



▲ **“Thankful” | Apostle Islands National Lakeshore**

This is a photo of me taken by Linda Tomsevic in Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Linda and I are both volunteers with Team River Runner. During our September 2019 kayak trip for disabled military veterans, Linda noticed the late afternoon sun lighting up the spot along the cliff where I was sitting in my kayak. I extended my arms, thankful for the amazing experiences everyone had on this unforgettable five-day trip.

– Photo: Linda “LT” Tomsevic, submitted by Ken Braband, Green Bay

## Photo Contest Winners!

We invited you to send in your favorite water images for our recent photo contest. We’ve chosen three winners from nearly 100 entries! Here are the three winning images selected by River Alliance staff based on the theme “WONDER.”



◀ **“Early Morning Mist” | Wisconsin River**

I took this photo in August during a four-day solo kayak trip on the lower Wisconsin River. I started just below the Prairie Du Sac hydro dam and ended on the Mississippi River a few miles down river from the confluence.

– Peter Spence, Oconomowoc



▲ **“My Boys” | Eau Claire River**

My boys enjoying the sounds of the Eau Claire River.  
– Kelly Reyer, Oshkosh

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Green Bay/Lake Michigan  
[Photo courtesy Barry Kalpinski.]



## It's Time for a Wisconsin Water Agenda

By Raj Shukla

It's not a coincidence that Governor Evers named 2019 "The Year of Clean Drinking Water." It isn't an accident that the legislature formed a Water Quality Task Force. It's you. They heard your calls, your testimony, and your votes. But despite all the talk and some small steps forward, leaders in the Capitol fell far short of what we need to do to keep our rivers, lakes and groundwater clean and safe for everyone in Wisconsin.

Farmers who work to achieve the only agricultural water stewardship standard in the world through our Clear Water Farms program will get some help from the state government in the coming years. That's a good thing and represents genuine progress toward a food system that keeps our streams and rivers free of pollution.

Unfortunately, elected officials are failing Wisconsin communities on issues like PFAS and lead pipes. In fact, the Water

Quality Task Force addressed only 4 of the 15 most frequently mentioned public concerns during more than a dozen public hearings held across Wisconsin last summer.

The reality of more devastating flooding on the horizon hasn't moved the needle far enough. The realities of algae-covered lakes hasn't sparked urgent action. Even the knowledge that cancer-causing chemicals are lurking in communities from Marinette to Madison has generated only a tepid response from many elected officials. It's not enough. In fact, the inaction in Madison is dangerous given the way Washington has turned its back on protections that have safeguarded our waters for decades.

Our elected officials clearly have not felt enough pressure to take on the threats to public health and our rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater.

**We are stepping up to make change.**

In the last six months River Alliance has initiated a 3-year project to advance a Wisconsin Water Agenda that safeguards water resources for generations. (See an update on this from staff member Bill Davis on Page 4.)

The Wisconsin Water Agenda is a blueprint for action that protects Wisconsin's waters and public health for many years to come. Think of it as a "Green New Deal" for water in Wisconsin.

In 2020 we will be organizing to build on the tremendous energy our members and partners have shown to protect and restore Wisconsin water. River Alliance will soon kick off our plan to unite Wisconsinites in a new way. You are a huge part of how we will succeed.

We'll ask a lot of you, but no less than what our state's communities and most precious water resources deserve. Stay tuned and stay active. There is much more to come.



## A Note from Karen

By Karen Bednar

As River Alliance's new Development Director, I look forward to partnering with you through a philanthropic program that builds access to clean, abundant water for everyone in Wisconsin. I am honored to work alongside you to protect and restore Wisconsin's waters, and want to share a bit about my background and personal connections to water and conservation in our state, and beyond!

