

Earth Day 2015: Four Feature Story Angles

Written by Clean Wisconsin

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MADISON - Next Thursday, April 22 marks the 45th observance of Earth Day, a day to promote responsible citizenship and sound policy to preserve natural resources and lay the foundation for a healthier future. To assist with environmental reporting needs, Clean Wisconsin offers the following story angles for consideration to people interested in reporting.

Groundwater: In areas across the state, lakes, river and streams are drying up because high-capacity wells are over-pumping groundwater, and right now, two very different approaches to groundwater management are circulating in the Legislature. The Water Sustainability Act from Sen. Mark Miller and Rep. Cory Mason offers a comprehensive solution to protect groundwater resources from over-pumping. The other bill from Sen. Rick Gudex and Rep. Lee Nerison would likely exacerbate Wisconsin's water quantity issues by removing the only chance to limit the impacts of existing wells by removing DNR review of replacement, reconstruction or transfer of high-capacity wells. Another bill is currently being drafted by Sen. Rob Cowles to seek solutions to the problems of over-pumping.

Environmental policy in the state budget: In its current form, the state budget rolls back many key environmental policies. Walker's budget removes \$6 million from polluted runoff programs; \$15 million from science, research and education efforts; and another \$15 million from other environmental traditions. Among other things, the budget would reduce DNR science staff by over 18 positions and would effectively end state purchases of land under the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program. In totality, the state budget represents a shift away from Wisconsin's environmental legacy.

Pharmaceutical waste: When unused prescription drugs aren't properly disposed, they ultimately end up in our environment, endangering the ecosystem and our health. One 2013 study by UW-Milwaukee showed the presence of 14 dangerous chemicals from pharmaceuticals and personal care products near sewage outfalls on Lake Michigan, and these chemicals pose a significant threat to the health of the Great Lakes and our drinking water. Many local governments currently run collections bins or drop-off days for unused prescription drugs, but funding is drying up. Attorney General Brad Schimel has stepped in and is assisting local law enforcement in their efforts to collect unused medication.

Microbeads: Microbeads, tiny plastic particles found in personal care products like toothpaste

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and body scrubs, have made their way from our sinks and bath drains into the Great Lakes, posing a significant environmental challenge for the health of the world's largest surface freshwater system. In March, the state Senate unanimously passed a bill that would phase out the manufacture and sale of products containing microbeads, and the Assembly is poised to take up the issue on April 14. If signed into law, the bill would significantly protect Wisconsin's water resources from the emerging issue of microplastic pollution.

Clean Wisconsin was founded on Earth Day in 1970 and has grown to be Wisconsin's oldest and largest environmental organization with staff expertise spanning a number of disciplines including legal, science, water resources and air quality.

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Clean Wisconsin, an environmental protection organization, protects Wisconsin's clean water and air and advocates for clean energy by being an effective voice in the state legislature and by holding elected officials and polluters accountable. On behalf of its 10,000 members, supporters and its coalition partners, Clean Wisconsin protects the special places that make Wisconsin such a wonderful place to live, work and play. 608-251-7020, www.cleanwisconsin.org

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