



Media Release

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Water Quality Task Force Leaders React to SWIGG Study Report; Highlight Progress Made and Next Steps for Clean Water Legislation

MADISON – Recently, “Assessing Private Well Contamination in Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette Counties, Wisconsin: The Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater and Geology Study” (SWIGG Study) [report](#) was released. This is one of the largest and most comprehensive private well studies in the nation, and only the second study (following another recent [study](#) in Kewaunee County) to examine the relationship between microbial contamination of private wells and risk factors, such as land use. The report’s summary can be found [here](#).

Rep. Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville), Chair of the Wisconsin Legislature’s bipartisan and bicameral 2019-20 Water Quality Task Force, released the following in response:

“Over the course of the 2019-20 legislative session, our task force held a total of 14 public hearings across Wisconsin. We heard from hundreds of citizens, experts, organizations, and stakeholders about the water quality issues facing their communities and the state as a whole. The recently-released SWIGG study report provides additional research and context that largely affirms what we heard in our hearings and already know to be the case: private well contamination is a serious issue in southwestern Wisconsin and beyond, contaminants like nitrate, fecal waste, and pathogens can and frequently do enter our groundwater, and their sources and the ways they move through our groundwater- which depends on a number of factors- are related to well contamination.

“While the SWIGG study pertains specifically to private wells in southwestern Wisconsin, we know that the problem extends far beyond just that region. There is no one silver bullet that will solve all of our state’s water quality issues at once, but the task force got the ball rolling, and this research will help inform future efforts as we chart a path forward that ensures everyone in Wisconsin has access to clean drinking water. Our success in passing many of the task force’s recommendations into law is a testament to what we can accomplish when legislators come together to identify and enact solutions, but it’s clear that further action is needed.”

Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point), Vice-Chair of the Water Quality Task Force, shared the following:

“The SWIGG report provides a detailed analysis, ultimately underscoring that when it comes to private well contamination, we must treat not only the symptom but also the root cause. That means looking at the sources of contamination and investing in appropriate prevention, testing, outreach, and education, as well as remediation efforts. And it’s not just southwestern Wisconsinites who are dealing with private well contamination— far too many families in the Central Sands and across our state can’t drink the water from their taps. While we’ve taken some good steps forward for water quality in recent years, there’s still much more to do to ensure clean drinking water for everyone in Wisconsin.

“I recently joined DATCP Secretary Romanski and producer-led watershed groups from across Central Wisconsin at the Feltz Family Farm in Plover to celebrate Governor Evers signing our bipartisan clean water bill, [2021 Wisconsin Act 223](#), into law. The new law will reduce nitrate contamination by establishing a nitrogen optimization pilot program to help farmers reduce nitrogen loading and leaching, while also starting a new cover crop insurance rebate program to incentivize planting cover crops, which improve soil health. The new law also creates a State Hydrogeologist position to help local governments find and address local hotspots of contamination. It’s meaningful new laws like this one that will create positive change and lead to healthier drinking water in our state, and I’m proud of our bipartisan success.

“I’m also proud of the other Water Quality Task Force initiatives that have become law. Together, we invested \$5 million in the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin to develop our water workforce, increased funding for producer-led watershed grants to support farmers in protecting our water, extended a program to help people repair or replace their failing septic systems, and more. Rep. Novak and I also worked with task force members to introduce bipartisan legislation to help people know what’s in their water by enhancing and supporting private well testing, education, and outreach, and we hope to see these initiatives become law next. I’m grateful for what we’ve achieved so far and am eager to carry the work forward, with the SWIGG study as a valued resource, to protect our economy, health, and futures. When we work together across the aisle, we get results, and we’ll keep working for a stronger Wisconsin.”

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