

From the Langlade County Land Conservation Department:

January 2023

Conservationist's Report



Message From The Land Conservationist

Dear Reader,

The purpose of this report is to give a general summary, with commentary, on the some of the programs the Land Conservation Department was involved with in the preceding year and plans to be involved with in the current year. If you have any feedback for the department, or would like to be involved/volunteer to help with any of the programs mentioned here, your participation is welcomed. Contact us and we'll see how we can involve you.

2022 Department Staff

The Land Conservation Department had 2.65 positions and staff members in 2022.:

- Katie Bender-Ream, Shoreland Specialist; a full-time project-based position responsible for implementing Langlade County's DNR Surface Water Grant.
- Maria Larson, Conservation Technician; a shared (50%) full-time regular staff position responsible for assisting the Land Conservationist in implementing conservation programs, especially the Soil & Water Resource Management Cost-Share Program.
- Chris Arrowood, Land Conservationist; a full-time (100%) regular staff position dedicated to implementing and administering all Land Conservation Department programs.
- Duane Haakenson, Land Records & Regulations Department Director; a shared (15%) full-time regular position that provides staff oversight to the Land Conservation Department.

The only staff issue in 2022 was the unavailability of the Conservation Technician position over the summer months, which resulted in Land Conservationist covering the duties. This resulted in less time being spent administering and implementing other programs.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

Chris Arrowood

Langlade County Land Conservationist

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"To promote awareness, provide management, improvement, assistance, implementation, and preservation of the natural resources found in Langlade County."
-Department Mission

FOLLOW-UP: 2022 Goals & Projects Reviewed

The previous year's *Conservationist's Report* included a list of goals & projects below is an update for each.

Website Updates:

Unfortunately in 2022, we were unable to enrich the Land Conservation Department webpages to tell the "story of conservation" in Langlade County. The Department's history is far more extensive than it originally seemed and far more time than was estimated has been needed to digitize, organize, and distill that information into a meaningful reports, messages and insights to be shared. This project will continue.

Manure Storage Program Administration:

Instead of implementing the anticipated self-certification program for Manure Storage, time was spent revising the language of the County's Manure Storage Ordinance. Some of this language would effect the administration of the Manure Storage Ordinance so this project was delayed to 2023.

Addressing Water Concerns:

In 2022, we worked with the Land Records Department and the County Administrator to continue to assess and develop a plan to gain a Water Specialist Position for the Department. Several existing and potential job duties have been identified.

Office Space Improvements:

The Department was able to utilize our new office equipment purchased in 2021 to display available educational materials to the public. In a few instances, the public was attracted into the office by materials they saw from the hallway, which is very encouraging.

Invasive Species Involvement:

Unfortunately in 2022 our partner organization, Timberland Invasives Partnership, had an extended vacancy in their Coordinator position. This meant that we weren't able to tap into that resource to further develop our invasive species program.

Farmland Preservation Administration:

The administrative changes to the Farmland Preservation program resulted in at least a 50% reduction in the amount of staff time spent on Farmland Preservation. The newly available staff time was used to offset the absence of the Conservation Technician in the summer months.

2022 Annual Work Plan:

The original goal of the Department with the 2022 Annual Work Plan was to be more inclusive of all staff in its development. During our efforts to revise the plan in 2022 we discovered that Langlade County's plans, while meeting requirements, included subject matter outside what was being requested by the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Simplifying and refocusing 2022's plan on DATCP's requirements shortened the writing (and reporting) process as the plan now accurately reflects areas of concern from DATCP.

Summary:

While most of our 2022 goals didn't proceed as expected, we did make lasting progress in many areas. The administrative improvements made this year will result in the ability to better implement our programs & projects in the future.

2022 Selected Highlights

Farmland Preservation:

64 program participants were reviewed for compliance, including 7 on-site inspections. We issued the highest number of Certificates of Compliance on record, 66, with 26 new and 40 updated. For the second year in a row no Notices of Non-Compliance needed to be issued. Nutrient Management Plan Cost Share contract acres are now accounted for in our Farmland Preservation Database. We estimate this program will generate \$380,000 in income tax credits for county landowners in 2022.

SEG Innovation Grant:

We were approved to extend 2021 SEG Innovation Grant project that allows the Department to offer landowners willing to sign a 15 year Farmland Preservation Agreement an incentive up to \$2,000 in 2022. As a result, we were able to motivate 10 landowners to sign agreements and provide \$18,000 in incentives. Given the overall success of this program the State/DATCP has awarded the county \$50,000 (\$20,000 had been requested) in 2023 to continue this project. Anyone interested should contact us to see if they qualify to be added to the waiting list.

