



## Wisconsin Land+Water Conservation Association

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### Memo

To: Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Board  
From: WI Land+Water  
Date: October 28, 2020  
Subject: Recommendations for Addressing Climate Change Resilience in Land and Water Resources Management Plans

#### Background

The Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Board (LWCB) has tasked WI Land+Water with developing recommendations for how to better address and build climate change resilience into county land and water resource management (LWRM) plans. A group of county conservationists and WI Land+Water staff, in concert with WI Land+Water's Legislative-Administrative Committee, developed the following recommendations and considerations for the LWCB's review.

#### Recommendations

In short, we strongly support inclusion of "climate change" in county LWRM plans.

We recommend utilizing Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) correspondence with county land and water conservation departments (LCDs) that occurs in advance of LWRM plan revisions and reviews to address the issue of climate change impacts, and to build climate change resilience.

We suggest that the following questions could be added to DATCP's LWRM Plan Review Checklist document, for LCDs to answer on a voluntary basis.

- 1) "How is climate change affecting your county? In assessing this topic, consider available data from the [Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts \(WICCI\)](#), [USDA Midwest Climate Hub](#), and the [Northern Institute for Applied Climate Science](#). Additionally, utilize observations about shifts in your own department's workload—for example, whether staff efforts are being directed more toward mitigating against or responding to extreme weather events. Please also consider the following factors, as applicable, in your answer:
  - a. Plants and natural communities (forests, wetlands, prairies, invasive species)
  - b. Soil and agriculture
  - c. Weather (growing season, seasonal temperatures, precipitation)
  - d. Infrastructure
  - e. Land owners (residents)
  - f. Water resources (groundwater and surface water quality and quantity)

- g. Fisheries
- h. Wildlife
- i. Human health and recreation”

2) “How is your county addressing climate change impacts? Please consider the factors listed in the previous question.”

We furthermore recommend that the LWCB provide LCDs flexibility on how they address climate change in their LWRM plans. We did not answer the question of whether the LWCB should request a stand-alone section in the LWRM plan addressing climate change, versus integrating it within other plan sections—we could see either method working adequately. But, we recognize that plan revisions and reviews are significant undertakings, and we think counties should be empowered to determine the appropriate approach that works best for their specific planning efforts.

#### Considerations

As part of our assessment of this issue, we are compelled to provide several observations that we hope will be considered in the LWCB’s deliberations.

- 1) We believe that LCDs, by the nature of their work, are responding and adapting to, and planning for climate change impacts along with mitigation efforts. They may not always recognize it as such, or “take credit” for it, for a number of reasons. How this looks will be different from county to county, and will be determined by the conservation practices appropriate to certain geographic areas of the state, topography, soil type, geology, climate, resource concerns, and many other factors.
- 2) More information and education are necessary for both LCDs and the Land Conservation Committee (LCC) committees that oversee them, to elevate the science-based assessments of how Wisconsin is currently being affected by climate change, and modeled projections of how Wisconsin may continue to be affected by it in the future.
- 3) A lack of sustained funding for LCDs continues to be an issue that may affect the ability of counties to respond to climate change. \*
- 4) It is important for LCD staff to initiate (or continue) discussions about climate change with their LCCs and other committees, residents, and local organizations. Addressing climate change begins at the local level, and has global implications. The LCDs are in unique position to address climate change, which is our greatest natural resource crisis since the Dust Bowl.
- 5) Those LCDs that *are* taking steps to build climate change resilience should be encouraged to point it out accordingly in their LWRM plan. For example, this could be as simple as revising the wording of a work plan activity from “implement annual Tree & Shrub Sale” to “promote native species in the annual Tree & Shrub Sale that are expected to be suitable for future conditions,” or revising from

“provide technical assistance and cost-share to landowners” to “provide technical assistance and cost-share to landowners to account for predicted future runoff.”

- 6) Some counties have embraced climate change resilience to such an extent that they have developed adaptation and mitigation plans outside of the purview of the LCD office. In such cases, LCDs are active participants, but do not lead the effort.

\* By default, LCDs are reacting to climate change regardless of funding