

DAWS well testing for Vernon, Crawford and Richland counties moves forward



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Updated: March 4, 2020, 3:36 p.m.

CRAWFORD, RICHLAND, VERNON - The Driftless Area Water Study (DAWS) to test well water in Crawford, Richland and Vernon counties will conduct their first round of testing on Monday, May 4. The tests will be aggregated from test collection points in each of the three counties, and then delivered to the UW-Stevens Point Center for Watershed Science and Education Lab on Tuesday, May 5.

All three counties have funding approved to move forward with the basic 'Homeowners Test' for nitrate and coliform bacteria. There will be two rounds of testing conducted in 2020. Crawford and Richland will sample 100 wells in May and 100 in the autumn, and Vernon County will sample 200 wells each time.

“We continue to be hopeful that the legislature will approve Assembly Bill 800 and its companion Senate Bill 722 that could approve \$10,000 per county to test well water,” Vernon County Conservationist Ben Wojahn said. “If that additional funding became available, then that might allow our three counties move sooner to conduct the geology and well construction analysis part of the study as well.”

Assembly Bill 800 (AB800) and Senate Bill 722 (SB 722) call for supporting the Center for Watershed Science and Education, creating a hydrogeologist position, funding research on phosphorus recovery and reuse, creating grant programs for counties to test wells and provide public education, granting rule-making authority, and making an appropriation.

Testing logistics

At their meeting, held in Gays Mills on Wednesday, Feb. 19, the DAWS coordinating group, consisting of county conservationists, public health employees, and farm and stewardship groups, discussed the logistics of the upcoming well sampling.

Crawford and Richland counties will select wells to sample based on a random selection process from among owners of the known septic systems in their counties. Those selected to participate will have the full cost of the sampling paid by the county. The random selection process will be repeated for the autumn 2020 sampling.

Selected well owners should expect to receive letters inviting them to participate in March. All well test results will be communicated from the lab in Stevens Point directly and confidentially to the well owner.

With any questions about the testing, citizens of Crawford and Richland counties can contact the Land Conservation Department: Crawford, 608-326-0270; Richland 608-647-8874, ext. 3.

Vernon County will make well testing available to volunteers on a first-come-first-serve basis, with the first ten volunteers in each of the county’s townships being selected. The county has decided to exclude Franklin Township from the sampling because of the large number of tests that have been completed there in the last two years through the Tainter Creek Watershed Council.

Vernon County residents participating in the sampling will be expected to pay a 50 percent co-pay, an amount of \$25. Advance payment will be required. To sign up, contact Sarah McDowell at Vernon County Land Conservation Department, 608-637-5480, or smcdowell@vernoncounty.org.

Each county will offer citizens multiple choices in sample drop off locations. Once finalized, a map and hours of operation for the drop off locations will be provided.

More information about the well testing will be made available from the DAWS coordinating group to citizens in the three counties soon. Citizens should look for that information in local newspapers, and on the county's Land Conservation Department web page and Facebook page. Information will also be broadcast on local radio stations.