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# Sustainability at UW–Madison

At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, sustainability is an integral part of the institution’s educational, research, and service missions, and dovetails with the university’s Strategic Framework 2015–2019. Sustainability has a place in our classrooms and residence halls, in our dining halls and facilities projects, and in our laboratories and outreach. Sustainability integrates environmental, economic, and social concerns to create a livable, just, and equitable world now and in the future. Here are many of our sustainability achievements from the past year, and our path forward.

## ★ Reaching for the STARS

- ★ In August 2019, UW–Madison submitted its first [Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System \(STARS\)](#) report, including a comprehensive greenhouse gas emissions inventory. This report reflects the expertise of more than 150 staff, faculty, and students who helped to [identify, compile, and review data](#). The university’s rating will enable UW–Madison to highlight achievements, identify opportunities for improvement, and set a baseline for future performance goals.

## Educational Experience

- 79 academic departments — representing more than 90% of our academic divisions— offer sustainability-related courses. For instance, the [School of Nursing integrates](#) climate change, planetary health, and air pollution into its undergraduate curriculum, in an effort to transform the environmental impact of healthcare, increase environmental health literacy, and improve public health outcomes.
- [Office of Sustainability student interns](#) worked over 6,600 hours on a variety of projects, including consulting with campus partners to make [labs](#), [events](#), [offices](#), and [Greek life](#) more sustainable.
- 20 campus and community partners collaborated on over 15 student-centered events for [Earth Week](#) in April 2019.
- UW–Madison students investigated regional watershed issues thanks to the [Go Big Read](#) selection, *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes* by Dan Egan.

## Research and Scholarship

With annual research expenditures of more than \$1.2 billion annually, a broad array of UW–Madison projects involve sustainability and environmental studies. In 2018, more than 150 faculty and staff members generated \$412 million in external funding for sustainability-related research. As a leading global institution for the study of climate change and public health, UW–Madison scholarship includes [energy efficiency and air quality](#), [heat-related mortalities](#), [insect-borne disease](#)

[vectors](#), and the [unequal distribution of climate change effects](#). For example:

- Professors Tracey Holloway and Greg Nemet are partnering with Madison Gas and Electric to evaluate its [plan for net zero carbon electricity by 2050](#).
- Recent [cluster hires](#) across 30 academic departments address sustainability concepts like climate change, access and equity, and socioeconomic disparities.

## Wisconsin Idea

- The [Native Nations UW Leadership Summit](#), in partnership with the 12 Native Nations of Wisconsin, helped explore the establishment of an indigenous, collaborative research center focused on improving health services, sustaining language and culture, preserving the environment, developing local economies, strengthening families, and expanding educational opportunities.
- High school students from across Wisconsin [discussed Rachel Carson’s \*Silent Spring\*](#) for the 2018 Great World Texts conference, hosted by the Center for the Humanities.
- 92 projects on water-related research — such as Professor Christina Remucal’s work on pollutants — received \$13 million in grant funding. These projects align with the Governor’s [Year of Clean Drinking Water](#) and will inform the way Wisconsin treats its water resources.



**410 million** gallons of water saved over the lifetime of new low-flow toilets in residence halls, funded by a student-initiated [Green Fund](#) project.



## Our People

- UW–Madison helps campus users access [fresh](#) and [local](#) food, [recover and distribute](#) unused food products, [compost](#) food waste, and learn about [regional agricultural systems](#).
- 93% of students travel to campus using [alternative transportation methods](#) thanks to excellent bike and public transportation infrastructure.
- Dozens of student organizations focus on sustainability-related topics. [Hooper Ambassadors](#), for example, encourages equity and diversity in the outdoors, while [Helios](#) played a role in the new [solar installation on Gordon Dining & Event Center](#).
- UW–Madison hired its first full-time Director of Sustainability and continues to [invest in its sustainability capacity](#).

## Resource Stewardship

- University Housing’s reusable container program, [Ticket to Takeout](#), eliminated the need for over 368,000 disposable containers and saved \$55,000 during the first year of implementation.
- Two innovative [water and energy saving initiatives](#) at the Charter Street Heating & Cooling Plant diverted over 70 million gallons of water from the sanitary sewer drain, saved more than \$130,000, and added the equivalent of 400-500 tons of additional cooling capacity.
- During FY 2018, the university sent over 450 tons of organic waste to be composted: 316 tons of food waste to an [anaerobic digester in Middleton](#) and 147 tons of other organic waste to a university-owned facility.

## On Wisconsin: The Year Ahead

- UW–Madison will establish the Sustainability Advisory Council to guide campus sustainability planning. It will also establish the Resiliency and Stewardship Committee to develop a comprehensive university resiliency plan.
- The Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies is celebrating the [Year of the Environment](#) in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Nelson Institute and the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. The Year of the Environment will feature lectures, films, performances, and special events, while expanding the Institute’s mission to inspire and educate the next generation of environmental leaders.
- The Midwest Universities for Global Health conference [will convene at UW–Madison for the first time](#); 20+ universities from around the U.S. will showcase ways higher education can advance health for people, animals, and ecosystems.
- State sustainability leaders will gather in Madison for the [UW System Sustainability Conference](#) in October, offering UW System students, staff, and faculty the opportunity to network, share their success and challenges, and collaborate on state-wide initiatives.
- Professor Jonathan Patz and Nelson Institute Instructor Nathan Schulfer are organizing a team from UW-Madison to participate in the United Nations 25th Conference of the Parties on Climate Change, December 2019 in Santiago, Chile.



**550,000**  
hours of  
[community](#)  
[service](#)  
contributed  
by UW–Madison students to  
over 90  
community  
organizations that address  
local, regional,  
and global  
sustainability.

