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Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Environment Assembly Bill 220

June 15, 2023

Thank you Chair Oldenburg, Vice-Chair Kitchens, and members of the Assembly Committee on Environment for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill (AB) 220, relating to funding for the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot program. The Fenwood Creek watershed pilot program is an innovative program designed to incentivize farmers to reduce sediment runoff and protect our waterways from phosphorous pollution. As explained by the Legislative Reference Bureau, this Bill will provide, each fiscal year of the 2023-2025 biennium, \$607,000 for the implementation and expansion of the existing Marathon County Fenwood Creek watershed pilot program. This program is critical for incentivizing farmers to reduce their phosphorous and sediment runoff, and provides the additional benefit of protecting the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, which is Lake Du Bay, and downstream, the Wisconsin River.

Currently, Wisconsin waterways are being impaired by significant runoff of phosphorous and other sediments resulting in excessive increases of algae that consume all of the available oxygen and lead to so called “dead zones” with a reduction in fish and plant populations in that watershed. Under current programs aimed at reducing the amount of agricultural runoff, farmers are given cost-sharing payments for creating a nutrient management plan to reduce runoff. However, these plans have no effective way of guaranteeing that the reduction levels are actually met and have not been successful at reducing contamination.

Under the proposed watershed pilot program, farmers are incentivized for demonstrating they have reduced their levels of pollution. The performance based payments will allow farmers to be rewarded for adopting best farming practices that yield measurable results. As part of the program, farmers will receive a \$20 to \$40 per acre annual payment for demonstrating reductions in phosphorous levels for the first three years of the program, followed by receiving half that sum for the next three years.

This new approach has already seen incredible results with phosphorus runoff reduced by over 1800lbs since the start of Marathon County’s Fenwood Creek watershed program, with only five farmers currently participating. This program has not been expanded due to the lack of financial resources available to Marathon County. An expansion of the pilot program throughout the entire watershed will allow policymakers to study the effectiveness of replicating the results in phosphorus reduction that we have already seen in other areas of the watershed. With the projected

future success, this program gives Wisconsin a chance to be a leader in reducing agricultural pollution and improving our marine ecosystem.

Finally, there are two requirements at the end of the bill. The first is that a report be provided annually to the relevant standing committees in the Assembly and Senate. The second is that the Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) must require additional funding in future agency budgets.

Thank you for your kind attention, and for your support of this new, innovative way to protect our wildlife and water systems for generations to come. I will be glad to answer any questions.



Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 220
Assembly Committee on Environment

June 15, 2023

Chair Oldenburg, Vice Chair Kitchens, and members of the Assembly Committee on Environment, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 220, bipartisan legislation that provides grant funding to the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot program located in Marathon County to help them reduce phosphorus and sediment levels in the watershed. I also want to recognize and thank Representative Rozar and Senator James for their leadership and hard work on this issue.

As currently implemented, the Fenwood Creek pilot program encourages farmers to utilize best conservation practices and reduce their phosphorus runoff by offering monetary rewards to farms that are at 50% or less of the state phosphorus index. AB 220 will build on the already successful Fenwood Creek watershed program by providing additional grant funding to expand the pilot program throughout the Fenwood Creek watershed. This bill instructs DATCP to request funding from the Joint Finance Committee of up to \$607,000 in each year of the biennium to expand the program throughout the Fenwood Creek Watershed. With \$33 million expected to be left in the environmental management account by the end of the biennium and a \$2.8 million balance in the nonpoint account by June 30, 2025, it is clear that our state's environmental fund can sustainably fund this worthy program.

Created in 2020, the pilot program has five participating farms, and in just three years, those farms have prevented more than 5,100 pounds of phosphorus from entering our waterways. As we know, the effects of excessive algae in our waterways can be devastating for fish and plant populations because the algae use up all of the available oxygen. And with every pound of phosphorus being capable of producing up to 500 pounds of harmful algae, the pilot program has already prevented roughly 2.5 million pounds of harmful algae blooms in Wisconsin's waterways, including Lake DuBay and the Wisconsin River.

I think we can all agree that this is a terrific start and something that we should look to build on. With the Fenwood Creek Watershed comprising 65 farms and roughly 65% of the watershed being cropland, and with only around a third of Wisconsin cropland under nutrient management plans, there's a lot more to be done.

Thankfully, the innovative approach to nutrient loading utilized in the Fenwood Creek pilot program provides the resources needed to encourage farmer participation in strengthening surface water quality. The program has proven to be a cost-effective tool in reducing harmful runoff, and its success is critical to demonstrating scalability for a more comprehensive program down the road. This program can and should serve as a statewide model for farmer-led water quality initiatives.

I again want to thank Chair Oldenburg for scheduling this hearing today and Representative Rozar and Senator James for prioritizing the issue of nutrient management. The Fenwood Creek watershed pilot program has been a very successful voluntary program, and this bill has earned the support of environmental and agricultural groups alike. The Legislature has a strong track record of funding incentives for voluntary producer-led programs that improve our state's water quality, and I hope that the members of the committee will support and champion the passage of this bill to expand the program. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.



June 15th, 2023

Representative Oldenburg, Chair
Representative Kitchens, Vice-Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Environment

Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 220

Relating to: funding for the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot project

Dear Chairman Oldenburg, Vice-Chair Kitchens, and Committee Members:

Wisconsin is known for its pristine water and abundant natural resources. Wisconsin is also known for its many small family and hobby farms. It is imperative these two industries work together if we are to get the best of both worlds.

Marathon County has come up with an innovative approach that does just that. Their model incentivizes farmers to reduce their agricultural runoff through an outcomes-based approach. Farms at 50% or less of the state phosphorous index standard are paid for their reductions. This helps protect our waterways and preserve the high standard of water we desire.

The program has seen incredible success since it began in 2020. In the three years the program has been operating, the five participating farmers have been able to stop between 1700-1800 pounds of phosphorus from running into waterways each year. That is more than 5100 pounds total.

These reductions have significant cost-savings too. While wastewater treatment plants spend on average \$200 per pound per year on phosphorus removal and individual grant programs spend \$57 per pound per year, the pilot only spends on average \$18 per pound per year, and it has easily trackable, cumulative results. That is nearly \$1 million in savings from just five farms over three years. Imagine the savings if this approach were expanded to the entire watershed and beyond?

I understand there may be hesitations to spend money or create a new government program. But given its proven track record and financial implications, I would encourage everyone to look at this as an investment not just for the larger Fenwood Creek watershed, but the entire state as a whole. Let's take full advantage of the opportunity ahead of us.

Thank you all again for allowing me to testify on this legislation. I am available to take any questions.

