

**SUMMARY NOTES**  
**Yahara CLEAN Compact Steering team**  
**Friday, June 12, 2020**  
**8:30-10:00 A.M.**  
**Zoom**

**Attendance**

Present: Chad Lawler, Greg Fries, Janet Schmidt, Jake Vander Zanden, Katie Hepler, Mike Rupiper, Missy Nergard, Chad Cook, Sarah Dance, Ruth Hackney, Laura Good, Renee Lauber, Carolyn Clow, Mark Riedel, Coreen Fallat (chair), Matt Diebel, Dale Robertson, James Tye, Paul Dearlove, Finn Ryan, Brenda Gonzalez, Luke Wynn (note-taker), Alison Lebwohl (facilitator)

**Anticipated Outcomes**

- a) Shared understanding of the science behind Yahara lakes' water quality and the factors that drive those conditions
- b) Shared understanding of next steps in Yahara CLEAN Compact process

**Welcome & Housekeeping**

- Reminder that all meeting handouts are accessible from the shared Google drive and distributed for review prior to each meeting
- New introductions: Carolyn Clow (lead designee for Dane County Cities & Villages Association); Sarah Dance (accepted UW fellow assisting with public engagement); Finn Ryan (film producer of yaharaproject.org); and Laura Good and Dale Robertson (P Loading Subgroup members)
- *Unanimous acceptance of summary notes from 5/8/20 meeting as presented*
- Steering Team meetings will continue to be held virtually for the indefinite future. May not have a Steering Team meeting in August to provide a break for members and allow Executive Committee to focus on securing needed consultants.
- Objective of the meeting is to ground the group in the science and fundamental concepts that drive water quality conditions in the lakes. We are starting to shift from phase 2 to phase 3 of the logic model. This involves preparing to evaluate current and new strategy priorities, and to begin finding and implementing effective ways to involve the public.

**The Science (Presentation: Matt Diebel)**

Diebel summarized the P Loading Subgroup's whitepaper titled *Fundamental Concepts on Water Quality of the Yahara Chain of Lakes (Mendota, Monona, Wingra, Waubesa, and Kegonsa)*. The document summarizes key concepts related to the water quality of the Yahara lakes. For each concept, a brief explanation was provided along with a description of its relevance to planning and decision-making. References and notes were provided for those interested in more detail. The intent was to break down the issues into individual parts to facilitate a better understanding of the factors affecting water quality. In the end, these components are all parts of a whole and are tied together. The authors are technical experts in water quality with experience working on the Yahara lakes. The document is not meant to address policy or specific solutions, but rather to summarize the state of the science on water quality in the Yahara lakes. Main summary points include the following:

1. Algal blooms, poor water clarity, excessive aquatic plants, and high bacteria concentrations are the primary water quality concerns.
2. Reducing phosphorus input to the Yahara lakes has the greatest potential to control
  - a. algal blooms and related problems.
    - The lakes should respond relatively quickly if phosphorus loading is reduced to acceptable levels.
3. Most of the phosphorus input to the Yahara lakes is in runoff from agricultural and
  - a. urban lands.
    - It is not evenly distributed, and some areas contribute more P than others. Runoff from bare, non-vegetated fields is the primary rural source, while leaves in the street is the largest urban source. Phosphorus can also be stored on the landscape and within stream and lakebed sediments. The majority of P enters the lakes during late winter and early spring runoff events.
4. Annual phosphorus inputs to the Yahara lakes are highly variable and there has been no trend in inputs over the last 30 years.
  - “Flow-normalization” can help establish a trend by factoring out rainfall variability. Looking at the Yahara River at Windsor, the flow-normalized trend shows that there would have been a small decrease in P over the last 30 years. In Pheasant Branch Creek, there would have been a 36% reduction in P if flows were normalized. In other words, the effectiveness of management practices are being masked by increased rainfall patterns.
5. Management practices on agricultural and urban lands can reduce phosphorus runoff.
6. There can be long lag times between management interventions and water quality responses in the lakes.
  - P can be stored from days to decades.
  - There is a risk of counting practices that are not actually performing as originally designed or failing to reduce P levels in the lakes.
7. Many factors that affect water quality change simultaneously.
  - As practices are being implemented, other factors and variables are changing that can mask progress. We need our plans and goals to be more robust to account for changes that are less within our control, such as climate, invasive species, and land use.

Next steps are to take feedback from the group and improve the document so it can help guide our work moving forward.

### **Break Out Rooms**

1. What questions do you still need answered?
2. Which concepts do you believe are most important for the public to understand?

