

For immediate release

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New program honors Darlington for water conservation efforts

Recognition to take place at City Council Meeting may 18 at 6:30pm

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Darlington, Wis.—As a charter member of a water conservation program to be launched statewide on Earth Day, Darlington will be among the first Wisconsin municipalities to receive program recognition for exemplary water conservation and protection efforts.

The new program, Water Star, honors cities, villages, towns and counties that have taken important steps to protect surface water and groundwater, such as strengthening stormwater controls, ensuring water quality, protecting habitats and encouraging residents to conserve water.

Water Star program sponsors include the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Cooperative Extension, MSA Professional Services, Town and County RC&D, Rock River Coalition, UW-Extension Environmental Resources Center, Dane County, Natural Resources Consulting Inc. and Ruckert-Mielke.

“Too often we complain about what isn’t being done instead of celebrating the positive steps municipalities are taking,” said Suzanne Wade, a University of Wisconsin-Extension basin educator and Water Star coordinator. “I’m amazed at the local wisdom that these municipal staff and elected officials have used in solving problems. Water Star is one way for them to share their good work.”

Municipal representatives nominated to pilot test Water Star welcomed the opportunity to participate in a program that would recognize their municipalities’ conservation efforts and help them identify new ways of improving water resource protections.

The program has already begun to unveil a wide range of innovative ideas Wisconsin municipalities are harnessing to protect water resources including those used in Darlington to reach beyond regulation requirements to improve water system efficiencies.

About five years ago, Darlington began tackling inefficiencies in its water system to reduce water losses and energy use. Water system improvements, such as the installation of a telemetry system, variable-frequency drive and water main upgrades, were so successful that water utility pumping costs dropped by 50%.

Darlington has also installed an automatic meter reading system, with electronic readers on every meter in the municipality. This allows the city to document system water

losses, closely track customer use and identify users that have leaks in their homes and businesses, said Darlington public works director, Bob Salmi.

For its achievements, the Water Star program will recognize Darlington as a Bronze Star Community during **XX**.

Based on how well a municipality meets its recommended standards, the Water Star program ranks municipalities with strong water resource protections by identifying them as gold, silver or bronze star communities. The program's charter members have demonstrated that Wisconsin municipalities have the capacity to establish and achieve high conservation and protection goals.

Representatives from municipalities, the DNR, the University of Wisconsin-Extension and other organizations said they hoped that when the program begins to show how Wisconsin municipalities stack up, Water Star-designated municipalities will inspire other municipalities to set loftier goals.

Jim Congdon, Upper Rock Watershed Department of Natural Resources supervisor, said opportunities for optimizing water resource protections include taking steps that go beyond DNR regulations.

Municipalities nominated to participate in the pilot testing of the Water Star application process represented some of Wisconsin's leading water conservation communities and are slated to receive recognitions. Pilot test participants included Fitchburg, Dane County and River Falls which will receive Gold Star Community recognition, Beloit, Mukwonago and Waukesha County which will receive Silver Star Community recognition, and Darlington and Manitowoc, which will receive Bronze Star Community recognition.

The Water Star program's application will open to municipalities statewide on Earth Day April 22. Municipalities can register and complete the application by visiting <http://www.waterstarwisconsin.org>.