

This is Wisconsin Water News, a production of the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Program. I'm your host, Marie Zhuikov. Today's episode is:

Northern Wisconsin communities benefit from climate change program

It's official: 2023 was the [hottest since we've been keeping records](#), according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This can trigger extreme weather events such as storms and flooding. Northern Wisconsin is not immune from the impacts of climate change and communities are taking action.

Leaders in several northern Wisconsin counties and cities were chosen to participate in a [Lake Superior Climate Champions Program](#) organized by Wisconsin Sea Grant and the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve in 2023. The program provided funding and guidance to two teams to work on goals of their choosing that addressed climate change.

The first team from the cities of Washburn and Ashland included Tony Janisch, Washburn assistant city administrator, and Sara Hudson, Ashland park and recreation director and city forester. Their project involved creating the outline of a coastal adaptation plan for their cities that focused on flood resilience and climate adaptation. They also developed a project priorities list, connected with other communities at a climate-focused annual conference by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative in Chicago and brought a coastal resilience adaptation workshop to the region in collaboration with the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science and the Lake Superior Collaborative.

During a webinar, Janisch described how the contacts he made during the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Conference helped him find funding for a long-standing problem in Washburn.

"We have some significant coastal erosion at one of our parks in the city. And it [the city] had spent three years trying to find funding to actually start some of the work. I was able to get some FEMA funding. So, we have an engineer now doing design work for how to solve the problem of the coastal erosion."

Another erosion project Janisch found possible funding sources for involves Thompson's Creek, which runs underneath a local highway and along another road.

"There was some erosion going on with one of the creek bends. You know, that's eating away at one of our side roads. So, it's very possible that it could start eroding away the right-of-way on the highway itself."

Hudson said the champions program, *"...Opened up a couple projects that have been on the back burner in my mind. And then also just creating more of a living shoreline along our Baker City Creek Estuary and along the ore dock shoreline that is there. It's been a really good process."*

The second team included emergency managers from Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas and Iron counties. These are Dorothy Tank (who is retired from Ashland County), Dave Sletten (with Douglas County), Stacy Ofstad (with Iron County) and Meagan Quaderer (Bayfield County) Their project focused on developing a digital form to record road maintenance activities for Great Lakes coastal counties in Wisconsin and beyond.

Quaderer said development of the road maintenance form was timely.

“This spring, the region had a lot of flooding and a lot of [road] damage. So, we actually had a real-world application of the document, especially in Bayfield County.”

The team presented their form at a Wisconsin Northwest Region Emergency Managers Meeting and it garnered their interest as well as that of representatives from Minnesota. The team was asked to present the form again to the Statewide Hazard Mitigation Committee. Those members saw the overwhelming value of the tool.

Sletten said, *“I think it’s not only something that will be used here within our four counties but also hopefully, within both states.”*

Tank said the form has already been used in Ashland County for a number of federally declared disasters.

“It was not only approved at the state level, but by FEMA. It contained all the information they wanted.”

The Climate Champions Program was facilitated by Karina Heim with the Reserve and Natalie Chin with Sea Grant. They recently released the call for applications for this year. If you’re listening to this podcast in 2024, you can apply at this link: <https://go.wisc.edu/0385yk>. The deadline is March 15.

For more general information, visit the Climate Champions webpage at <https://go.wisc.edu/am468e>.

That’s it for this episode of Wisconsin Water News, just one of the ways that Wisconsin Sea Grant promotes the sustainable use of Great Lakes resources through research, education and outreach. Listen and subscribe to us through I-Tunes and Google Play or at seagrant.wisc.edu. Thank you to Tony Janisch, Sara Hudson, Meagan Quaderer, and Dave Sletten. And thank you for listening.