



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON FORESTRY

Tony Evers, Governor

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Dear Governor Evers,

Congratulations on the success you have had with the Year of Clean Drinking Water and bringing attention to this critical issue. Thank you for making it a high priority of your administration. We read the report from the Department of Natural Resources and would like to provide information on a potentially overlooked aspect and solution regarding clean water.

As the Council on Forestry is charged by statute with advising yourself, the Department of Natural Resources, legislators, and other agencies, we would like to offer information on how forests support and create clean water. We also want to highlight recent initiatives and open the door to a discussion on suggestions for how forests provide answers.

How forests (rural and urban) protect and promote water quality:

- Riparian areas are lands next to lakes and streams. In a forested condition, these areas help to slow and filter runoff, regulate water temperatures, and provide habitat for wildlife. In watersheds dominated by agriculture, **forested riparian areas are especially valuable in intercepting nonpoint source pollution** (nutrients, sediments, chemicals, and pesticides) **and reducing the input of these pollutants into water resources.**
- Maintaining a watershed in a forested condition can help to protect water quality and maintain aquatic habitat many species depend upon. Studies conducted in Wisconsin found that **if a watershed can be maintained at 65% forest cover and less than 10% impervious surfaces, the hydrology of that watershed is maintained**, especially the stability of those streams (Booth 2000).
- Riparian **forests also ameliorate the effects of some pesticides**, and directly provide dissolved and particulate organic food needed to maintain high biological productivity and diversity in the adjoining stream.
- The impervious surfaces in our cities and villages, such as roads, driveways and rooftops, convert precipitation into stormwater runoff. This runoff can cause water quality and quantity issues as it picks up pollutants and flows into waterbodies. While traditional stormwater management has relied on gray infrastructure to collect and transport runoff to waste water treatment facilities or surface waters, there has been **increasing interest to better understand and employ the use of urban and community forests to manage stormwater runoff in place.**

- The presence of trees in Wisconsin communities can help to **slow and temporarily store stormwater runoff, increase infiltration, decrease flooding and erosion downstream, and improve water quality.**

Forestry solutions:

- As part of their **green infrastructure solutions** to manage rainwater and improve water quality in urban waterways, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) is implementing their **Milwaukee Stormwater Tree Project**, working with residents to plant over 300 trees in a Milwaukee neighborhood. (<https://www.mmsd.com/what-we-do/green-infrastructure/milwaukee-stormwater-tree-project>)
- The US Geological Survey (USGS) is conducting **research** in Fond du Lac to study the effects of tree removal on the urban hydrologic cycle in order to **measure the impacts that trees have on stormwater runoff detention volume.** (Research funded through a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant.)
- A **workshop** session of the upcoming 2020 Wisconsin Arborist Association/Department of Natural Resources Annual Conference, which regularly attracts over 700 professionals in arboriculture and urban forestry, **will focus on urban forests and stormwater**, featuring speakers from DNR, USGS, UW Stevens Point, and local communities.
- The Council encourages Wisconsin DNR to continue to explore and support efforts to **quantify the impacts of urban and community forests on stormwater runoff quality and volume and develop policies that allow for urban and community forests to be properly integrated into stormwater management best management practices and credited by regulatory permits.** Healthy and abundant urban forests contribute to runoff volume reductions and water quality improvements, which in turn contribute to cleaner drinking water for Wisconsin citizens and visitors.
- Wisconsin's **Forestry Best Management Practices (WI BMPs) for Water Quality Program** satisfies requirement of federal legislation (the 1977 Clean Water Act and the 1987 Water Quality Act) to develop and implement a program to reduce nonpoint source pollution, including nonpoint source pollution related to silvicultural activities, to the "maximum extent practicable". WI BMPs are **applied correctly over 90%** of the time for all landowners (state and county forestlands and private forestlands enrolled in the Managed Forest Law) and when they are applied correctly, **water quality is protected over 99% of the time.**
- Forest Industry Safety and Training Alliance (FISTA) organizes and gives **certification credits to loggers and foresters** who partake in BMP for Water Quality classes.

As the state moves forward in addressing water issues, we will strive to advance and promote ways that forests, urban and rural, can and do provide solutions. Please let us know how the Council can assist you in understanding and promoting the role that forests play in preserving clean water supplies. We would be happy to discuss additional thoughts and recommendations. Protecting and responsibly managing forests should be an essential part of future strategies to ensure clean water in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,



Chair Thomas Hittle
Council on Forestry