Group 1 (Dance, Hackney, Vander Zanden, Ryan, Lauber) – The document provides a nice baseline of understanding and a foundation for discussion moving forward. How do we use it to make recommendations, and what is most important for the public to know? The document does not address how common *E. coli* bacteria and cyanobacteria blooms are in the lakes. How do we address the fact that the public may not realize the extent of the issue? What does it mean when algal blooms are present? Tracking and conveying the number of days that beaches are closed is a way to communicate the problem.

Group 2 (Lawler, Robertson, Hilyard, Dearlove) – Concept of a lag time between actions and P load reductions was interesting. Should probably verify the effectiveness of current strategies before looking to other solutions. Builders fight against overregulation because it affects affordability in construction. If we knew which actions worked best we would know which regulations are most appropriate. Directly correlating the connection between action and impact will always be challenging. Need to be careful that we take credit for only those actions that result in P reductions that were part of the initial model. Are we really 42% of the way to our CLEAN 2.0 goal as reported in the 2019 State of the Lakes? Models and baselines should be reviewed for accuracy. Climate change, lag time of actions, invasive species impacts, and the effects of P loads through time are all important to convey to the public. Producing a map showing the locations of various actions relative to pollution hot spots would be helpful so the public can better visualize progress.

Group 3 (Fries, Schmidt, Wynn, Cook) – Regarding concept #7, lakes do not act like a controlled experiment. There are lots of variables impacting lake conditions at any given time, and it is important that the public understands each variable and its impacts (i.e., climate change). We have a goal, but how can we make our goals more dynamic and less static so they take into account the constantly changing issues. There is a wide breadth of resources we can tap into at UW-Madison. Should the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI) be part of this to allow a more dynamic goal to be created? How are goals translated into what residents are actually seeing out on the lakes? Progress is being made, but the public does not necessarily see that progress. How do we convey the message of lag time and progress when improvements might not be immediately recognizable? Need to create visual benchmarks that can help define success.

Group 4 (Clow, Hepler, Good, Gonzalez) – How will this information get shared with local units of government? How can we make it so that small municipalities with limited staff are able to access and utilize the information? We need to bring the science into the boardrooms. People also need to know more about the benefits of fall leaf collections, as well as how to overcome the barriers that are preventing leaves from being regularly removed from the streets.

Group 5 (Rupiper, Diebel, Tye, Fallat, Minks, Nergard) – Current models, such as Snap Plus, may not be accurate if they are not using current rainfall data. How do we incorporate current climate science to update these models? The document provides a great technical summary, but it will need to be simplified even further to be accessible to a general audience. Need to answer the question of what practices are needed and at what cost. Does the seasonal timing and sources of P inputs make a difference in algal growth?

The consensus following the breakout room exercise was that participants needed more than the 10 minutes to discuss the whitepaper.

### **Public Engagement Subgroup Update (Paul Dearlove)**

The Public Engagement Subgroup met on 6/8 to draft its charge and objectives. In general, the subgroup will recommend ways to involve diverse watershed communities in a manner that supports our decision-making and plan development. The following charge and objectives were developed for Executive Committee consideration:

Charge: Formulate a recommended implementation strategy for how the Yahara CLEAN Compact will communicate with, engage, and empower diverse watershed communities to support our decision-making and plan development.

Objectives:

- 1) Recommend content and outreach-coordination strategies related to Compact messaging and information sharing.
- 2) Recommend what specific questions should be asked of the public to inform plan development.
- 3) Recommend desired outcomes, methods, level of intensity, and timing for soliciting public feedback, particularly from specific communities or demographics.
- 4) Recommend how and by whom this work gets completed.

**Executive Committee Update (Coreen Fallat)**

- Compact Decisions Summary: This document will be used to keep a running tally of decisions that are made as our work progresses. A copy was shared with the Steering Team that had last been updated just prior to the May 8<sup>th</sup> meetings.
- Opportunity will continue to be provided at every meeting for Steering Team members to ask questions related to Executive Committee business and actions as documented in the summary notes.
- Upcoming discussions will focus on actively exploring contracting services to fill in gaps and complete the necessary work of the Compact. Once that is done, the Executive Committee will initiate a process for soliciting qualifications and bringing on that extra help.

**Next Steps**

Feedback from today's Steering Team will be used to guide agenda planning for the upcoming meetings. Topics will likely include reviewing and discussing current Yahara CLEAN strategies, and/or learning more about the perspectives, resources, needs and constituency priorities of our Compact member organizations.