

TAKE ACTION ON STATE WATER FUNDS

States' revolving funds help keep water safe and affordable, but action is needed to make sure the money goes to people who really need it.

Improve Wisconsin's Drinking Water Funding Process!

Wisconsin's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) program does not currently incorporate environmental justice. Due to the impact of legacy pollution on drinking water quality, environmental justice policies help ensure that money reaches the communities that need it the most. Recent changes to Wisconsin's DWSRF program fall short of the U.S. EPA's recommendations. This guide includes recommended advocacy points for public comment on the annual intended use plan, which is typically released in **June**.

Problems and Solutions

Replace Weak Criteria to Identify Disadvantaged Communities

Median Household Income (MHI) is a poor statistic to identify low-income populations that state revolving funds should target because MHI is easily influenced by some residents with higher incomes. Instead, DWSRF criteria should consider the percentage of a community's population that falls below 200% of the federal poverty level. This measure represents the actual number of low-income households in a community.

Scoring Criteria Does Not Protect Local Autonomy

Wisconsin's criteria prioritizes consolidation, but there are no safeguards in place to protect local oversight, governance, and ownership of assets. Without protections, this process can result in loss of revenue, property, and local power. For systems with existing community governance (i.e. municipal and other systems), consolidation points should be awarded only if all communities that will have a system shuttered have held a referendum indicating their approval to consolidate their system, resulting in a system being shuttered. The agreements leading to a referendum must be communicated to the public.

Small Population Bias for Disadvantaged Communities

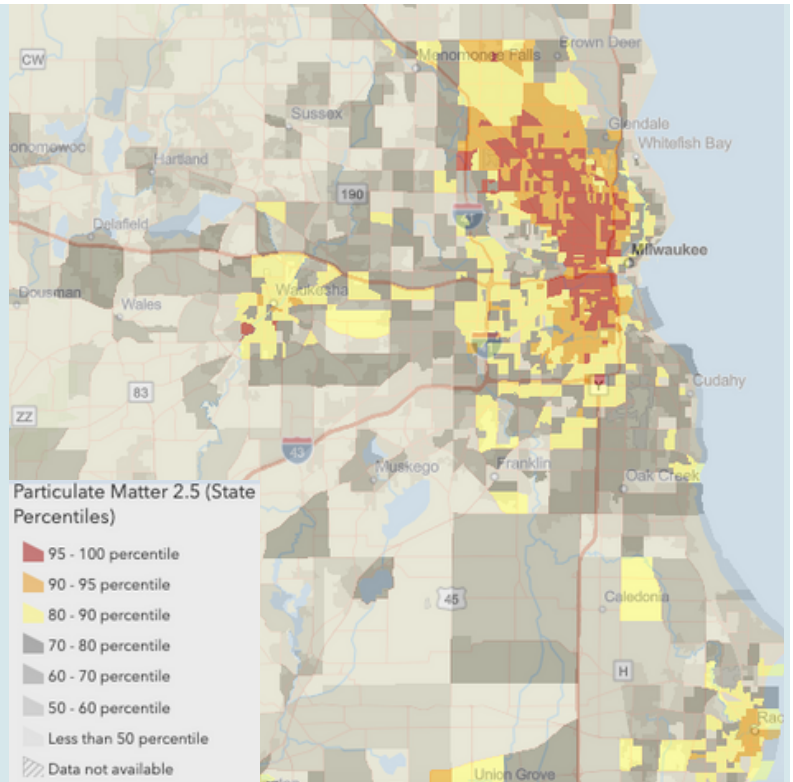
We suggest taking away any favoritism towards smaller populations to be considered a "disadvantaged community." The State gives more points to small disadvantaged towns and this makes it harder for mid-to-large sized areas to get grants or low-rate loans. We agree that small communities deserve extra assistance due to limited staff, but this is already provided by the state from another pot of money.

Prioritize Disadvantaged Communities

Wisconsin can dedicate up to 35% of the capitalization grant to DACs as principal forgiveness. Moreover, the Justice40 initiative directed 40% of total SRF funding to disadvantaged communities. DACs must be flagged in the PPL to track this spending as well.

Wisconsin is developing a map called the Environmental Equity Tool which will use environmental quality and socioeconomic data to understand environmental justice in the state. The finished tool should be utilized to help identify disadvantaged communities and address environmental justice in the DWSRF.

Currently, the state can also use the **EJSCREEN** tool from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to find areas with environmental justice issues. This tool uses critical data in Environmental Justice Indexes and socioeconomic indicators to help prioritize projects in areas of need.



EPA's EJSCREEN shows a view of the eastern coast of Wisconsin, including Milwaukee, which highlights areas of poor air quality in dark red.

If you have any questions, concerns, or want to know more, please reach out to Freshwater Future staff at info@freshwaterfuture.org or call (231)348-8200.