

# 2015 WATER SUCCESS STORY

## Bureau of Water Quality



### Priorities for water quality set through 2017

By Jennifer Sereno and Ashley Beranek, Wisconsin DNR

#### DNR and Citizens Identify Priorities

Projects to protect Wisconsin waters against degradation, revise bacteria water quality criteria and develop guidance for blue green algae are among the priorities established by citizens statewide through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' triennial standards review process.

Every three years, DNR reviews Wisconsin's surface [water quality standards](#) and asks citizens to weigh in on priorities and topics of concern. This comprehensive evaluation is required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to keep waters swimmable, fishable and drinkable.

Ashley Beranek, DNR water resources management specialist, said the review helps the department focus its resources to integrate the latest science, technology and federal requirements to protect public health, recreation and fish and other aquatic communities. As described in the [2015-2017 triennial standards review](#) publication, DNR currently has eight projects underway related to surface water quality standards; the triennial standards review process allowed for the identification of three additional major projects over the next three years.

#### Major Project Topics

**Antidegradation:** This policy ensures that existing uses of high quality waters are protected and maintained by preventing future degradation. The project involves reviewing and revising procedures to implement antidegradation measures.

**Bacteria water quality criteria:** By revising the bacteria criteria - the levels of bacteria (E. coli) allowed in Wisconsin's waters - swimming will be safer for people, pets and wildlife.



Levels of bacteria are monitored at Lake Michigan beaches to determine when to close a beach due to unsafe conditions for public health. Photo by Andy Clark.

Cyanobacterial toxin water quality criteria/guidance: Cyanobacteria, also known as [blue-green algae](#), and the associated toxins can cause serious health effects. By developing water quality criteria or guidance for these toxins, it will be possible to better protect humans and animals from harmful algal blooms.

The projects were chosen based on their environmental importance, feasibility and levels of public concern. Citizens used an online survey to rank their top water quality concerns.

DNR will use the identified priorities to plan work through 2017 and address the topics as resources allow. Any changes to standards must be approved by the Natural Resources Board, the Wisconsin Legislature and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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