

## Troubles run deep for Wisconsin waters

By Larry Laehn

For the Courier

I have a confession to make. For part of my life, I took it for granted that there would always be plenty of clean and safe water to meet the needs of Wisconsin residents into the foreseeable future. After all, there are regulations in place to reduce pollution from sources like industries, municipalities, agricultural and property owners. Communities, conservation organizations and people from across the state are implementing plans to reduce the use of and conserve water.

In the next three segments of *Conservation Corner*, we'll look at some current challenges facing all Wisconsinites regarding water quality and quantity. Regardless of your political, social or economic status, we are all impacted when an opened water faucet produces little or unsafe water.

Blue-green algae, containing a toxin named microcystin, recently became so prevalent in Lake Erie that

the water supply for Toledo, Ohio was poisoned. Many types of algae are polluting Wisconsin waters, with blue-green type being very concerning to public health. The fight to protect water

quality by reducing nutrient runoff (especially phosphorous) from streets, water treatment plants and farms is one of Wisconsin's most challenging environmental issues.

The Wisconsin DNR cites that one-quarter of more than 700 bodies of water which fail to meet water quality standards do so because of high levels of phosphorous.

The Department of Health Services cites 26 cases of algae-related illnesses between 2009 and 2011 in Dunn County, which originated from Tainter Lake. Blue-green algae has been

found in Lake Winnebago, which supplies drinking water to Appleton, Neenah, Menasha and Oshkosh.

In Green Bay, it is estimated that one-third of the phosphorous and other nutrients found come from the Fox River. Green Bay has experienced large areas of dead zones (no oxygen content) due to algae/ bacteria breakdown.

There is hope for Wisconsin waters. The Clean Water Act reduced phosphorous output from sewage treatment plants. Many farmers are using nutrient plans to reduce runoff from their lands. People are recycling waste oil, unused paint etc. instead of flushing it down the drain.

The DNR advises adults and children who cannot see their feet when standing knee deep in algae-filled waters to stay out of the water. This applies to pets as well.

*"The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant, 'What good is it?' – Aldo Leopold*



Larry Laehn