Respectfully,

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District
Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov

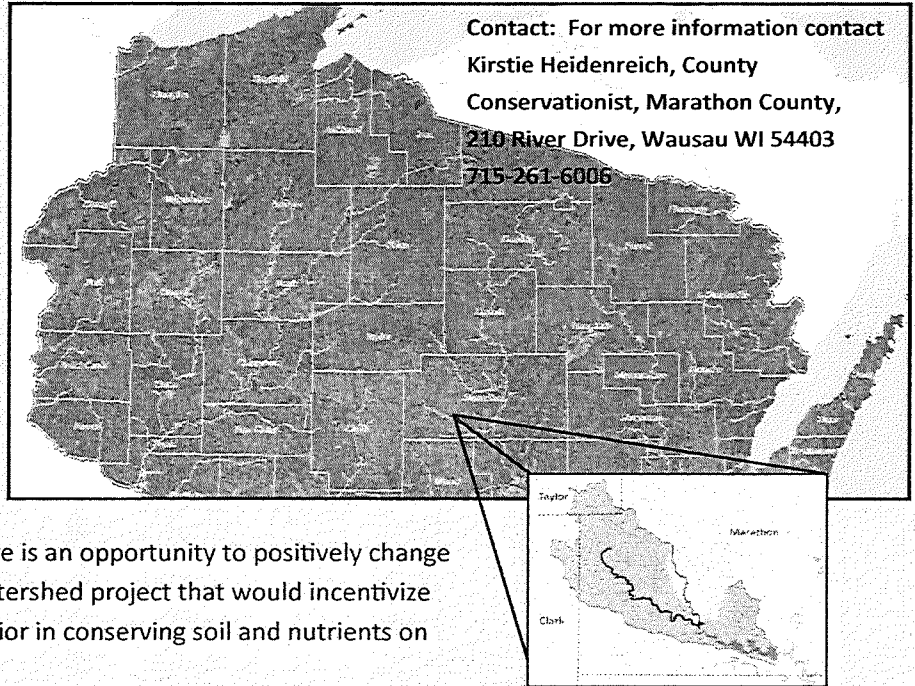
A New Approach to Sediment and Phosphorous Management: The Fenwood Pilot Project—Marathon County

Wisconsin's waters are impaired, and many of today's agricultural practices are contributing significant sediment and nutrients to state water.

The Fenwood Creek Watershed is similar to many impaired watersheds in the State of Wisconsin. Phosphorus and soil sediment loads are impairing the water quality of downstream water bodies primarily through agricultural runoff. Traditional conservation approaches have had varying levels of success, but none have been able to substantially improve water quality. There is an opportunity to positively change those results by implementing a pilot watershed project that would incentivize any farming system that can prove superior in conserving soil and nutrients on the land.

Unlike previous programs, this project would provide monetary incentives for superior farming systems. These systems would be rewarded based on their actual performance; the lower the levels of phosphorus and sediment leaving the land, the greater the reward. This approach would reward the best and motivate the rest, regardless of farm size or land management system.

Eligibility for incentives relies on all farmers meeting a base level of conservation which asks farmers to meet the State agricultural performance standards and manure management prohibitions.



Contact: For more information contact
Kirstie Heidenreich, County
Conservationist, Marathon County,
210 River Drive, Wausau WI 54403
715-261-6006

The Fenwood Creek Watershed (highlighted in yellow above) drains 24,958 acres of land into the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir. Over the years, the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir has experienced fish kills due to non-point source pollution from agricultural fields.

This pilot project aims to change the way that conservation incentive programs are administered.



Maintaining living cover on the soil, like this cover crop which was interseeded into the corn during the growing season, will protect the soil after the corn is harvested and over the winter.

Old Approaches	Fenwood Pilot Project Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reward poor performers, based primarily on practice implementation • Practice criteria are prescriptive and difficult to understand • No guarantee of nutrient and sediment runoff reduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reward based on actual on-farm performance • Non-prescriptive, easy to understand, farmer has more control • Participation ensures 60-90% reduction from the state standard, for total farm phosphorous level

The time is now to implement outcome based conservation incentives to improve the health of our working lands and water.

An opportunity for a new approach to Sediment and Phosphorus Management: The Fenwood Pilot Project-Marathon County

Note: This proposal is reflects the highest priority in the Marathon County Land and Water Resource Management Plan: Staff have been directed by County Executive Committee to seek State funding for this “Pilot Watershed Project.”

Purpose:

The time has come for a new approach in Fenwood Creek Watershed with proven outcomes that will lower phosphorus and sediment levels by over 60%, one that is not prescriptive to farmers but easy to understand, and can achieve the desired outcomes. It entails a base level of conservation that all farmers must meet, requiring full implementation of the State agricultural performance standards and manure management prohibitions to be eligible for incentives. If implemented, these requirements will raise the bar for all farmers and bring them to a base level of conservation. It would also provide incentives for superior farming systems that achieve, farm scale, high performance levels by reducing sediment and phosphorus levels by a minimum of 60% lower than the State performance standards. These farmers would be rewarded for changing management based on their actual performance; the lower the levels of phosphorus and sediment leaving the land, the greater the reward. This approach would reward the best and motivate the rest, regardless of farm size or land management system.

Current Situation:

The Fenwood Watershed, as a sub-watershed of the Big Eau Pleine watershed, has been part of the past priority watershed projects. It has been targeted for nutrient management efforts, State performance standards and prohibitions, and animal waste management, yet the waters remain impaired. In fact, recent soil erosion survey results indicate erosion rates have increased slightly again since the last survey. The Fenwood Creek watershed drains approximately 39 square miles (24,958 acres) of land into the Big Eau Pleine (BEP) reservoir. The Big Eau Pleine reservoir has experienced chronic and historic water quality problems which have resulted in minor and major fish kills. The last major fish kill was in 2009, which initiated a task force to identify the problems and recommend solutions for remediation of the problems. One of which was to establish a “Pilot Project” in the Fenwood to try different strategies to increase the adoption of conservation practices proven to reduce non-point runoff. The Fenwood Creek Pilot project was established to provide education, planning, and technical assistance within the watershed to provide a blueprint for the greater Big Eau Pleine watershed and possibly statewide. The pilot project recognizes that a new approach and effort is needed.