I grew up on a terminal moraine that divides two watersheds: the Six-Mile and Pheasant Branch with the Black Earth Creek. Coming full circle, my graduate Water Resources Management Practicum at UW-Madison focused on the management of phosphorus in the Six-Mile Creek Watershed. I've spent summers working in community-based wetland restoration in the lowest wetlands of New Orleans and conducted hydro-ecological research in the highest subalpine meadows of Yosemite. I assisted the Village of La Farge in the implementation of components of a post-flood Economic and Recreation Development Plan near the Kickapoo River. As a restoration ecologist with The Prairie Enthusiasts, I gained firsthand knowledge of the connectedness of upland and lowland restoration efforts. As a conservation biologist with the Department of Natural Resources, I contributed to the restoration of State Natural Areas and protected listed species. Later in my career, I worked for the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Water Resources Program. I also supported the water protectors and Moondancers' solidarity at Standing Rock Reservation.



Lake Mendota, Madison, WI.  
[Photo courtesy Jyothi Froemming.]

In the Madison area, I translated my water work to community development and raised funds with Common Wealth Development. I recently completed a community fellowship in Social Innovation and Sustainability Leadership at Edgewood College. Currently, at River Alliance, I am building on all of this—10 years of multifaceted experience in water conservation and 5 years in fundraising. The importance of water flows throughout my life.

I want to thank you for your membership. You are one of 1,500 members who contribute to nearly 40% of River Alliance's annual operating budget. Your impact is simultaneously profound and practical. Keep an eye out for fun and meaningful ways to give in future issues of *WaterWays*, or contact me to find the best fit for you to turn your gifts into actions that are healing and transformative for our waters. I look forward to meeting you in the coming months, and/or connecting with you via phone or email.



# A Bird's-Eye View: (Some of) Wisconsin's Pressing Water Problems

By Allison Werner and Michael Tiboris

Wisconsin is fortunate to have an abundance of water resources. However, communities around the state are facing very serious water issues that negatively impact public health, our clean water economy, tourism, and recreation.

Some of the top water concerns were brought to light during the 2019 Speaker's Water Quality Task Force hearings across the state. Hundreds of people, state agencies and local government representatives testified about water quality issues in Wisconsin.

Frequent issues addressed at the hearings included: PFAS, lead, nitrate and nonpoint pollution. Here are some basics on some of Wisconsin's pressing water problems, with the caveat that this list is not exhaustive. There are more water issues—from flooding to mining pollution to high-cap wells to aquatic invasive species—that River Alliance will continue to address in our ongoing work.



PFAS, aka "forever chemicals," have made the headlines recently because they have been found in drinking and surface water in Wisconsin. Marinette, Peshtigo, Rhinelander and Madison are some of the communities that have found PFAS in their water.

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are a

family of 3,000+ human-made chemicals that have been used in commercial and industrial applications since the 1940s. PFAS are harmful chemicals that build up in the body and environment. PFAS are found in non-stick coatings, waterproof fabrics, some firefighting foams, food packaging, and other products.

Studies in humans have shown many health effects from PFAS including decreased fertility in women, increased risk of high blood pressure and pre-eclampsia in pregnant women, increased risk of thyroid disease, and lower infant birth weights. The main human exposures to PFAS are from ingestion, including drinking contaminated water, eating food with PFAS-containing packaging, and eating fish caught from PFAS-contaminated water.

Legislation and rules have been proposed to begin to address this large problem. These policies are intended to set drinking, surface, and groundwater standards for some PFAS chemicals; study the human and ecological impacts; and provide funding for the collection of firefighting foam. These are a start to understand and clean up PFAS contamination. However, we need to make sure Wisconsin actually passes standards that are protective of human health. A lengthy rule-making process has begun. The Evers Administration is proposing a standard, based on independent peer-reviewed research, of 20 ppt (parts per trillion). Industry is already pushing for a less protective standard.

You can learn more about PFAS from two of the organizations that have taken the lead on PFAS, Clean Wisconsin and S.O.H2O (find this group on Facebook). And, see the film "Dark Waters."



