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FACT SHEET

Areawide Water Quality Management Planning

Overview

The **Dane County Water Quality Plan (DCWQP, or Plan)** is the state's areawide water quality management plan for the Dane County region. It considers the relationship of water quality to land and water resources and uses, in an effort to manage, protect, and enhance groundwater and surface water quality.

Regulatory Context

CARPC's role in areawide water quality management planning stems from the federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, as amended by the Clean Water Act of 1977. This requires states to develop comprehensive areawide water quality management plans addressing the full range of water quality problems, from both point sources (like wastewater treatment plants and industrial facilities) and nonpoint sources (like stormwater runoff from urban and agricultural areas).

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) coordinates all aspects of water pollution control and helps maintain progress toward protecting and preserving water quality in part through the Areawide Water Quality Management Plan (AWQMP) Program. NR 121, Wis. Adm. Code establishes policies, procedures, and requirements for Wisconsin's areawide water quality planning process.

Dane County is designated as an *areawide water quality planning area* which, as a result of urban and industrial concentrations, has substantial and complex water quality problems (s. NR 121.06(1)). In such "designated areas," areawide water quality management plans are required for managing, protecting and enhancing groundwater and surface water quality. These plans consider the interrelationship of water quality and land and water resources on an areawide basis (s. NR 121.03(1)).

Planning History

Home to "the most studied lake in the world," Dane County has a long history of assessing groundwater and surface water quality. Most historical efforts were concerned with the effects of point source pollution, including municipal and industrial wastewater discharge into the Yahara River chain of lakes. By the mid-1960s, it had become increasingly apparent that the efforts to address point source pollution had not achieved the desired improvements to water quality. The need for a comprehensive planning and management program that considered all sources of water pollution, including both point and nonpoint sources, led to the creation of the first *Dane County Water Quality Plan* in the 1970s.

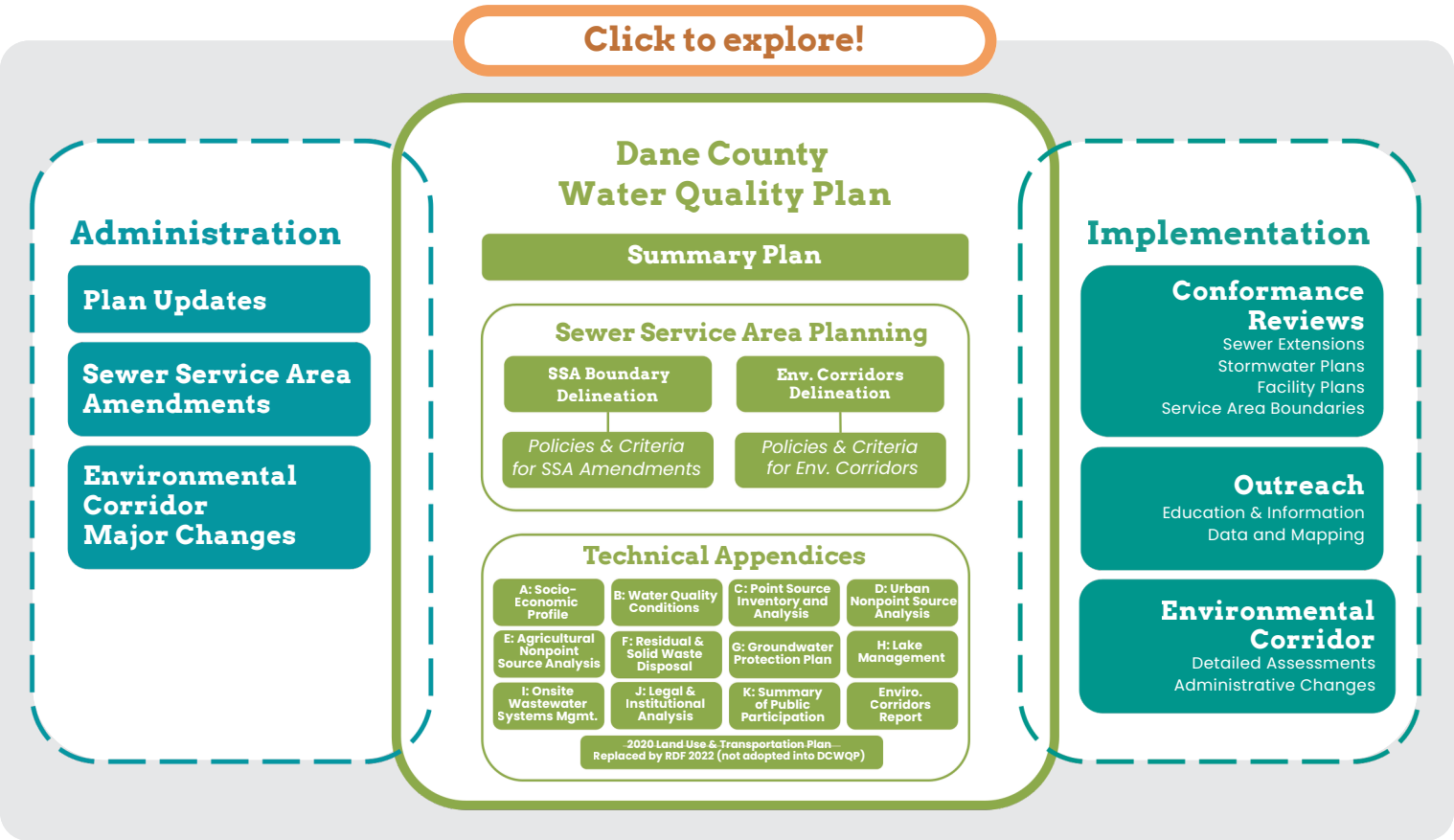
Our region has long faced intense development pressures alongside extensive agricultural activity. Combined with present day population growth and climate-driven changes in hydrology, these issues present significant challenges for water quality and ecosystem protection in an area plentiful in water resources. With 60 municipalities spanning 5 subbasin (HUC 8) watersheds, effective water quality management planning necessitates an approach that maintains local input and decision-making while also enhancing intergovernmental collaboration on issues that transcend municipal boundaries.