Background and Historical Information: The Fenwood Creek is similar to many small and large scale impaired watersheds in the State of Wisconsin. Phosphorus and sediment loads are impairing the water quality of downstream water bodies from runoff pollution, primarily from agriculture. Traditional conservation approaches have had varying levels of success, but none have improved water quality to the point where the water body is removed from the DNR impaired waters listing. Past efforts have relied upon voluntary cooperation of farmers

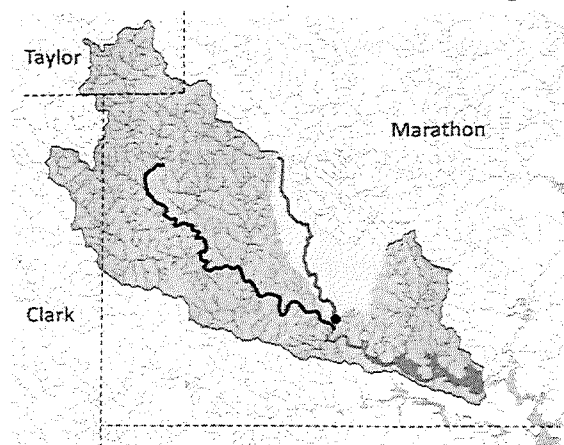


Figure 1: Fenwood Creek Watershed in Yellow-Part of Big Eau Pleine Watershed

and the use of cost sharing to ease the financial burden of practice installation. This method had little community wide engagement or support. It relied upon the experts in various government agencies to develop conservation plans for individual farmers with recommended best management practices to achieve the desired goals. The results were disappointing with 20-30% farmer participation. The current producer-led watershed groups are having similar levels of participation as well.

An opportunity for a new approach:

Require basic conservation for all land, provide incentives for superior levels of management and performance, and engage the community stakeholders in the effort:

The time has come for all landowners to meet the State performance standards and manure management prohibitions. According to State law, all agricultural lands must meet agricultural performance standards and manure management prohibitions. There is currently a requirement that cost sharing must be provided to meet these conditions. The State agricultural performance standards and manure management prohibitions were enacted in 2002 based upon the recommendations of eight years of work by the DNR task force called the Animal Waste Advisory Committee *(see footnote). Their recommendations are based upon a basic common sense set of criteria for conservation, established by the committee that should be met by all landowners. These provisions have actually been State law for 20 years, but they require an offer of cost share to enforce the rules. A requirement to enter into this pilot program to receive financial incentives is that all applicants meet these basic performance standards and prohibitions to qualify.

The common sense basic conservation criteria that all landowners would need to meet are as follows:

Agricultural performance standards

- Sheet, rill and wind erosion: All cropped fields shall meet the tolerable (T) soil erosion rate established for that soil.
- Tillage setback: No tillage operations may be conducted within 5-20 feet of the top of the channel of surface waters.
- Phosphorus index: Croplands, pastures, and winter grazing areas shall average a phosphorus index of 6 or less over the accounting period and may not exceed a phosphorus index of 12 in any individual year within the accounting period.
- Manure storage facilities: All new, substantially altered, or abandoned manure storage facilities shall be constructed, maintained or abandoned in accordance with accepted standards. Failing and leaking existing facilities posing an imminent threat to public health or fish and aquatic life or violate groundwater standards shall be upgraded or replaced.
- Process wastewater handling: There may be no significant discharge of process wastewater to waters of the state.
- Clean water diversions: Runoff from agricultural buildings and fields shall be diverted away from contacting feedlots, manure storage areas and barnyards located within water quality management areas (300 feet from a stream or 1,000 feet from a lake or areas susceptible to groundwater contamination).

- Nutrient management: Agricultural operations applying nutrients to agricultural fields shall do so according to a nutrient management plan.

Manure management prohibitions

- No overflow of manure storage facilities.
- No unconfined manure piles in a water quality management area.
- No direct runoff from feedlots or stored manure into state waters.
- No unlimited livestock access to waters of the state in locations where high concentrations of animals prevent the maintenance of adequate or self-sustaining vegetative cover.

Reward superior levels of management and performance to include the following:

- Lands must meet or exceed all of the conditions above plus:
 - Phosphorus runoff of less than 3 lbs. per acre. (Phosphorus Index <3, State standard is 6)
- Provide a new Incentive based performance system: Provides an increased incentive on each farm with greatly reduced runoff. Does not favor one type of farm size or farming system over another. It rewards superior land management practices and facilities.

Performance based incentive program for all agricultural lands:			
Total farm Phosphorus levels (lbs./acre):	Incentive installation phase first 3 years of implementation	Incentive base phase for 3 year maintenance of effort	Examples of general cropland practices required to meet incentive in the Fenwood Creek Watershed
< 3	\$20/acre/year	\$10/acre/year	Reduced tillage with cover crops/longer hay rotations with spring tillage
<2	\$30/acre/year	\$15/acre/year	Reduced tillage with cover crops, adding contouring and longer hay rotations, no winter spreading of manure
<1	\$40/acre/year	\$20/acre/year	No-till with cover crops/Managed grazing/Conservation Reserve/Tree planting/Perennial Forage, no winter spreading of manure

An example of how a farmer or landowner could earn and use this payment could be as follows: The farmer chooses to implement reduced tillage with cover crops on their 100 acre farm. This would qualify them for \$20 per acre or \$2000 per year for the first three years and \$10 per acre for the last three year or \$3000, for a grand total of \$5,000 earned incentive payment. This money could then be used for annual expenses related to implementing new practices as well as reducing risk during startup phase of a new management practice.

Annual and Total Pilot project costs, if implemented in the Fenwood Creek Watershed:

No additional cost sharing for State performance standards and prohibitions-Farmers could access traditional sources to meet these criteria, but would need to meet them to be eligible to receive incentives. One full time Conservation Specialist for 6 years: \$80,000/year with benefits, total cost of \$480,000. **Incentive payments: Goal of reducing phosphorus by an additional 26,390 lbs. Current estimated cost under this effort is \$20 per pound. Annual cost of \$527,000/year, total cost of \$3,162,000.

Total annual cost: Staffing and incentive payments \$610,000 (rounded) per year for six years.**

Engaging the Fenwood Community in water quality improvements:

Past conservation efforts have not engaged the community in what it takes to have healthy soil and the resulting improved water quality. Marathon County along with several stakeholders worked with a broad group of partners over the last year to change the approach. The outcome was a broad base group of partners who have formed "The Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation" (EPPIC). EPPIC is a vibrant and expansive community partnership based in Western Marathon County. The Fenwood Creek Watershed resides within the Big Eau Pleine watershed. EPPIC formed in late 2017 to search for solutions to soil and water quality issues within the Eau Pleine Watershed. In an effort to increase participation in land conservation, and improve soil health and water quality, the partnership was formed as a way to engage a much broader group of community stakeholders in improving the environment.

The group consists of stakeholders who represent a spectrum of interests including: farmers, farm groups, lake stewards, natural resource oriented organizations/agencies, agronomists, equipment dealers, and others. EPPIC's values can best be described by their mission statement, "Integrating resilience into the natural resources, community, and economy of the Eau Pleine Watershed." Through this mission, the group intends to develop long term strategies to improve soil health and water quality by engaging the community as a whole. Soil and water quality affect everybody in some capacity. While the issue has increasingly become more divisive over time, the goal of EPPIC is to unify people around the health and resiliency of the soil and water resources for which the economy is dependent upon to be prosperous. EPPIC will be relied upon to engage landowners and farmers at a much broader approach as all of the stakeholders work within their own respective groups to grow participation in land and water conservation.