Lead is a naturally-occurring metal that can be found in paint, soil, plumbing components and gasoline. There is no known safe level of lead exposure. Exposure in early childhood has been linked to decreased IQ and behavioral disorders. Today, there are an estimated 200,000 lead service lines remaining in communities

across Wisconsin and 6% of children in Wisconsin have tested positive for lead poisoning.

The Water Quality Task Force recommendations did not include new legislation related to lead. The report did endorse two bills, The "SCHOOL Acts," that require public and private schools, child care providers, and camps to test their drinking water for lead and take action when the results are above the federal drinking water standards. These bills are an important step toward protecting children's health. However, we also need more funding to remove and replace lead lateral pipes to protect Wisconsinites from dangerous lead exposure via drinking water.



Nitrates are often found in groundwater due to fertilizer and manure applied to crop fields. The Wisconsin DNR estimates that more than 40,000 private wells and 300 public water systems exceed the nitrate health standard of 10mg/L. The estimated cost of abandoning and replacing these wells is \$440M.

When nitrates get into our drinking water, they can pose health risks. Nitrates can impact the blood's ability to carry oxygen. Drinking water with high levels of nitrates is unsafe for everyone, but especially for babies and pregnant women. High levels of nitrates can cause "blue baby syndrome" in infants. Some studies suggest that high levels of nitrates may also cause birth defects, thyroid problems, and cancer.

Solutions need to address the source of the pollution. The Wisconsin DNR is implementing and developing new targeted performance standards in regions of the state that have high contamination levels. The Water Quality Task Force also proposed a new nitrogen optimization pilot program that provides grants to farmers to implement projects that reduce nitrogen loading. Results may take years, but these changes will have a lasting impact on water quality.

For homeowners, the first step is to find out if you are in a high-risk area. Contact your local health department. They can connect you to programs to test your drinking water. You may qualify for funding through the state's well compensation program.



A lot of water contamination comes from single "point" sources, like pipes discharging pollutants from factories or wastewater plants. However, the leading cause of water pollution in the US is "nonpoint source" pollution, which comes from diffuse places, like farm fields and street gutters, but collects in surface

waterways and groundwater to cause serious problems. This sort of pollution is more difficult to control and is much less stringently regulated. Agriculture is the largest contributor to nonpoint pollution in Wisconsin. Farmers land-use decisions disturb the soil and add fertilizers and chemicals which wash off into surface waters.

Controlling and regulating agricultural nonpoint pollution was a major theme during the Water Quality Task Force hearings. The Task Force has since proposed several bills that will provide support for farmers and county staff to address the problems. These include the "Assistance to Farmers Bill," which supports grazing practices, cover crop adoption, water stewardship certifications for farms, and producer-led watershed protection grants.

River Alliance believes this legislation is a positive step toward agricultural nonpoint pollution control. Among the bills is \$250,000 of funding to carry out Alliance for Water Stewardship certifications on individual farms across the state. This certification is the one River Alliance's Clear Water Farms program uses. The funding will help us to bring more farms into the Clear Water Farms program, which is designed to build support in the farming community for increased water stewardship practices. These bills are far from a final answer to Wisconsin's agricultural nonpoint pollution challenges, but they're a real start.



Stay informed on these issues and ways YOU can get involved.

Sign up for our e-newsletter and Action Alerts at: [wisconsinrivers.org/newsletter-signup](https://www.wisconsinrivers.org/newsletter-signup)

# Dams Remain an Important Part of River Alliance's Work

River Alliance of Wisconsin has a long history with dams. In the organization's early days River Alliance was a leader in dam removal in Wisconsin. Though this work is a smaller part of our organization today, River Alliance is still engaged in the relicensing of hydroelectric dams and this work is an important way to protect and restore Wisconsin's rivers.

The federal government, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), has jurisdiction over most hydroelectric dams in Wisconsin. River Alliance's role is to leverage opportunities for restoration, mitigation, and enhancement for impacted rivers during the license renewal process. Most hydroelectric dam licenses are renewed every 40 years. When a renewal comes up, we have a once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity to make improvements. Improvements can include increasing recreational access (boat landings, canoe portages, signage), increasing water levels and instream flows in the river during fish spawning time, managing invasive species, and promoting upstream and downstream fish passage and helping to design such structures.

