



October 20th, 2021

Cowles' Statement for NEW Water Event

I appreciate the invitation from NEW Water to be able to speak at their event today, but unfortunately a State Senate floor session day – which is happening right now – prevents me from being able to join for the launch of this important program.

While I am unable to speak to you directly, I've been proud to be part of the discussions over the years that have led to reasonable and balanced efforts to progress water quality in Wisconsin's waterways.

But while Wisconsin's water quality remains a goal of many state and local leaders including myself, water quality improvements in the Fox River and throughout the U.S. were far easier in the 20th Century than it's been in the 21st Century as our waterbodies were once much dirtier and the discharges were once much worse.

Today, many standards that point source dischargers, including NEW Water, must meet are so ratcheted down that further noticeable progress on surface water quality is only truly achievable by thinking outside of the box.

I've been proud to work on efforts with federal, state and local governmental leaders and representatives of Wisconsin industry and agriculture to be able to get bills signed that think outside of the box by creating the multi-discharger variance several sessions ago and water quality trading clearinghouse more recently.

But these two efforts aren't the only methods for this outside of the box thinking that seeks to delay or offset the need for vast, expensive upgrades to remove minimal amounts of pollutants from point sources in exchange for greater amounts of pollutant runoff reductions from nonpoint sources within the same watershed.

I'm pleased to see the work that our wastewater utilities are doing to make a larger impact in the region while also saving ratepayers money in the long run, with NEW Water certainly being a statewide leader in this area.

These efforts will not only help to reduce runoff to improve water quality, but they may also have a number of less tangible benefits, including greater wildlife habitat, reduced flood peaks, increased soil resilience, restored surface and groundwater interactions, and increased groundwater infiltration.

With many existing educational partnerships that NEW Water has fostered with UW-Green Bay, the adaptive management program may also serve as a launching point for continued collaboration, especially as UWGB continues their increased focus on water quality through the new UW Freshwater Collaborative.

The intent of NEW Water's adaptive management program is one that we often hear articulated as a shared goal from leaders in public and private sectors alike, but rarely do we see these program ideas carried out with such detail and local buy-in. I believe that this will lay a good framework for success in Northeast Wisconsin.

I want to thank NEW Water not only for the invitation to participate in today's announcement, but also for their continued long-term efforts to improve our region while also working in the interest of their ratepayers.