Request on behalf of Marathon County: Marathon County conservation staff have been requested to seek "Pilot Project" funding to meet the highest priority project identified in the Land and Water Resource Management plan. The request is to seek \$610,000** per year for six years in State funding to meet the goals of the Fenwood Creek Watershed plan. *If successful, this effort will become a blueprint for addressing the water quality impairments of many parts of Marathon County, as well as within the State. In addition, it will provide the necessary information for the County Environmental Resources Committee to have a policy discussion if future projects should be incentive or targeted performance standard drive.*

*The DNR animal waste advisory committee was established in 1994 to establish a statewide set of criteria to address the agricultural runoff. It was in response to the growing list of impaired waters in Wisconsin and most notably to the 1993 water borne cryptosporidium outbreak and infection of residents in Milwaukee. This outbreak resulted in the illness of over 400,000 residents, multiple deaths and an estimated cost of 93 million dollars at the time. The outbreak was blamed on livestock manure carrying the virus running into surface waters. The committee consisted of a wide group of stakeholders. The outcome of their work was the agricultural performance standards and manure management prohibitions, which become state law in 2002.

**If the request to increase grants for county conservation staff is approved in the new State budget, this request can be reduce by \$80,000 per year, as Marathon County will receive adequate funds for this position.



Wisconsin Land+Water Conservation Association

121 S. Pinckney Street, Suite 420 • Madison, WI 53703
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Written Testimony of WI Land+Water Executive Director Matt Krueger in Support of AB 220

Assembly Committee on Environment

June 15, 2023

Chairman Oldenburg, Vice-Chair Kitchens, Ranking Member Shankland, and Committee Members,

My name is Matt Krueger. I am the executive director of WI Land+Water, a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that represents 800 boots-on-the-ground county conservation department staff and elected county land conservation committee members across the state. Our members provide technical support and trusted advice to agricultural producers and private landowners as they help them achieve their land management objectives, while meeting baseline conservation standards at the same time. On behalf of those members, I submit my testimony in support of AB 220.

The Fenwood Creek watershed is a 39 square mile area that drains into the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, and eventually, into the Wisconsin River. Though it is located in western Marathon County, there are a number of issues in the Fenwood Creek watershed that are representative of many counties and watersheds around the state.

Almost all Wisconsin counties contain agricultural areas from which excess phosphorus and sediment run off, and pollute downstream lakes and rivers. In some cases, this runoff acts as an unwanted fertilizer in waterways, causing algae blooms that can decrease property values or impact recreational use, like fishing and swimming. These polluted lakes and rivers are considered by the Dept. of Natural Resources to be “impaired,” or not meeting water quality standards; and there are a growing number of such waterways across the state.

For years, our approach to polluted runoff challenges like the ones seen in Fenwood Creek has been to use conservation practices to address resource concerns on the land, with county conservation staff playing an essential role in assisting landowners with practice design, implementation, and funding. This system has kept millions of tons of soil on farm fields and out of waterways—but it has its limits. A major limitation is that the agricultural performance standards that these conservation practices were developed to meet were only ever designed to be baseline expectations. Implementation of them helps improve water quality, but not on the scale that is necessary to fix downstream water quality concerns.

This challenge is very apparent in the Fenwood Creek watershed, and that is why this bill is innovative, and worthy of support. Producers are compensated for superior management and farming systems that go beyond basic agricultural performance standards, and their compensation is based upon showing

results. The less phosphorus and sediment that leave a farm field (and stay out of a lake or river in the process), the more compensation that producer receives. It is very straightforward, and it is likely to foster greater adoption by agricultural producers in the watershed than our traditional approach, particularly as farmers there are already very engaged in land stewardship, and peer-to-peer learning.

As conversations around the state and in this building over the past several years have demonstrated, we face growing concerns over water quality, and we are searching for new approaches. The approach proposed in this bill is one that, if successful, will potentially provide us a new and valuable tool in ensuring our farms remain profitable and well-managed, and water quality is protected at the same time.

In closing, I encourage you to support AB 220, and thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. I also want to thank Rep. Rozar and Sen. James for their leadership on this bill.

June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

Wisconsin's Green Fire supports Assembly Bill 220 relating to: funding for the Fenwood Creek watershed Pilot Project.

This bill would fund the Fenwood Creek Watershed pilot project, which is designed to reward on-farm performance to reduce phosphorous and sediment loading. **WGF believes the pilot project, if it becomes law, has the potential to establish a new direction in land and water conservation that may be implemented statewide.**

Traditional conservation approaches to improve water quality have had varying levels of success. These programs provide cost-sharing as an incentive to meet statewide Agricultural Performance Standards. This project rewards superior farming systems with cash payments, on a per acre basis to participants who exceed state performance standards by reducing phosphorous and sediment loading in waterways.

Fenwood Creek is like many small and large watersheds that are impaired by phosphorous and sediment. Participants in the watershed implement cropland practices like cover cropping, reduced or no tillage, tillage setbacks from waterways, managed grazing, and proper manure management to reduce nutrient and sediment loading in waterways. Reductions in phosphorous and sediment are verified, and participants receive their cash payments.

This unique approach incorporates resilience by engaging the farming community. Marathon County conservation staff have devoted time and effort to engage the community and emphasize that the future in agriculture depends on soil health, improved water quality, and aquatic habitat. Considering the number of impaired waters statewide, we believe it is time to **go one step further** to improve water quality and reward farming operations that are committed and can demonstrate superior performance.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Paul Heinen
Legislative Liaison, Wisconsin's Green Fire

June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support AB220: funding for the Fenwood Creek Watershed Pilot Project. Over the past three years participating in the Fenwood Pilot Program, our 164 acre farm has kept over **590 pounds of phosphorus and 574 tons of soil** out of the surface waters of Wisconsin. Through my participation in the pilot program, it has given me the resources to purchase a no-till corn planter and no-till drill. My primary reason for doing this is it saves time and labor, which is even more appealing to our farm than what these practices benefit the environment.

I grew up in Washington County and farmed in Sheboygan county before we moved to Marathon County (I now have 17 years of cropping experience in Marathon County). When we took the farm over we saw heavy erosion from moldboard plowing...as soon as you get two inches of rain, it would all run off. Being able to invest in no-till equipment and transitioning to no-till farming has helped us to see little to no erosion occurring on our fields. Being in Marathon County, I do see the benefit this brings all citizens, with attracting more people to come and enjoy the Eau Pleine reservoir and go fishing.

What I like best about the program is that we're not restricted to just one practice; we can use a combination of whatever practices we want to reduce our phosphorus index. We've been incorporating no-till corn and beans; we can also chisel plow and try to leave a heavier amount of residue on top.