River Alliance is fortunate to have Jim Fossum as our hydroelectric consultant for this work. (Prior to this, Jim worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 26 years.)

Jim is currently assisting River Alliance with long-term hydroelectric projects on the Menominee River, the Pine River and the Lower Chippewa River. We are



Breakwater Falls (Pine River Flowage). River Alliance member John Roberts has been a tireless and effective advocate for the Pine River (a State Wild River) and Breakwater Falls in Florence County. [Photo courtesy John Roberts.]

currently in discussions with partners about meeting the obligations set forth in the Wilderness Shores Settlement Agreement concerning the fate of the Pine Dam—specifically, will the dam be relicensed or removed. Stay tuned for updates on these projects and our continued work to protect and restore rivers impacted by dams.

## Update on River Alliance's Wisconsin Water Agenda

By Bill Davis



Water is a fundamental need for all people and the environment. We need a water management system in Wisconsin that will deliver abundant water, in perpetuity, that can be used for all purposes without risk by humans or the environment.

It is clear that our current system—while it has made significant progress from the

conditions in the 1960's—cannot get us where we need to be. (See the summary of issues on Page 3 for examples of this.) As Raj mentioned in the lead article, River Alliance's Wisconsin Water Agenda is working on the elements and design of a system that can protect our waters and communities.

River Alliance has recently conducted two strategy sessions with leaders from across the state, including tribal

leaders, academics, business people and grassroots leaders. We're calling this group "the Core Team" and they've made exciting progress toward laying out the basic principles that must govern a new system. We look forward to sharing more details with you in the next issue of *Waterways*. In the meantime, if you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

## HELLOS:

### KAREN BEDNAR

Join us in welcoming Karen Bednar as River Alliance's new Development Director. She brings experience in community development and natural resources, and in the past has worked as a fund development director, a tribal water regulatory and restoration specialist, and as a conservation biologist.



### CATHY DOW

We are delighted to welcome Cathy Dow as River Alliance's new Business Manager. Cathy brings 17+ years of small business and nonprofit bookkeeping experience to her role with River Alliance. As an avid outdoorswoman, Cathy is excited to be able to use her skills to help River Alliance of Wisconsin pursue its mission and goals.



### ELLEN VOSS

We are pleased to welcome Ellen Voss as River Alliance's new La Crosse Area Aquatic Invasive Species Manager. Ellen has worked extensively throughout the US, Africa, and South America and brings over 15 years of aquatic conservation, fisheries, and science communication experience to this role.



## WELCOME TO THE BOARD:

### DAVE FOWLER

River Alliance is honored to welcome Dave Fowler to our Board of Directors. Dave worked on water resource issues for 36 years with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD). He is most proud of the Flood Management work removing more than 300 residential and commercial structures from the regulatory flood plain, the design and construction of eight major flood management projects, the restoration and rehabilitation of more than 15 miles of channelized urban streams, and his role in starting the MMSD Green Seams program (a land acquisition program to protect natural flood storage). Dave retired from MMSD in 2016. His current role is Senior Project Manager at the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM).



### KRISTIN SCHULTHEIS

Kristin Schultheis's life work is dedicated to building community-wide expertise and partnerships for the care and preservation of our natural environment. Using her training as a soil ecologist, Kristin advances research and new innovative practices to support urban and rural land restoration efforts. She currently works for OTIE, the engineering and science arm of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, as a project manager and technical expert. Kristin is a life-long paddler of Wisconsin's waters. River Alliance is proud to welcome Kristin to our Board.



## GOODBYE:

### MIRIAM GRUNES

We are deeply grateful to Miriam Grunes, River Alliance's former Business Manager. Miriam's skills and dedication to keeping our office operations running smoothly were unrivaled. We will also miss her incredible cooking and baking talents, as well as her green thumb. We wish her the very best in her next endeavor!



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