



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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Volunteers recognized for monitoring local streams

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources are pleased to announce the recipients of the 2020 Wisconsin Volunteer Stream Monitoring Awards. These awards recognize individuals and groups for their exemplary efforts in stream monitoring and water-quality related activities, support of stream stewardship, and a commitment to developing partnerships and sharing their skills and water quality data to benefit Wisconsin streams and rivers.

Retired teachers, Bruce and Sue Ristow are Crawford County conservation farmers who raise grass-fed beef utilizing managed grazing techniques to protect and maintain the portion of Tainter Creek that runs through their property. Monitoring water quality on their farm through the Water Action Volunteers program since 2011, the Ristows are innovators in water quality protection and sustainable agricultural practices in southwest Wisconsin. In addition to stream monitoring, their work with the Tainter Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council, and willingness to engage and teach others about the importance of water quality exemplifies the qualities of the Adult Volunteer Award.

North American company, GEI Consultants, has three office locations in Wisconsin, including one in Green Bay, where they encourage their engineers and scientists to volunteer in Water Action Volunteers stream monitoring, youth education, and local community stream cleanup events. As part of their mission, GEI Consultants invests in the communities in which their employees, clients, and partners live and work, through activities such as water monitoring and cleanups and raising money to donate to environmental projects identified by their employees. Their willingness to go above and beyond the day-to-day business model as they work to improve their local communities through volunteerism has made them an excellent choice for the Exemplary Business Award.

Pecatonica Pride Watershed Association (supported by the Blanchardville Woman's Club) is the recipient of the 2020 Exemplary Group Award. In their first year of monitoring in the Lower East Pecatonica watershed, they had four teams in streams. They doubled to eight teams in the second year, held steady in the third year, and are looking to grow their numbers again in 2020. Water Action Volunteers stream monitoring serves as a base for their efforts that also include: informative lectures and field walks, raising funds for stream improvement projects, working with the Village of Argyle to reduce phosphorus loads through stream bank work, and other programs that encourage farmers and landowners to improve water quality in the watershed.

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Outstanding Educator Award recipient Wendy Lutzke, Manitowoc, WI, has established herself as a leader in local watershed issues, including her experience monitoring streams. Wendy is a founding member and monitoring coordinator for the Friends of the Manitowoc River Watershed. She also coordinates monitoring for the Friends of the Twin Rivers watershed and personally samples on the West Twin River and Forget Me Not Creek. She trains volunteers, including Woodland Dunes interns, educating them about water quality issues and protocols for sampling under the Water Action Volunteers baseline standards. Wendy's efforts have touched hundreds of people in the Manitowoc-Two Rivers area, and her positive demeanor is an example to all.

Monitoring Milestone Award – 20 Years. Ellen Brooks and Dave Hackett have been monitoring their stream station on the Halls Branch in Crawford County for two decades, despite flooding, stream course changes, beaver dam interference, massive erosion and other shenanigans thrown at them by Mother Nature. Ellen and Dave have taken the work of citizen science water quality monitoring and made it their own. They take precise measurements, follow the protocol, and consider the entire context of their stream when choosing their access points for the season. They are passionate about water quality issues and excited that the data they collect contributes to stream conservation efforts. They are true role models, bringing science, education and dedication to volunteer stream monitoring.

Established in 1996, the Water Action Volunteers program supports more than 600 citizen water quality monitors across the state of Wisconsin. Extension Coordinator for the program, Peggy Compton, said, "I am humbled by the passion and dedication of the volunteers who collect and share data from their local streams, contributing to a greater understanding and protection of our water resources." To learn more: <https://wateractionvolunteers.org/>.

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