If all Fenwood Watershed farmers could have access to this program I think it would be really great. Everyone can do their own thing and find their own ways to reduce phosphorus. I really like the flexibility of this program and know that it works. Please consider funding this program so that we can use the Fenwood watershed as a model for success in working with farmers for clean water in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Rodney Roskopf, **Fenwood Pilot Program Participant**

Roskopf Family Farm LLC
129303 Four Mile Rd
Edgar, WI, 54426

June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support AB220: funding for the Fenwood Creek Watershed Pilot Project. As a life-long resident in this watershed, I believe you have to start somewhere cleaning up the water in our area and if we can get more and more farmers to start farming this way, you will start seeing many more results in our area and for the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir.

I voluntarily began participating in this program because it helps and shows that I am trying to do something good for the environment to keep the Big Eau Pleine and the Wisconsin rivers clean for future generations.

I like the flexibility of the program, as you don't have to follow it step by step; you can do what practices you want for your own farm and decide how aggressive you are with your farming practice changes. You can take baby steps and do it or go all the way in and no till and cover crops and even more.

I have seen great changes for the better in our cropland. We used to have gullies in our fields all the time in the spring and now not working them as much has let us not see those gullies in our fields at all anymore. We have seen great improvements in our soil health and have kept 492 tons of soil from eroding through this program.

If we expanded this for the whole watershed it would create a positive outlook from the people from the city looking at the farmers trying to do the best they can to take care of their land and take care of our waters. Please support this program so that it can be offered to more farmers.

Sincerely,

David Bauman, **Fenwood Pilot Program Participant**

Bauman Dairy Farms
221584 Fairfield Dr.
Edgar, WI, 54426



June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

We are writing on behalf of the Marathon County Farmers Union and the Wisconsin Farmers Union to inform you and the Wisconsin Legislature of our support of the Assembly bill which will provide funding for the Fenwood Creek Pilot Watershed Project. We ask for swift action and approval of funding for this pilot project. This provisions in this bill are important because they support outcome-based practices with a proven record of success in reducing phosphorus and sediment in an impaired watershed.

The Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) is a state-wide farm organization, with farmers representing all areas of the state and all types of agriculture in our membership. The Marathon County Farmers Union is the local chapter of WFU with membership across the county. We have a strong commitment to policy that assists farmers in implementing conservation measures. The Fenwood Creek Pilot project is consistent with our goals to see funding that can support highly effective and innovative approaches to achieve both successful farming operations and improvements in water quality.

Funding for the Pilot will expand a current Marathon County effort to a 25,000-acre watershed to greatly reduce phosphorus runoff. We see this as an important model not only for Marathon County but an important template to address the most severely impaired watersheds in the State. Reducing agricultural runoff is critical to the health of Wisconsin's waterways. Less than 37% of the cropland in the State has a nutrient management plan (NMP) in place, one of the state's primary tool for reducing cropland runoff. Of the NMPs in place, in phosphorus impaired watershed like the Fenwood, few have a long-term impact on phosphorus reduction, causing the local watersheds and Wisconsin to miss phosphorus reduction goals, leaving many of our waters continually on the state's impaired list. Current efforts in Fenwood Creek are showing outcomes of 60-90% reduction in phosphorus and sediment runoff per farm by aligning incentives to farmers with outcome based measurable results.

Unlike current cost-share payments which are given to farmers for with often unknown levels of implementation, payments under the Fenwood Creek pilot are performance-based. This is the critical feature in this work. Under the program, farms that reach superior levels of phosphorus reduction receive higher per-acre incentive payments. Annual payments range from \$20 to \$40 per acre for the first three years, followed by half-payments during for the final three-year maintenance phase. Expanding this pilot project throughout the watershed would give Wisconsin vital information about the efficacy of scaling these efforts in other parts of the state as well as a tool locally to try something new, innovative with broad support.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Spaulding
President, Marathon County Farmers Union

Darin Von Ruden
President, Wisconsin Farmers Union

Cc: Kirstie Heidenreich-Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

9 June 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

I am writing on behalf of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension to confirm my support of Assembly Bill 220: The Fenwood Creek Watershed Pilot Project. As a partner of this project, a resident of Marathon County, and a statewide agricultural specialist, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of this funding to achieve the ambitious goals that are necessary for the long-term health and vitality of the Fenwood Creek watershed.

I have spent the past 10 years promoting conservation agriculture in Marathon County and across the state, and over that time I have come to understand that incremental improvements to current agricultural systems will not achieve the scale of change necessary to sustain our resources, farm economics or communities for the indefinite future. We are in need of large-scale adoption of outcome-based practices that have been proven to work – those that address phosphorus and sediment contamination in our surface waters, such as perennial cropping systems and well-managed grazing of livestock.

This pilot project is a concept that will address the scale of change that is necessary. This will be a community-supported effort that will span across the 25,000 acre Fenwood Creek watershed and reduce phosphorus and sediment contamination by 60-90%, utilizing incentive programs as the mechanism to drive outcome-based practices. Unlike other cost share programs, this will pay farmers based on results – the greater the reduction in phosphorus and sediment, the greater the payment. This is a concept that will be “ground-truthed” in the Fenwood Creek watershed, but the reality is that projects like this are needed in watersheds all across the state. The overarching goal of this project is to prove a concept that can be scaled up to benefit our entire state. Because of that, the passing of this bill is critical, has my full support, and I thank you for yours as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jason Cavadini".

Jason Cavadini
Grazing Outreach Specialist
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Division of Extension

June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

I am writing on behalf of Marathon County Farm Bureau to inform you and the Wisconsin Legislature of our support of a new bill which will provide funding for the Fenwood Creek Pilot Watershed Project. In addition, we ask for swift action and approval of funding for this pilot project. It is imperative that we put in place, outcome-based practices with a proven record of success in reducing phosphorus and sediment in an impaired watershed. In addition, this Pilot project is consistent with goals within our organization, especially our Leaders of the Land Sustainability Series, and that is to work together to provide support for funding of highly effective and innovative approaches to achieve both successful farming operations and improvements in water quality.

If this Pilot project is funded, it will expand a current effort in Marathon County to a 25,000 acre watershed to put in place a community supported effort to greatly reduce phosphorus runoff. In addition, if this project is fully funded and successful, it can put in place a model to be used not only across Marathon County but across Wisconsin to address the most severely impaired watersheds in the State.

Marathon County Farm Bureau has been a supportive of innovative opportunities to provide incentive payments for superior farming systems. In fact, some of our members are in the Fenwood and are early cooperators of this pilot. We need these systems in place or watersheds like the Fenwood, will continue to miss phosphorus reduction goals, leaving many of our waters continually on the state's impaired list.

An innovative pilot program in Marathon County's Fenwood Creek watershed is reducing phosphorus and sediment runoff between 60-90% per farm by aligning incentives to farmers with outcome based measurable results.

Unlike current cost-share payments which are given to farmers for with often unknown levels of implementation, payments under the Fenwood Creek pilot are performance-based. Under the program, farms that reach superior levels of phosphorus reduction receive higher per-acre incentive payments. Annual payments range from \$20 to \$40 per acre for the first three years, followed by half-payments during for the final three-year maintenance phase.