Today, areawide water quality management planning in Dane County often focuses on **stormwater runoff management** (nonpoint source pollution control) and **conservation of environmental systems** that support water quality. It involves balancing the needs of a growing economy and population with the need to sustain the ecological systems that are the foundation of our region's vitality.

About the Plan

The *Dane County Water Quality Plan* serves as a foundation for the management and protection of water quality and related environmental resources and ecosystems in the region. The Plan is a collection of technical reports, policies, and planning boundaries that have been continually updated and revised since their initial adoption in 1979.

The *DCWQP Summary Plan*, last updated in 2004 (and currently being updated in 2026), ties the DCWQP components together with a comprehensive overview of water quality conditions, pollution control sources, and protection measures, including short-range priority actions and program recommendations for local municipalities and other designated management agencies. Thirteen technical appendices provide further detail on a variety of subject areas. Policies and criteria within the DCWQP set requirements and guidance for effective delineation of sewer service area (SSA) and environmental corridor (EC) boundaries.



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LEARN MORE

View all the components of the Dane County Water Quality Plan at **carpcwaterqualityplan.org.**

SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Implementation

CARPC contracts with WDNR to maintain and administer the DCWQP. The Plan provides the foundation for all of CARPC's work in water quality management planning. This includes SSA planning and EC delineation, as well as reviews of development and infrastructure plans for conformance with the Plan (e.g., sewer extensions), stormwater management plan consultation and review, collaboration and leadership on regional watershed-based issues and initiatives, advocacy and leadership in green infrastructure and other educational activities.

(1) "Sewer Service Area Planning | | Wisconsin DNR." Accessed May 9, 2026. https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater/SSAPlanning.html.
(2) "Areawide Water Quality Management Plan (AWQMP) Program | | Wisconsin DNR." Accessed May 9, 2026. https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater/Planning.html.