

# The Decade's Top Three Issues

## Environmentalists look at land use and despoilation.

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

**S**teady Eddy says that trip to the Rose Bowl isn't the only great Christmas present that we long-suffering residents of the Badger State are getting. Our other present is from Wisconsin's Environmental Decade, which is launching a new agenda to fight threats to our state's environment.

The Decade's directors have developed three priority issues for the next three years—land use, energy and agricultural pollution.

Concerning land use, the Decade observes in a recent report that the purposes for which we use—or do not use—land are a major factor in the environmental integrity of Wisconsin.

"Do we use a given parcel of land for a dump, park, housing development, farm field, forest preserve, highway, shopping mall or copper mine? Decisions regarding land use are among the most important environmental decisions in the 1990s."

Land use, in the Decade's definition, includes: enactment of statewide land-use legislation to limit urban sprawl, local land-use actions that affect urban sprawl or other environmental concerns, and many transportation decisions.

Concerning energy use, the Decade says "the production and use of energy affects Wisconsin's air quality, water quality and the health of its citizens." Specific initiatives include lobbying for energy conservation and renewable energy development and for promoting conservation and limits on power plant construction in the Public Service Commission's advance plan.

**C**oncerning agricultural pollution, the Decade confirms the experiences of folks throughout the state who have encountered problems with our drinking and fishing waters.

"Agricultural activities," the Decade says, "represent the largest single threat to surface and groundwater in Wisconsin. This is an urban and rural problem."

The Decade's specific goals here include: effective regulation of animal waste, including tougher DNR rules; a practical enforcement program, including provisions for handling citizen complaints; an improved sustainable agriculture program; and tougher enforcement of pesticide rules.

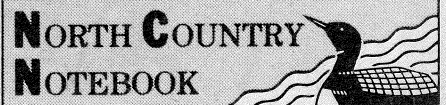
Steady Eddy says that trout fishers, like canaries in the mine, have long been warning us of animal wastes in trout waters, including the precious jewels in the 14 counties of the DNR's southern district. DNR's Mike Vollrath

has been responding to complaints about "manure management" like an overworked plumber.

In addition to the Decade's concern, Vollrath and the DNR are getting help from a new coalition, Wisconsin Agriculture for the Environment, dedicated to helping livestock producers view animal waste "as an asset and to manage it properly so it doesn't become an environmental liability."

In a recent issue of Agri-View, Keri Retallick, spokesperson for the new organization, explained why it was formed. "As livestock enterprises grow larger and rural/urban boundaries become blurred, the waste disposal process must be managed differently. The non-farm public that once said 'Smell that country air' now call the EPA and ask 'Why is our lake dying?'"

An encouraging aspect of this new organization is that it's not a bunch of



city slickers calling on farmers to clean up their act; it's agricultural folks calling upon the ag community to clean up its act—and to make a little more money in the process.

Member groups include the Wisconsin Agribusiness Council, the Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, the Wisconsin Farm Bureau, the Wisconsin Pork Producers Association, the National Pork Producers Council, the Professional Dairy Producers, the Wisconsin Sheep Breeders Co-op, American Feeds and various poultry and other ag producers.

The coalition works closely with educators and regulators involved with manure management. Assisting the group are UW-Extension experts, such as Vern Leibbrandt in animal science; Dick Wolkowski, Larry Bundy and Keith Kelling in soil science; and Brian Holmes in ag engineering. Other participants include Robin Harris, chair of the UW soil science department; Sue Porter of the state Agriculture Department; Jim Kurtz of DNR; Susan Butler of the U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service; and Tom Davenport of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Steady Eddy says all the folks mentioned above, including the reps of the trade groups, are "our country cousins" and deserve the heartfelt thanks of all us city folks who drink water and who fish in it, too.

"If we're gonna be up the crick," Steady says, "it might as well be clean! Happy Holidays, Cuz!" ■