Expanding this pilot project throughout the watershed would give Wisconsin vital information about the efficacy of scaling these efforts in other parts of the state as well as a tool locally to try something new, innovative with broad support.

Sincerely,

Josh Schmidt
Marathon County Farm Bureau President

cc: Wisconsin Farm Bureau 1241 John Q Hammons Drive, STE 201, Madison, WI 53717
Kirstie Heidenreich-Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department

June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support AB220: funding for the Fenwood Creek Watershed Pilot Project. Over the past three years participating in the Fenwood Pilot Program, our 210 acre farm has kept over 983 pounds of phosphorus and 823 tons of soil out of the surface waters of Wisconsin.

As legislators, I feel it is important that you keep encouraging farmers to try different things to achieve conservation. This program offers flexibility offers and more options. Over the last three years, I have found that my cropland is a lot firmer and more stable; I don't have deep tillage so when it's wet it's not nearly as wet – you can still drive on it. My yields are just as good as before I made cropping changes.

I chose to participate in this program because a few years ago we were already trying minimum tillage, and this program gave me an incentive to try a little more and do a little more for conservation than I already was.

I strongly believe this program is more worthwhile than spending state money on doing big construction projects on the just a few of our farms in the state. We will see more results and participation and it is more accessible to thousands of farmers instead of just a couple hundred in the state.

Sincerely,

Jim Viegut, **Fenwood Pilot Program Participant**

221221 PIONEER DR
EDGAR, WI 54426
Edgar, WI, 54426

June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support AB220: funding for the Fenwood Creek Watershed Pilot Project. In my three years of participating in the program on our 180-acre farm, our farm has reduced our phosphorus by **1,206 pounds** **and stopped 972 tons of soil** from being eroded off fields.

The thing I like the most about this program, is it gives me so much flexibility to try things that work best for my farm. What works for me might not work for the next person and the money helps with the cost of the things I try, which really helps cover any risk.

Most importantly, we NEED more people in it and a lot of farmers around me are old and set in their ways. Lots of farmers could get their "feet wet" in the program I think we all could benefit from it. Telling them that they get to do practices that work for THEIR farm would help to get more people in to the program.

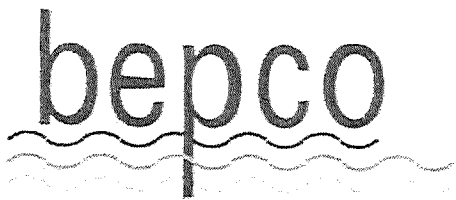
I think it is very, very important to get the word out about the great things that come from this program and to tell the new people that get into it this is not a one, two, or event three year thing, but to see the fruits of our labor takes time. I am on year five and last year was the first year I started to see a big change. It takes time for this to work. I am using less Fertilizer and getting as good, if not better, yields as I did before I started, not to mention less fuel and a lot less equipment wear and tear and just plain not in the field as much!

Please support this program so that we can continue to see this type of success from more farmers in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Keith Bauman, **Fenwood Pilot Program Participant**

120825 County Road N
Edgar, WI, 54426



Big Eau Pleine Citizens Organization o PO Box 335 o Mosinee, WI54455.0335 o www.bigeaupleine.org

June 7, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

I am writing on behalf of the Big Eau Pleine Citizens Org (BEPCO) to inform you and the Wisconsin Legislature of our support of Assembly Bill 220 regarding funding for the Fenwood Creek Pilot Watershed. In addition, we ask for immediate action and approval of funding for this pilot project. It is imperative that we put in place, outcome-based practices with a proven record of success in reducing phosphorus and sediment in an impaired watershed. In addition, this Pilot project is consistent with goals within our organization and that is to work together to provide support for funding of highly effective and innovative approaches to achieve both successful farming operations and improvements in water quality.

If this Pilot project is funded, it will expand a current effort in Marathon County to a 25,000 acre watershed to put in place a community supported effort to greatly reduce phosphorus runoff. In addition, if this project is fully funded and successful, it can put in place a model to be used not only across Marathon County but across Wisconsin to address the most severely impaired watersheds in the State.

BEPCO Purpose Statement

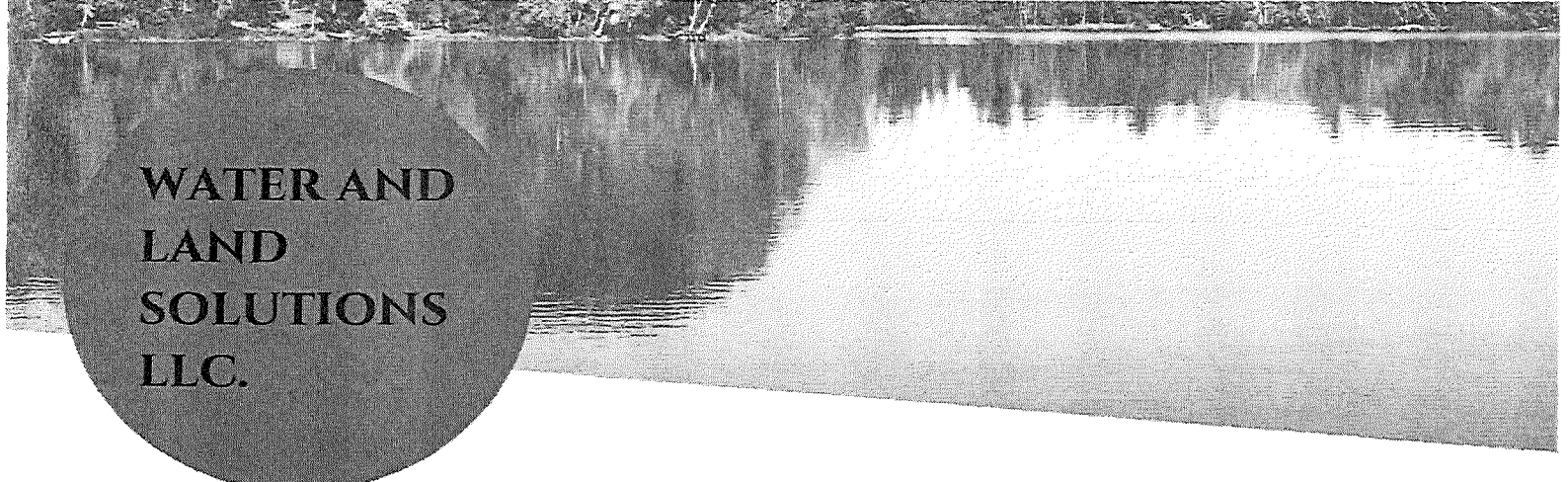
The purpose of the Big Eau Pleine Citizens Organization (BEPCO) is to preserve, protect, and improve the quality of the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, its watershed area, its surroundings; and to enhance the water quality, fishery, boating safety, and aesthetic values as a year-round public recreational facility- for today and future generations.

