Science & Decision Support

Collaboration/Networking to address PFAS contamination on French Island, Town of Campbell, WI and beyond

Lee Donahue, Supervisor, Town of Campbell
Michael Cardiff, Professor, Department of Geoscience UW-Madison

TOWN OF Campbell WISCONSIN

Department of Geoscience
Exploring fundamental questions about Earth, life, and the environment

Acknowledgements

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1851 LC
LA CROSSE COUNTY

Collaboration and Project Support:

TOWN OF Campbell WISCONSIN

USGS science for a changing world
Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center
Upper Midwest Water Science Center

WGNHS
Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey

WISCONSIN DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources


La Crosse Municipal Airport
(owned by City of La Crosse)
MN
1970 Plane Crash
2001 Plane Crash
Fire Drill Burn Pit
USGS UMESC
Campbell
Town Hall

PFAS in Campbell Groundwater

- Initial PFAS found in 2 City of La Crosse wells on French Island under EPA - UCMR sampling.
- Campbell notified of possible PFAS in groundwater October 2020.

PFAS in Campbell Groundwater

milwaukee journal sentinel

HEALTH

La Crosse area residents still coping with water contaminated by PFAS on French Island

Mark Hoffman

Published 7:01 a.m. CT July 13, 2024

Ralph Thoren uses eight to nine five-gallon bottles of water per month since the well at this home was found to be contaminated with PFAS. He is shown Thursday, June 13, 2024 in the Town of Campbell on French Island adjacent to La Crosse, Wisconsin. The town has been dealing with a large-scale contamination of toxic PFAS chemicals spreading out from the La Crosse Regional Airport. Hundreds of private wells on the island have been impacted, and the state has been paying for bottled water for residents for years.

- Initial DNR sampling found PFAS in groundwater near known Airport firefighting locations
- Individual resident samples spurred additional DNR tests throughout Campbell. 97% of 555 samples detected PFAS throughout island's shallow aquifer
- Campbell residents have not been able to drink their tap water for nearly 5 years

Solution: A safe (PFAS-Free) long-term source of drinking water -found in an alternate aquifer not impacted by human activities

Building a Partnership

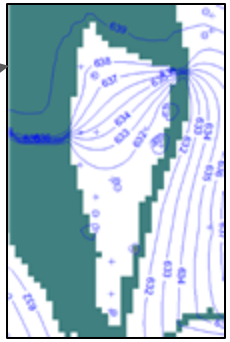
Lee Donahue
Supervisor, Town of Campbell

USGS science for a changing world

Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center

Upper Midwest Water Science Center

Randy Hunt
(USGS)



AGU THRIVING EARTH EXCHANGE

Empowering Communities Through Science

Thriving Earth Exchange supports community science by helping communities find resources, project managers, and experts to address their pressing concerns. Together they work to help communities be more empowered, resilient, and responsive.

Mike Cardiff
(UW-Madison)

Dave Hart & Moe Muldoon
(WGNHS)

Media

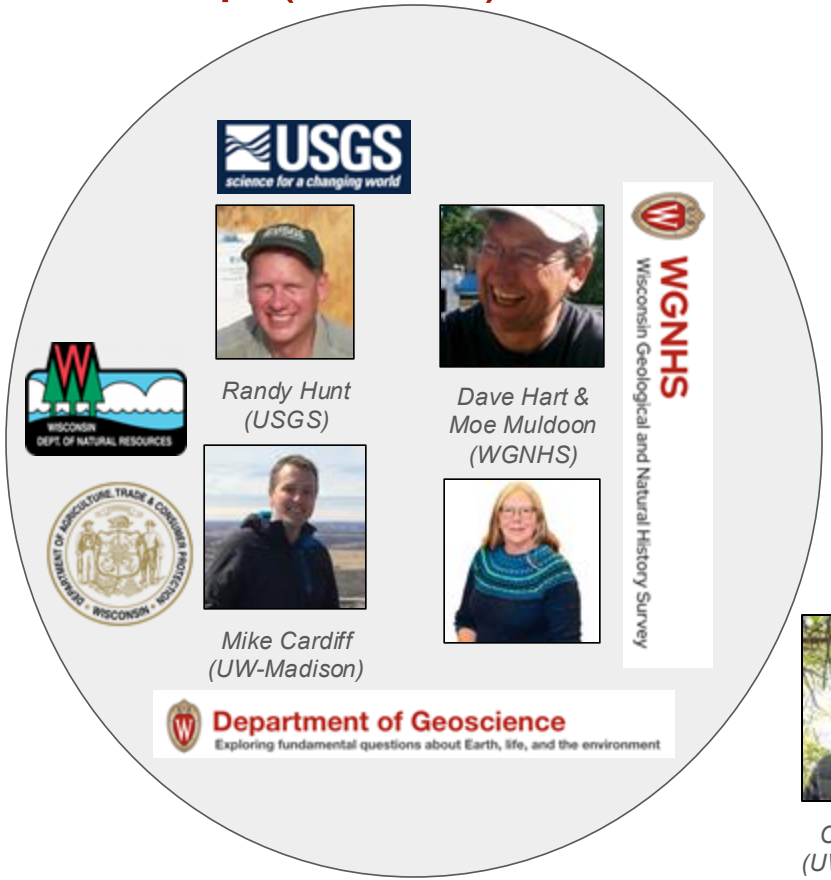
National & State & County Gov't

Regulators

Building a Partnership (sort of)

Madeline Gotkowitz & Carla Romano (DNR)

Sam Brockschmidt (DATCP, former MS student)



Randy Hunt (USGS)

Dave Hart & Moe Muldoon (WGNHS)

Mike Cardiff (UW-Madison)

Benefits of Collaborations & Communication:

- Equipment Sharing
- Knowledge transfer
- Student employment
- External Networks
- Building Momentum

Christy Remucal (UW, CEE / Sea Grant)

Chris Zahasky (UW Geoscience)

Finding and building partnership

UW-Madison students with Dave Hart from WGNHS

- Contact with other PFAS impacted communities/experts
- Create partnerships: DNR/DHS, elected officials, universities, communities, NGO's, utilities, SME's nation and world wide
- Collaborate with other org's AGU, Thriving Earth Exchange
- Leverage experts: USGS National Tap Water study, UWL correlated well depth to PFAS levels in shallow aquifer. Pompeii social sciences study. Viterbo microbe study in soil.
- County collaboration (e.g. Waste management storing used filters, and utility support Xcel WTE program)
- DNR / County collaboration (drilling permits and protocols)
- Constant contact with elected officials, policy makers
- **Tell your story** - Media Advisories, News Releases

Maintaining the Relationship

- Regular meetings & trust-building
- Thinking application-oriented rather than hypothesis-oriented: “Work in support of a sustainable, long-term source of drinking water for Campbell”
- Pro-bono insights / best possible science input
- Finding cheap ways to build on initial data (undergraduate helpers, interns, etc.)
- Organizing a true Team vs. splitting into sub-projects

Pitfalls and Challenges

- Communication / planning & adapting
- Timelines & personnel changes
- Balancing “in the weeds” technical conversation with overall goal
- Being prepared for uncertainties and limitations in science
- Balancing scientific motivations (new insights / publications) against community motivation (solutions ASAP, cost, privacy)
- Esp for students: Wide array of perspectives / interests. Pressure from many directions