



The Wisconsin Clean Marina Program assists marinas in preventing pollution and improving water quality.

WISCONSIN CLEAN MARINA PROGRAM

Theresa Qualls and Todd Breiby

Wisconsin has over 160 marinas, yacht clubs and boatyards constituting an important sector of the state's recreation, marine and tourism economies. Marinas and boatyards contribute hundreds of millions of dollars annually to communities across Wisconsin and provide recreational opportunities for residents and tourists. More than 1 in 10 state residents own a registered boat and 61% of state residents boated at least once in 2019.

Since marinas are located directly on the water, they act as a final defense before pollution enters the waterways and are in a unique position to make a positive impact on water quality through the implementation of best management practices (BMPs). This is where the Wisconsin Clean Marina Program (CMP) comes into play. Developed in 2009, the CMP is a voluntary certification program that assists marinas in implementing BMPs to prevent pollution and improve water quality. In addition, the program provides guidance, training and technical assistance to Wisconsin marina and boatyard operators.

A Wisconsin Clean Marina is a marina or boatyard that has voluntarily adopted sufficient measures to reduce water pollution, protect public health, and improve fish and wildlife habitat. To become a certified Clean Marina, facilities must pass an onsite inspection by the CMP coordinator and technical team, which verifies the adoption of required BMPs. Examples of best management practices include preventing and cleaning up fuel spills, reducing hazardous waste generation,

proper storage and disposal of hazardous waste, recycling waste, managing storm water, treating boat pressure wash wastewater, preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species, and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat. Marinas also must educate their boaters on clean boating practices.

For the past five years, the Fund for Lake Michigan has provided two grants to support the CMP. The program is administered by the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant College Program in partnership with the Wisconsin Marine Association, the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Through the grant, the program was able to grow and increase the number of participating marinas. Currently, there are 21 certified Clean Marinas and 24 pledged marinas throughout the state, and through certification, over 1,600 BMPs have been implemented.

The program provides training for marina managers and staff annually through workshops and one-on-one technical assistance and over 50 marina managers and staff are trained each year. As a voluntary, nonregulatory program, the CMP provides technical assistance to marinas on regulations and permit requirements.

Recently, the program was able to update the program website and provide valuable information to marinas including includes videos and a brochure, boater education materials, the Wisconsin Clean Marina Program Guidebook, and other resources. In fall 2022, version 3 of



the “Wisconsin Clean Marina Best Management Practice Guidebook” was developed along with an updated checklist. This guidebook is a reference document for marina managers and operators and outlines practices required by law as well as practices required and recommended for certification. All Clean Marina materials, including the guidebook, are available on the program’s website at <https://wisconsincleanmarina.org>.

In addition to certification, the CMP addresses other industry needs such as boater education, marine debris collection and shrink wrap recycling. The program provides marinas with boater education materials, such as clean boater rack cards and signage indicating BMPs for boaters to follow. During winters in Wisconsin, it is typical for boats to be wrapped in plastic when stored outside and then in the spring, the plastic boat wrap is removed and needs disposal. The CMP assists marinas in recycling plastic boat wrap to keep it out of landfills. Marine debris, in particular plastics, can accumulate in marina basins and the CMP helps marinas collect this plastic waste. From installing trash collecting technology to fishing line recycling receptacles, marinas can help collect and reduce plastic pollution in the waterways.

The CMP continues to work cooperatively with the Great Lakes and National Clean Marina Networks to share ideas and identify opportunities for project collaborations. Identifying and developing new partnerships to further the goals and impact of



the CMP continues to be a priority. This includes finding new ways to both provide technical assistance and implement projects at marinas.

Several local projects were recently completed including construction of a stormwater treatment wetland at Barker’s Island Marina in Superior, development of a Wisconsin Great Lakes Marina Resilience Assessment to help marinas be prepared for coastal storms, flooding and fluctuating water levels, and development of conceptual designs and engineering plans for a boat wash station and stormwater improvements at Kewaunee Marina and boat launch. These projects are examples of what can be accomplished through partnerships with the CMP.

Clean Marinas keep oil, fuel, paints, cleaning products, plastics and nutrients out of the water, and create a safer and healthier place to work and recreate. Clean Marinas contribute to the local and state economies and enhance the positive image of the community. Boaters truly care about clean waterways and want to patronize Clean Marinas. As the CMP continues to expand and grow, it will play a vital role in improving water quality for the boating community and marine industry.

Theresa Qualls is a Wisconsin Clean Marina Program Coordinator with Wisconsin Sea Grant. She may be reached at quallst@uwgb.edu. Todd Breiby is a Program Coordinator with the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program. He may be reached at todd.breiby@wisconsin.gov.