As a lake organization, we strongly recommend the merits of this bill for funding.
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Kennedy-Vice President BEPCO

John Kennedy



**WATER AND
LAND
SOLUTIONS
LLC.**

June 9th, 2023

Subject: Assembly Bill 220-Fenwood Creek Funding

Assembly Committee on Environment

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

Please accept this letter in strong support of Assembly 220 regarding funding for the Fenwood Creek Pilot Watershed funding.


I am strongly in favor of this bill. After working nearly 40 years in the Land Conservation field, this is the first bill which rewards the best and inspires the rest. This pilot would provide incentives for farmers to adopt farm wide superior farming systems. This would apply to farms of all sizes and management systems, making it appealing to everyone.


If Wisconsin is to have clean water and healthy soil, we must put to the test this new Pilot Watershed, supported by the strongest community lead watershed group in the State, the Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation - EPPIC, to which Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department is a strong partner. It has been proven over and over that having one group trying implement a watershed project will not be successful, whether that effort is driven by the State, County, Federal, lake groups, or Producer led watershed groups. There is no example where water quality has improved. The Fenwood offers a unique opportunity and approach because it is a true community supported watershed effort. Through this groups support, it is believed that over 80% participation can be achieved because partners in the group will have the ability to reach farmers and landowners that may otherwise choose not to participate.

In addition, there is unprecedented water quality testing, engagement with watershed residents and several years of education on superior farming practices. This funding will put in place a pilot which can prove superior farming systems can move the needle on improving water quality across a full watershed.

Sincerely,

Paul Daigle *Paul Daigle*

 715-573-1435

 2357678 Morgan Lane
Wausau, WI 54403



June 9, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

We are writing to provide information pertaining the Fenwood Creek Watershed (FCW) Pilot Project (Assembly Bill 220). For the past 4 years, our Grassland 2.0 group has been engaged with community partners in the Cloverbelt Learning Hub in which Fenwood Creek is located. Through our *Collaborative Landscape Design* processes (20+ interviews, community meetings, and computer modeling), it is increasingly apparent that the people of western Marathon County are committed to efforts that would significantly improve water quality

The community has identified a goal of reducing phosphorous runoff into Fenwood Creek by 60%. Based on the models we have developed at UW-Madison, attaining a 60% reduction in phosphorous runoff will require a transformative shift toward perennial agriculture. To meet those targets, we have documented the potential impact of the vigorous efforts that are being taken by Marathon County Planning and Zoning (CPZ) and the Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation (EPPIC) to achieve their water quality goals.

The proposed legislation is noteworthy because of the incentive structure and investment in human capital. Notably, the FCW Pilot Project is centered on performance-based incentives. If funded, Wisconsin taxpayers compensate for results that actually improve state waterways, not just document potential improvements. Also of note is the capacity of Marathon CPZ to carry out the project. Personnel, or the lack thereof, is a persistent barrier to implementing conservation agriculture practices. With these attributes the FCW Pilot Project is unique and seems likely to provide positive results. We hope that these insights are helpful and if further questions remain, please follow up by email.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'John Strauser'.

John Strauser, Scientist
Department of Agronomy, University of Wisconsin-Madison
john.strauser@wisc.edu



Randall D. Jackson, Professor of Grassland Ecology
Department of Agronomy, University of Wisconsin-Madison
rdjackson@wisc.edu



Claudio Gratton, Kellett Professor
Department of Entomology, University of Wisconsin-Madison
cgratton@wisc.edu



Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards

1735 Archer Lane, Nekoosa, WI. 54457 www.PACRS.org

June 9, 2023

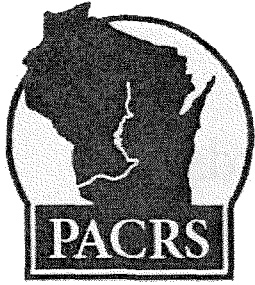
Assembly Committee on Environment
State Capitol
2 E Main Street,
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

As the lead citizen group that obtained funding for the WI River TMDL in 2009, I am writing on behalf of the Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards (PACRS) to inform you and the Wisconsin Legislature of our full support of a new bill which will provide funding for the Fenwood Creek Pilot Watershed Project. In addition, we ask for swift action and approval of funding for this pilot project. It is imperative that we put in place, outcome-based practices with a proven record of success in reducing phosphorus and sediment in an impaired watershed within the WI River Basin. This Pilot project is consistent with goals within our organization to work together to provide support for funding of highly effective and innovative approaches to achieve both successful farming operations and improvements in water quality.

If this Pilot project is funded it will expand a current effort in Marathon County to a 25,000-acre watershed to put in place a community supported effort to greatly reduce phosphorus runoff. In addition, if this project is fully funded and successful, it can put in place a model to be used not only across Marathon County but across Wisconsin to address the most severely impaired watersheds in the State.

Reducing agricultural runoff is critical to the health of Wisconsin's waterways. However less than 37% of the cropland in the State has a nutrient management plan (NMP) in place, one of the state's primary tool for reducing cropland runoff. Of the NMPs in place, in phosphorus impaired watershed like the Fenwood, few have a long-term impact on phosphorus reduction, causing the local watersheds and Wisconsin to miss phosphorus reduction goals, leaving many of our waters continually on the state's impaired list. We are encouraged that this project will greatly reduce the amount of phosphorous runoff that enters into Petenwell and Castle Rock Lakes.



Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards

1735 Archer Lane, Nekoosa, WI. 54457 www.PACRS.org

This innovative pilot program in Marathon County's Fenwood Creek watershed is reducing phosphorus and sediment runoff between 60-90% per farm by aligning incentives to farmers with outcome based measurable results.

Unlike current cost-share payments which are given with unknown levels of implementation, payments under the Fenwood Creek pilot are performance-based. Under the program, farms that reach superior levels of phosphorus reduction receive higher per-acre incentive payments. Annual payments range from \$20 to \$40 per acre for the first three years, followed by half-payments during for the final three-year maintenance phase.

Expanding this pilot project throughout the watershed would give Wisconsin vital information about the efficacy of scaling these efforts in other parts of the state as well as a tool locally to try something new, innovative with broad support.

Sincerely,

Scott Bordeau

Scott Bordeau
President
Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards

Cc: Kirstie Heidenreich Marathon County Conservationist



W606 Short Road Colby, WI 54421

June 9, 2023

Letter of Support for AB220 *An Act to create 20.115 (7) (gg) of the statutes; Relating to: funding for the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot project. (FE)*

My name is Matthew Oehmichen from Colby, Wisconsin. I am an owner and manager of an independent agriculture retailer, I serve as an advisor for the Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation farmer-led watershed group, and I help raise crops on my family's acres from our former dairy farm.

