

Wisconsin Groundwater Coordinating Council (GCC) Meeting Minutes

Date: November 14th, 2025

Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Location: WGNHS Mount Horeb Research Collections and Educational Center, 211 S. Blue Mounds Street, Mount Horeb and via Zoom

1. Meeting Opening and Approval of Previous Minutes

- **GCC Members Present:** Steve Elmore (DNR), Travis Wagner (DSPS), Christy Remucal (UW-Madison), Steve Dirks (Governor's Representative), Sue Swanson (WGNHS), Robby Personette (DATCP), and Sarah Yang (DHS), Barry Paye (DOT).
- **Introductions:** Steve Elmore led introductions for members and guests both in the room and online.
- **Minutes Approval:** The minutes from the August 15, 2025, meeting were reviewed and approved unanimously.

2. FY 2027 Joint Solicitation RFP Update — Jen Hauxwell (UW System)

A record 20 proposals were received for the FY 2027 Joint Solicitation, significantly higher than the typical 9 to 16 seen in previous years. Submissions covered various groundwater quality issues (PFAS, nitrate, microplastics, pathogens) and quantity concerns (recharge, base flow). Proposals requested a total of \$1.2 million for the first year, exceeding the available funds of approximately \$478,000. Peer reviews are underway through December, with final funding notifications expected in February 2026.

3. Technical Presentation: Characterizing Dispersed Sources of PFAS — Kaitlyn Gruber (UW-Madison)

This presentation focused on "dispersed sources"—scattered or widespread locations where PFAS exists but is not linked to a single manufacturing point.

The research analyzed 16 landfill leachates, 8 hauled septage samples, 7 municipal influents, and 17 different types of biosolids from across Wisconsin.

LCMS (Liquid Chromatography Mass Spectrometry) was used to quantify 36 known compounds. EOF (Extractable Organic Fluorine) was used as a proxy for detecting fluorinated compounds, including unknown or non-targeted PFAS compounds.

Key Findings by Source:

- **Landfill Leachate:** Contained the highest aqueous concentrations (up to 36,600 parts per trillion), primarily consisting of perfluoroalkyl carboxylic acids (PFCAs).
- **Biosolids:** Concentrations were on the order of parts per billion (up to 1,300 ppb). Only one of the 17 samples exceeded the DNR's interim guidance of 150 ppb for land application.

- **Septage & Municipal Influent:** Found to have higher amounts of unknown PFAS compared to other sources. The concentrations were generally on the same order of magnitude (30 to 250 parts per trillion).
- **Well Drilling Aids:** The study also tested liquid foaming agents used in drilling; most contained very little PFAS, though one sample showed levels similar to those found in biosolids.

4. Technical Presentation: Remediation and Redevelopment (RR) PFAS Updates — Trevor Nobile (DNR)

Trevor Noble provided a presentation on how the DNR manages contamination and the current state of PFAS sites in Wisconsin.

The Remediation and Redevelopment (RR) program operates under Statute 292 (the "Spills Law") and the NR 700 series, which acts as the "cookbook" for cleaning up contaminated sites.

Current PFAS Site Statistics (as of Nov 2025):

- Total PFAS Sites: 185.
- Open Cases: 133 environmental repair cases.
- Closed Cases: 52 cases (mostly one-time spills or AFFF/firefighting foam deployments).

Most active sites are currently in the Site Investigation phase. The immediate priority for these sites is the mitigation of risk to drinking water rather than full-scale remediation.

Town of Stella (Oneida County) Update:

- This area has some of the highest recorded PFAS levels in private wells, with samples ranging from 10,000 to 40,000 parts per trillion.
- The DNR has extended sampling offers to all residents within a three-mile radius of the town hall.
- A **Superfund Site Assessment** by the EPA is underway for this area to determine if federal resources are needed for long-term cleanup.
- **Treatment Technologies:** The council discussed that standard granulated activated carbon (GAC) is typically designed for levels around 1,500 ppt; areas like Stella with much higher concentrations may require "treatment trains" using multiple technologies in succession (like GAC followed by Ion Exchange)

5. Agency updates

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) – Robby Personette

The department highlighted its continued collaboration with the DNR on groundwater and surface water sampling efforts, with staff currently working to finalize both the 2024 Field Monitoring Report and the 2024 Surface Water Report. Regarding nitrogen management, DATCP announced an upcoming presentation for late November focused on the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Project, which will examine how field data interacts with nutrient

management tools like "Snap Plus". Additionally, the agency noted that the Agrochemical Cleanup Program (ACP) has nearly depleted its excess funding, leading to the expectation that full program fees may need to be reinstated by May 2026 to continue payouts.

Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (WGNHS) – Sue Swanson

The survey established several mapping priorities for the upcoming year, specifically targeting bedrock geologic mapping in Calumet County and Barron County due to vulnerability of groundwater. In addition to ongoing hydrostratigraphy studies in Grant County, the agency recently released a comprehensive report and map documenting the geology of the Baraboo Hills and the first three maps in a new series focused on the Driftless Area. To support public education, the WGNHS also launched a self-paced online "Water Wellness" course in partnership with UW-Stevens Point to help private well owners better understand well construction and water test results.

