



# DONNA M. ROZAR

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 69<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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## Testimony before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

SB 220

May 10, 2023

Thank you Chair Cowles, Vice-Chair Wimburger, and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy for holding this hearing on SB 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 agricultural 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 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.

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 area. 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 would 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 is to be provided annually to the relevant standing committees in the Assembly and Senate. The second is 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.



May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Senator Cowles, Chair

Senator Wimberger, Vice-Chair

Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

**Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 220**

***Relating to: funding for the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot project***

Dear Chairman Cowles, Vice-Chair Wimberger, 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 approached 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

23<sup>rd</sup> Senate District

[Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov)



## Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

5 May 2023

Senator Jesse James  
Room 319 South  
State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator James,

I am writing on behalf of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension to confirm my support of Senate 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



May 8, 2023

Wisconsin State Capitol  
2 E Main St,  
Madison, WI, 53703

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

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



W606 Short Road Colby, WI 54421

May 8, 2023

*Letter of Support for SB220 An Act to create 20.115 (7) (ag) 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

Matthew Oehmichen

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



## Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards

1735 Archer Lane, Nekoosa, WI. 54457    [www.PACRS.org](http://www.PACRS.org)

May 4, 2023

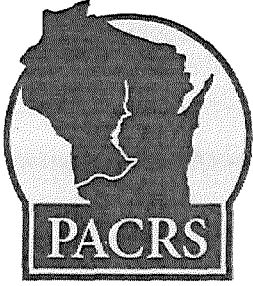
Senator Jesse James  
Room 319 South  
State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707  
[Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov)

Senator James,

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. In addition, 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](http://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





Senator Jesse James  
Room 319 South  
State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

May 4, 2023

Dear Senator James,

I am writing on behalf of River Alliance of Wisconsin to express our support for 2023 SB 220, the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot project. River Alliance is a state-wide nonpartisan non-profit organization that empowers Wisconsin's citizens to protect and restore the state's water. We have more than 1500 members and provide capacity support for many lake and river associations, as well as farmer-led watershed groups. We have worked with and have strong relationships with farmers in Marathon County and with its producer-led watershed group, the Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation (EPPIC).

Agricultural runoff, and the nutrients, pesticides, and herbicides it carries into surface and groundwater, continues to be a major obstacle to a healthy clean environment for Wisconsinites. The Total Maximum Daily Load assessment for the Wisconsin River requires major reductions in phosphorus to meet its targets, and the Fenwood Creek watershed is one of the high priority basins for meeting this reduction. Many farmers in the state have stepped up, supported by state incentive programs, to put in new field practices designed to reduce nutrient loss. While rates of practice adoption have risen, they are not widespread enough to get us to the water quality outcomes we urgently need.

The Fenwood Creek Pilot Project represents a novel approach to incentivizing water protection by rewarding farmers for actual reductions in phosphorus loss rather than paying them simply for adopting practices that may or may not result in actual outcomes. This allows farmers greater latitude in how they achieve these outcomes. It listens to farmers who have long said that they are the best authorities on how to achieve conservation outcomes on their land. Pay for performance systems are more accountable to taxpayers who fund incentive programs while still supporting farmers' economic transition to conservation practices. The success of this pilot project could make Wisconsin a model for how incentive programs work in other parts of the country.

We would like to reiterate how incredibly important it is for a program like this to have secure funding year after year. It asks participating farmers to make a commitment that will likely last several years and may alter the way they are farming. There is a responsibility, given this, to make sure that the program has the resources to make good on that commitment to farmers who are willing to participate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Tiboris', written in a cursive style.

Michael Tiboris  
Policy Director  
River Alliance of Wisconsin  
mtiboris@wisconsinrivers.org  
(608) 257-2424x125



May 4, 2023

Senator Jesse James  
Room 319 South  
State Capital  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Senator James:

We are writing to provide information pertaining the Fenwood Creek Watershed (FCW) Pilot Project (Senate 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](mailto:john.strauser@wisc.edu)



Randall D. Jackson, Professor of Grassland Ecology  
Department of Agronomy, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
[rdjackson@wisc.edu](mailto:rdjackson@wisc.edu)



Claudio Gratton, Kellett Professor  
Department of Entomology, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
[cgratton@wisc.edu](mailto:cgratton@wisc.edu)



UNITED TO GROW  
FAMILY AGRICULTURE

May 8, 2023

**Senator Jesse James**  
Room 319 South  
State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator James:

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 Senate 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

117 West Spring St. • Chippewa Falls, WI 54729 • Phone: 715-723-5561 • Website: [www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com)  
Madison Office: 30 W. Mifflin St., Ste 905 • Madison, WI 53703



Big Eau Pleine Citizens Organization • PO Box 335 • Mosinee, WI 54455-0335 • [www.bigeaupleine.org](http://www.bigeaupleine.org)

May 8, 2023

Dear Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

I am writing on behalf of the Big Eau Pleine Citizens Org (BEPCO) to inform you and the Wisconsin Legislature of our support of Senate 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

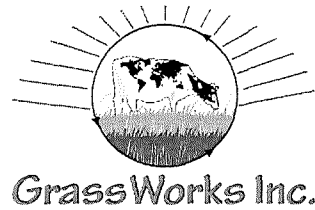
*The purpose of the Big Eau Pleine Citizens Organization (BEPCO) is to preserve, protect, and improve the quality of the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, its watershed area, its surroundings; and to enhance the water quality, fishery, boating safety, and aesthetic values as a year-round public recreational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

As a lake organization, we strongly recommend funding this grant proposal.  
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Kennedy-Vice President BEPCO

*John Kennedy*



GrassWorks Inc.

