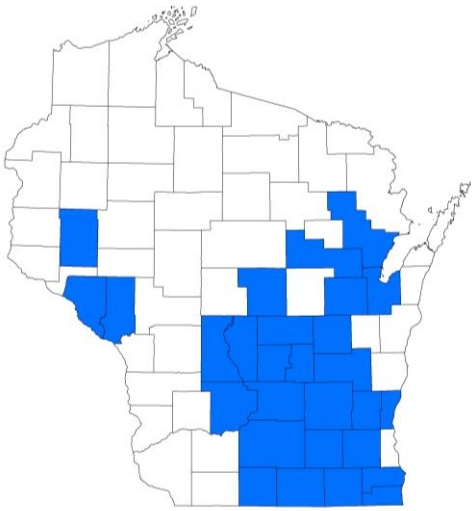
Wisconsin Counties with Drainage Districts



Adams	Oconto
Brown	Outagamie
Buffalo	Ozaukee
Columbia	Portage
Dane	Racine
Dodge	Rock
Dunn	Sauk
Fond du Lac	Shawano
Green	Trempealeau
Green Lake	Walworth
Jefferson	Washington
Juneau	Waukesha
Kenosha	Waupaca
Marquette	Waushara
Monroe	Winnebago

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

About Us

We support the drainage program by:

- Reviewing and approving designs and maintenance plans.
- Preparing environmental assessments when required.
- Maintaining information including approved engineer list.
- Providing technical and other assistance.

Contact Us

For more information, contact:

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Drainage Program Website:
http://datcp.wi.gov/Environment/Drainage_Programs/index.aspx

DRAINAGE DISTRICTS IN WISCONSIN

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

What is a Drainage District?

Drainage districts are local governmental entities organized under a county drainage board for the primary purpose of draining lands for agriculture. A drainage district establishes a legal mechanism for managing drains and related facilities to ensure reliable drainage. Landowners who benefit from drainage must pay assessments to cover the cost of constructing, maintaining, and repairing district drains. The majority of the existing drainage districts in the state were formed in the early 1900s.

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is aware of about 176 active drainage districts in Wisconsin. Of the 72 counties in Wisconsin, 31 of them contain one or more drainage districts. The majority of the drainage districts are located in the eastern and southeastern portions of the state.

DATCP has an interactive web map, https://datcpgis.wi.gov/maps/?viewer=dd, that can used to identify districts.

What are the advantages of being in a drainage district?

Wisconsin's water law establishes the framework for the orderly drainage of farm land. Unlike western states, where limited amounts of water are available for agricultural production, most midwestern farmland has too much water. Consequently, farmers in Wisconsin rely on surface and subsurface drainage systems to remove water from fields in order to grow crops. These drainage systems also protect structures built below grade (i.e., basements and septic tanks) from periodic flooding. Therefore, drainage is a benefit to many who live in Wisconsin's rural lands.

When landowners take it upon themselves to drain their fields, divert stormwater, or pump out their basements, it is frequently at the expense of the landowner downstream. As you can imagine, this causes problems. Often the solution to the removal of surface water and groundwater is best approached regionally, or with many neighbors working together for a common goal.

By organizing a drainage district, landowners gain these advantages:

- Pooling resources and sharing responsibilities to achieve a common good.
- Securing an engineered system that provides reliable drainage.
- Supporting an organized framework for effective management of operations.
- Avoiding and resolving landowner conflicts related to water management.

Agricultural drainage lowers the water table to make land more suitable for farming,

How do drainage districts operate?

The county drainage board holds public meetings to discuss issues involving drainage districts and to make decisions regarding those districts. The county drainage board is required to ensure that all drainage districts under its jurisdiction comply with the standards in the drainage rule (Ch. ATCP 48, Wis. Admin. Code) and statute (Ch. 88, Wis. Stats.).

The county drainage board has the power to:

- Manage district boundaries including annexing or withdrawing land.
- Conduct inspections annually and when necessary.
- Undertake drain maintenance and construction projects.
- Levy assessments and borrow money.
- Hire attorneys and engineers.