Nutrient Management Farmer Education Grant:

In March, the Department held a training with UW-Extension. Participation was free and anyone submitting a completed plan would be eligible for a \$500 stipend, and anyone completing a plan could be reimbursed up to \$750 for the cost of soil sampling. This training had a new structure where participants are able to begin writing their plan early in the process with minimal education beforehand. This format was very successful in engaging participants with detailed questions relating to their operations.

Clean Sweep:

On August 13th the Land Conservation Department hosted a Clean Sweep Hazardous Waste Disposal event. The event followed the trend of less participants, bringing in less toxic waste. Total waste numbers are stable, and participants feel there is a definite need to continue the program. The Land Conservation Department plans on having the next Clean Sweep in August of 2024, following our established every other year pattern.

Cost Share Projects:

This year Langlade County was awarded \$84,400 in cost-share funding by the Department of Agriculture's Soil & Water Resource Management Program. This money was used to fund 13 cost share contracts, with some remaining funds needing to be transferred out. Projects undertaken include 6 Nutrient Management Plans, 2 Cover Crops, 2 Perimeter Fences, 2 Livestock Waterlines/Facilities, and an Access Road. More information, including a more complete list of cost-sharable practices, is available on the Land Conservation webpage. Langlade County also crossed a major milestone: Over **\$1,000,000** in SWRM Cost Share projects implemented in the county since the program began in 1999.

DNR Surface Water Grant:

The Shoreland Specialist position has now been fully moved from the Land Records budget into the Land Conservation budget, helping to clarify the position's role in the county. In 2022, the Shoreland Specialist was able to survey and monitor Mary, Crystal, and Perch Lakes, greatly adding to our knowledge of the conditions of these lakes. This data will be used to inform management decisions at the state and local level in the future.

Wildlife Damage & Venison Donation Program:

Once again we worked with APHIS & DNR to ensure farmers get compensated for crop damage caused by certain wildlife species. We also continued a long tradition of participation in the venison donation program. Any deer donated are processed and sent to local food pantries.

2023 Goals & Projects

The following are a list of goals and projects that department staff have set out to accomplish in 2023. These goals don't reflect day-to-day operations and work activities, but are extra efforts made to benefit & improve Langlade County.

Website Updates:

In 2023, we will continue to try to better tell the "Story of Conservation" in Langlade County. Specifically, we'll be looking to add relevant program facts & figures to our web pages and we hope to add more pages to the website to give information on the programs we work with. We have also begun using the "News and Announcements" page on the website to share conservation news relevant to our county.

Manure Storage Program Administration:

To build on 2022's efforts to digitally compile our Manure Storage program information, in 2023 we will be adding it to our conservation compliance database. This will allow the department to better manage our duties to monitor, inspect, and maintain records of the Manure Storage Facilities in Langlade County.

Manure Complaint & Spill Administrative Review:

Would like to review, update organize records and make sure administrative practices match current legal and program requirements.

Protecting Water Quality by Improving Current Programs:

Many have been looking to the Land Conservation Department in recent years to address water quality concerns. Unfortunately, we do not have the authority to address these issues in the ways that are often desired. What we can do is use the programs we do have to try to protect our water resources as best we can by:

1. Recruiting more land into the Farmland Preservation Program.
2. Incentivizing agricultural landowners to sign 15-year Farmland Preservation Agreements.
3. Allocating staff time to deeper reviews of Nutrient Management Plans.
4. Developing a long-term plan & goal for our Shoreland Specialist.

Invasive Species Management Plan:

Langlade County has a long history of supporting and being involved in invasive species efforts. These efforts have largely been individual in nature. This year we'd like to begin the step of developing a larger plan to address invasive species that involves inputs from the relevant county departments, outside partner groups, and county board.

2024 Farmland Preservation Plan:

Langlade County's current Farmland Preservation Plan will expire at the end of 2024. While the plan's text was updated in 2019 when it was combined with the Comprehensive Plan (Zoning), the related maps were not. Therefore, the Land Conservation Department has been tasked with getting the plan updated, which is a very long and complicated process. In 2023 we will be applying for a grant to offset the development costs, working to assemble the advisory committees, and budgeting for the anticipated 2024 costs of adopting the plan.

Adopting New Records Software:

In 2023 we are anticipating that Langlade County will switch its core records keeping system. The Land Conservation Department is hoping to be able to use the new software for managing the records of our many programs.