May 9, 2023

**To : Senator Jesse James**

✉ [Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov)

📍 Room 319 South  
State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Senator James,

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](mailto:director@grassworks.org)

📍 E17995 Western Rd  
Hillsboro, WI 54634

🌐 [grassworks.org](http://grassworks.org)



May 8, 2023

State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support SB220: 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 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

May 8, 2023

State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support SB220: 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



**WATER AND  
LAND  
SOLUTIONS  
LLC.**

May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Subject: Senate Bill 220-Fenwood Creek Funding

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

Senator Cowles, Senator Winmberger, Senator Tomczyk, Senator Wirch, and Senator Hesselbein

Please accept this letter in strong support of Senate 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



Tuesday May 9th, 2023

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

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

**Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union**

Chair Cowles and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate 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.”***

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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.

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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

May 8, 2023

State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support SB220: 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



May 8, 2023

State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

As a Fenwood Pilot Program participant since 2020, I support SB220: 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

## 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.

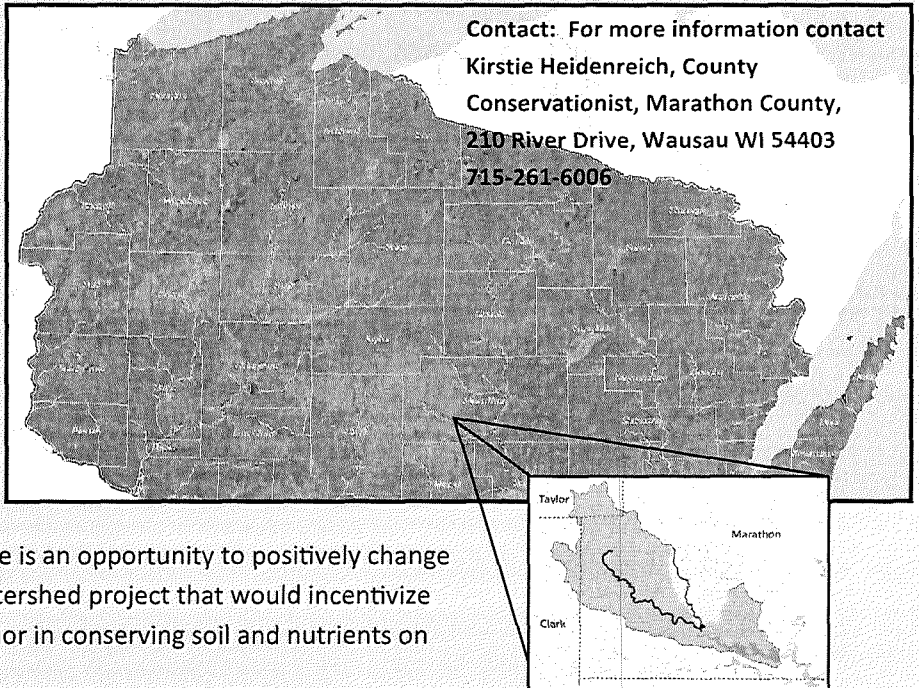
The Fenwood Creek Watershed is similar to many impaired watersheds in the State of Wisconsin. Phosphorus and soil sediment loads are impairing the water quality of downstream water bodies primarily through agricultural runoff. Traditional conservation approaches have had varying levels of success, but 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.



*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.*



**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.**

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

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



**Wisconsin Land+Water Conservation Association**

121 S. Pinckney Street, Suite 420 • Madison, WI 53703  
(608) 441-2677 • wisconsinlandwater.org

**Testimony of WI Land+Water Executive Director Matt Krueger in Support of Senate Bill 220**

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

May 10, 2023

Chairman Cowles, Vice-Chair Wimberger, 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 SB 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 SB 220, and thank you for the opportunity to provide comment today. I also want to thank Sen. James and Rep. Kozar for their leadership on this bill. I am happy to answer any questions committee members might have.





Wednesday 10th, 2023

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

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

**Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union**

Chair Cowles and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate 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.”***

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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



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**Tenzin Botsford**- Vice President Marathon Co. Farmers Union

245423 State Hwy 97

Athens, Wi 54411

(715) 409-1738

reddoorfamilyfarm@gmail.com

May 8 th , 2023

Subject: Senate Bill 220-Fenwood Creek Funding

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

Senator Cowles, Senator Winmberger, Senator Tomczyk, Senator Wirch, and Senator Hesselbein

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

I am strongly in favor of this bill. It is past time for Ag bills and programs which reward the best and inspire 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 Farmers Union is an active partner. It has been proven over and over that having one group trying to 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 group's 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,

Tenzin Botsford