This pilot program will create an incentive approach that is performance-based. What this encourages is rewarding a farmer's progress in reducing their phosphorus discharge and soil runoff. What else makes this unique is they are allowed to approach this program in any fashion and are not limited to only one practice. This encourages proper placement of conservation implemented practices on our region's dynamic agriculture landscape, such as adaptive rotations, perennial forage, grazing, companion crops, alternative forages, and minimum till. Farmers have an arsenal of conservation methods at their fingertips.

In the growing strains of the agriculture industry our rural economy needs to have all our farms, large and small, be financially viable as well as environmentally responsible. Creating systems that implement conservation practices build fertility, improve field conditions for better plantability and harvest, diversify income, and alleviate risk from severe weather. As our industry continues to see consolidation and volatile markets our smaller operations need to have a competitive edge, and conservation gives them that. For example, interseeding companion crops into standing corn creates a synergetic relationship with the biome in the soil and corn, increases water management in the field, enhances trafficability, and creates nutrient sequestering to potentially reduce commercial inputs. Grazing, such as raising heifers for a dairy on grass pasture rotations, establishes a continuous cover of soil and livestock on the landscape that increases herd health. And better herd health leads to better milk and better cheese, like Colby cheese.

Our farms drive our rural communities. The heartbeat of our state comes from its rural communities, and small hometown farms like mine. Without them, we do not have a Wisconsin.

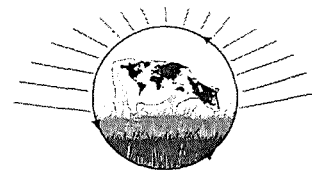
The last thought I will leave you with is if we do not support this now, then when? The opportunity is here. It is up to our leaders to help us move forward like our state motto beckons us to.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Oehmichen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matthew Oehmichen

Owner/Manager/Agronomist of Short Lane Ag Supply
Advisory Board Member of the Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation
Colby, Wisconsin



GrassWorks Inc.

June 9, 2023

To : Assembly Committee on Environment

✉ Rep.Oldenburger@legis.wisconsin.gov

📍 State Capitol
2 E Main Street
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Committee on Environment and Chairman Oldenburg,

I am writing on behalf of GrassWorks, Inc. to inform you and the Wisconsin Legislature of our support of a new bill that will provide funding for the Fenwood Creek Pilot Watershed Project. In addition, we ask for swift action and approval of funding for this pilot project. It is imperative that we put in place outcome-based practices with a proven record of success in reducing phosphorus and sediment in an impaired watershed. This pilot project includes support for managed grazing, considered to be the gold standard of conservation farming systems.

The pilot project will expand current efforts to reduce phosphorous runoff in Marathon County to the 25,000-acre Fenwood Creek watershed. If funded and successful, the Fenwood Creek Pilot project can serve as a model to improve water quality not only in Marathon County but across Wisconsin.

Reducing agricultural runoff is critical to the health of Wisconsin's waterways. However less than 37% of the cropland in the State has a nutrient management plan (NMP) in place, one of the state's primary tools for reducing cropland runoff. Of the NMPs in place, in phosphorus-impaired watersheds like the Fenwood, few have a long-term impact on phosphorus reduction, causing the local watersheds and Wisconsin to miss phosphorus reduction goals, leaving many of our waters continually on the state's impaired list.

However, the innovative pilot program in Marathon County's Fenwood Creek watershed is reducing phosphorus and sediment runoff between 60-90% per farm by aligning incentives to farmers with outcome-based measurable results.

Unlike current cost-share payments, which are given to farmers with often unknown levels of implementation, payments under the Fenwood Creek pilot are performance-based. Farms that reach superior levels of phosphorus reduction receive higher per-acre incentive payments. Annual payments range from \$20 to \$40 per acre for the first three years, followed by half-payments during the final three-year maintenance phase.

Expanding this pilot project throughout the watershed would give Wisconsin vital information about the efficacy of scaling these efforts in other parts of the state as well as provide the locals with a new and innovative tool to improve their local environment.

Sincerely,

Patty Laskowski Morren
Executive Director

📞 608-475-3361

✉ director@grassworks.org

📍 E17995 Western Rd
Hillsboro, WI 54634

🌐 grassworks.org



Friday, June 9th, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment

Re: Assembly Bill 220: Relating to: funding for the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot project.

Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union

Chair Oldenburg and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 220.

Wisconsin Farmers Union's grassroots, member-driven policy reads:

“Wisconsin Farmers Union calls for further study on how to minimize the entry of phosphorus into place. In addition, Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the use of state and federal resources to improve manure management in the area of capturing more of the phosphorus that is being put into and onto the ground.”

“Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the concept of economically rewarding land use practices that reduce nutrient loss. Any legislation that rewards these land use practices should include provisions that ensure transparency, accountability, and enforcement. Furthermore, any such legislation should be applicable to all farm-land owners, not just large landowners. Land owners with existing conservation practices should be financially rewarded for having a good land use practice already implemented.”

The Producer-led Watershed program helps farmers share information and collaborate on solutions to protect local water resources. WFU supports the continued advancement of the producer-led watershed program in WI, through the Fenwood Creek Watershed pilot project.

This incentive-based performance program for the Fenwood Watershed, encourages

farmers to do better than the phosphorus and sediment requirements, to improve water quality of the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir.

Fenwood Creek is like many small and large-scale impaired watersheds in the State of Wisconsin. Phosphorus and sediment loads are impairing the water quality of downstream water bodies from runoff pollution, primarily from agriculture. Traditional conservation

approaches have not improved water quality to the point where the water body is removed from the DNR impaired waters listing.

This pilot project mimics a current smaller-scale project running on 5 farms in the Fenwood Watershed, for the past four years. This smaller project has sequestered 6,000LBs of phosphorus to date. We support funding to widen this program, and unlike previous programs, to provide monetary incentives for superior farming systems. This project is applicable to all farm-land owners, regardless of farm size or land management system, requiring full implementation of the State agricultural performance standards and manure management prohibitions to be eligible for incentives.

If implanted, this action will bring all farmers in the Fenwood Watershed to base-level conservation standards. This program shifts from rewarding poor performers, based mainly on practice implementation of difficult to understand criteria to rewarding farms based on easy-to-understand actual on-farm performance.

Wisconsin Farmers Union would support developing a way to ensure that these pivotal programs have a permanent funding source, which would be increasingly important as councils age and continue to expand.

For too long, we have been presented with a false choice between agriculture and clean water. Wisconsin Farmers Union believes that it is possible to have clean water, thriving family farms, and vibrant rural economies, and that farmers can be champions in this effort. All of us have an interest in ensuring our water is clean and safe for ourselves, our environment, and future generations.

Thank you for this opportunity to share Wisconsin Farmers Union's thoughts on this issue.

Sincerely,

Michelle Ramirez-White

Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union