary cost limitations on rule implementation that are preventing sensible, basic public health protections from coming into effect.
- Make all required economic impact analyses to consider economic, public health, and environmental benefits in their calculations, and not just financial costs to businesses.

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