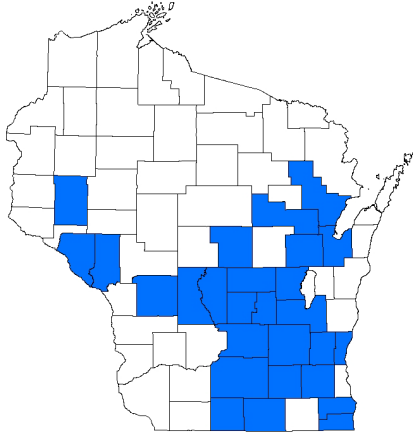


Wisconsin Counties with Drainage Districts



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

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

About Us

DATCP is responsible for monitoring county drainage board and drainage district compliance with applicable law. We support the drainage program by:

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

For more information, contact:

Barton T. Chapman, P.E.
State Drainage Program Manager
(608) 224-4608
Barton.Chapman@Wisconsin.gov

DATCP

Agricultural Resource Management Division 2811
Agriculture Drive
PO Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708 – 8911

Drainage Program Website:

[https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/
Programs Services/DrainageDistricts.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/ProgramsServices/DrainageDistricts.aspx)



DRAINAGE DISTRICTS IN WISCONSIN

P-DARM195 (05/26)



DRAINAGE DISTRICTS IN WISCONSIN

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 Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is aware of about 190 active drainage districts in Wisconsin. Of the 72 counties in Wisconsin, 27 of them contain one or more drainage districts. Most of the drainage districts are in the eastern and southeastern portions of the state.

DATCP has an interactive web map, <https://datcpgis.wi.gov/maps/?viewer=dd>,

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING IN A DRAINAGE DISTRICT?

Wisconsin's water law establishes the framework for the orderly drainage of farmland. 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 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.



WHAT ARE DRAINAGE BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES?

A county drainage board is responsible for operating all drainage districts in the county. Drainage board members have a serious responsibility. Drainage districts have major impacts on land use, and on individual landowners. The county drainage board must exercise its considerable power according to law, and with due regard to the rights and interests of those affected. The county drainage board is responsible for:

- Operating and maintaining district drains and dams within a district.
- Levying assessments against landowners who benefit from the drainage provided.
- Inspecting the district drains and corridors.
- Making or recommending modifications to a drainage district.
- Resolving drainage disputes, subject to applicable law.
- Notifying landowners that their property is within a drainage district.

WHAT ARE LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES?

All landowners are required to notify the county drainage board of any proposed activity that may affect a district drain in any way. Activities requiring landowners to give prior notification to the county drainage board include:

- Making land use changes.
- Altering the flow of water into or from a district drain.
- Cleaning, extending, or enlarging a private ditch.
- Connecting a private drain to a district drain, including the installation of new tile fields.
- Installing private dams in private drainage ditches.
- Removing existing district or private drains from ditches.
- Disconnecting a private drain from a district drain.
- Removing other private or district ditch obstructions, such as beaver dams, dead falls, sand bars, or sediment deposits.
- Removing lands from inclusion in a district.
- Withdrawing water from a district drain.
- Removing a spoil pile.
- Placing a structure or obstruction in a drain.
- Manipulating the water levels in the ditches.
- Taking any action which affects the operation of the drainage district.
- Row cropping or placing obstructions within the district corridor.



Landowners are encouraged to engage the county drainage boards by attending district meetings and hearings.

ADDITIONAL LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES?

Additional landowner responsibilities include:

- Allow access to district ditches and corridors.
- Establish erosion control practices, on own lands.
- Comply with lawful orders of the county drainage board.
- Pay cost assessments.