

MAKING STRIDES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL EQUITY

2021 HIGHLIGHTS



INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) mission is ensuring the right of all people to use and enjoy a healthy, sustainable environment and a full range of outdoor opportunities, and bringing together people of diverse perspectives to carry out the public will. To fulfill this mission, the DNR is bringing a climate change and equity lens to its work. That includes ensuring we are addressing environmental and climate change hazards, in particular those that disproportionately impact people with low income, people of color, tribal nations, and other underserved Wisconsinites.

In addition to the department's mission, the DNR's efforts in these areas stem from Governor Tony Evers' Executive Orders 38, 52 and 59. This document highlights some of the department's accomplishments on equity and climate change during 2021. These actions support many of the recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change and Wisconsin's commitment to the U.S. Climate Alliance and the Paris Climate Accord.

ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL EQUITY

In consultation with communities and other partners, the DNR is collaborating with the Wisconsin Departments of Administration and Health Services, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, on a bold, data-driven initiative called the Wisconsin Environmental Equity Tool. Once fully developed, this comprehensive online mapping tool will enable the public, agencies, and others to pinpoint Wisconsin's most impacted communities and better understand the challenges they face from pollution, a changing climate, socioeconomic factors, and other environmental and health hazards.



Industrial area in Milwaukee.

ADDRESSING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, it is important to know the current state of emissions and be able to measure changes over time. The DNR developed the state's first greenhouse gas emissions inventory in 2020 to do just that. The department used U.S. EPA tools for the inventory so that Wisconsin could compare our emissions rates to other states. In 2021, the department updated the inventory using Wisconsin-specific data to better examine emissions locally. Those data serve as the basis for much of the department's planning and that of other Wisconsin agencies, such as the Department of Administration's Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy.

While looking broadly at the different types of emissions in the state, the DNR is taking a deep dive on certain sources of emissions, like landfills. A statewide landfill study found that the amount of Wisconsinites' yard and food waste increased since the last time the department studied landfills. As this organic material decomposes in landfills, it produces a significant amount of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. To reduce these emissions, the DNR started an effort to discover how to reduce the amount of food waste going into Wisconsin landfills.

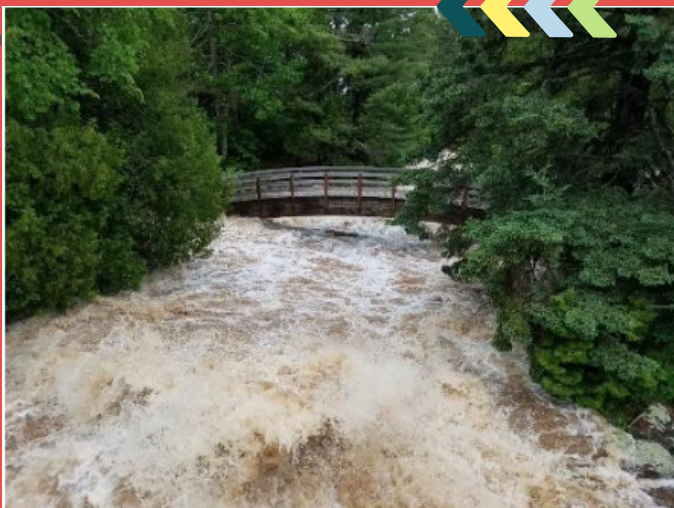


Another part of addressing greenhouse gas emissions is capturing carbon that is already emitted into the atmosphere. One way the DNR is doing that is by leading the state's commitment to the Trillion Tree Pledge, a collaboration with public, private and non-governmental partners. This effort includes conserving 125,000 acres of forestland and planting 74 million trees in rural areas and 1 million in urban areas by 2030. In the first year of the pledge, 2021, partners planted over 9.3 million seedlings.

BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



It is clear that our climate has already changed. Communities across the state have been hit hard with extreme weather related to climate change, like much more frequent and severe flooding, high heat days, and damaging storms. The DNR has been working with communities to help them plan for ways to make infrastructure like roads and culverts more resilient to these changes and the DNR rolled out a plan to improve our dam safety program.



HELPING NATURAL RESOURCES ADAPT



Human communities are not the only ones that need assistance adapting to the new normal and future changes. The DNR worked with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to develop a habitat connectivity toolkit to help key aquatic and land-based wildlife that need to shift their range and movements to adapt to climate change. This tool will inform the development of master plans and other efforts to manage natural resources and climate change impacts on a landscape scale.

CONCLUSION

Climate change and environmental equity are top priorities for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. They are a natural extension of the department's mission and role as a responsible steward of the state's natural resources and environment for the benefit of all Wisconsinites. In 2021, the department made strides in advancing environmental equity, addressing greenhouse gas emissions, building community resilience, and helping natural communities adapt to climate change.

Learn more at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/climatechange>.