Governor's Representative - Steve Diercks

Representative Steve Dirks reported on the state of agricultural research, noting a particularly long growing season and the progress of \$275,000 in competitive grants for projects investigating irrigation water, nitrates, and neonicotinoids. He specifically highlighted a five-year field project that utilizes lysimeters on a 10-to-15-acre plot to track water movement and nutrient leaching in real-world agricultural conditions.

Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) – Travis Wagner

Following the retirement of Brad Johnson, Travis Wagner has assumed the lead role in managing the state's network of over 750,000 septic systems. He reported that the "Wisconsin Fund," a long-standing grant program providing financial assistance to low-income families for septic system replacements, is officially set for elimination as of June 30, 2025. Furthermore, the agency's technical advisory committee has recommended an indefinite suspension of the use of hydrographs for setting septic system limits while further research is conducted to improve accuracy.

Department of Transportation (DOT) – Barry Paye

The DOT provided an update on its winter maintenance and salt reduction efforts, reporting that the number of counties utilizing brine application instead of traditional rock salt has expanded to 32. This transition is intended to maintain road safety while significantly reducing the amount of salt that migrates into the groundwater table. The agency noted that while equipment costs remain a barrier for some counties, the transition is beneficial for both the environment and long-term maintenance budgets.

Department of Health Services (DHS) – Sarah Yang

DHS introduced Jordan Murray as the new groundwater toxicologist and shared progress on the "Be Well Informed" website, a tool that allows private well owners to enter their lab results and receive automatic comparisons against existing health guidelines. The agency also confirmed that it currently maintains drinking water health advisory levels for 18 different PFAS compounds. Efforts continue within their biomonitoring group to study the presence of pesticides

and metals in farmworkers and private wells, with plans to begin hiring a new chief medical officer in early 2026.

University of Wisconsin System (UWS) – Christy Remucal

The UW System reported that it is closely monitoring federal budget developments, particularly regarding the National Institutes of Water Resources, as current marks in the House and Senate suggest potential funding increases. On the outreach front, the university recently hosted federal delegation staffers on campus to showcase PFAS research and other state-funded groundwater projects, emphasizing the continued relevance of these issues to congressional representatives.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Steve Elmore

The DNR is currently managing several significant revisions to state administrative codes. The NR 500 series (landfill rules) updates became effective on October 1st, specifically affecting groundwater monitoring requirements under NR 507. Looking ahead, revisions to NR 812 (well construction) and NR 146 (well driller licensing) are expected to go into effect in March or April 2026. Regarding water quality standards, the DNR is drafting rules for NR 140 to establish groundwater standards for six PFAS compounds, with public comment periods expected next year. Additionally, three separate revisions are underway for NR 809 (public water supply) to incorporate federal EPA standards for PFAS and lead and copper, as well as various technical edits requested by stakeholders.

The ARPA-funded well compensation grant program is winding down, having obligated its full \$5 million budget. This funding round supported 223 well replacements and 46 well-filling and sealing projects. Over the entire life of the program across three rounds, approximately 900 grants were awarded to help private well owners address contamination from PFAS, nitrates, and other pollutants.

The agency provided a detailed breakdown of recent PFAS private well sampling across Oneida County:

- Town of Stella: Sampling has expanded to a three-mile radius from the town hall; recent results showed only one of 11 new samples exceeding health advisories.
- Town of Crescent: Out of 25 results, seven were above DHS state drinking water health advisories.
- Town of Pine Lake: Both of the two initial results were above DHS state drinking water health advisories.
- Other Towns: Results in Newbold (2 of 21) and Sugar Camp (1 of 6) showed sporadic exceedances, while all four samples in the Town of Pelican were "no detect."

Of the 1,900 active public water systems in Wisconsin that have sampled for PFAS, approximately 30% had detections, and 2% exceeded the state's current health index. While only three systems currently violate the existing 70 parts per trillion (ppt) MCL, the DNR identified 94 systems that will likely exceed the new, stricter EPA standards once they are formally promulgated in Wisconsin.

A major highlight of the update was the development of "aquifer penetration graphs." These tools illustrate how contaminants like nitrates, arsenic, and PFAS move through the soil and at what depths they are typically found. Currently, nitrate graphs are available on the DNR website to help well drillers determine how deep to case wells to avoid contaminated water. The agency is working to expand these into an interactive public dashboard where users can filter by contaminant and county.

6. Council Membership and Closing remarks

The council took a moment to acknowledge the contributions of departing members Jim Zellmer (DNR), Brad Johnson (DSPS), and Sheryl Bedno (DHS). It was also noted that Joe Van Rossum is now serving as the new GCC Chair.

The meeting concluded with the setting of 2026 meeting dates. Notably, the February meeting will be decoupled from the research funding meeting (which is moving to January). The scheduled dates for 2026 are February 13, May 8, August 14, and November 13. The meeting was adjourned following a motion by Steve and a second by Christie.