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Driftless Area Water Study to Provide Free Professional Well Testing; 1,200 Invitations Mailed to Area Residents

PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, WI — The Conservation and Health Departments of Crawford, Richland, and Vernon Counties have announced the 2026 phase of the Driftless Area Water Study (DAWS). This year, the project will provide comprehensive groundwater testing at no cost to 400 households within the three-county region to establish a scientific baseline for regional groundwater/drinking water health.

Participants were identified through a rigorous selection process conducted by the UW-Stevens Point Water and Environmental Analysis Lab (WEAL). Using Wisconsin DNR records, researchers filtered for specific well construction criteria and applied spatial weighting to ensure the study accurately represents the region's complex fractured bedrock and sandstone aquifers.

A \$128 Value at No Cost

Selected participants will receive two professional test suites:

- **Homeowner Package:** Includes tests for bacteria, nitrates, pH, alkalinity, hardness, chloride, and conductivity.
- **Metals Package:** Measures 11 different elements, including arsenic, lead, copper, iron, and manganese.

"This study is about the health of our shared groundwater," said Dawn Adams, Crawford County Public Health Specialist. "By participating, residents help us map the safety of the water source that serves nearly all of our neighbors. Because we have funding for only 400 tests, we encourage invited residents to respond immediately."

How the Process Works:

- **Late January:** 1,200 invitation letters will be mailed to pre-selected properties.
- **Opt-In:** Recipients must return the enclosed postage-paid postcard to participate.
Note: Participation is limited to the first 400 respondents.
- **Collection Day (March 24):** Participants will collect their own water samples on Tuesday, March 24. Detailed instructions will be provided in the kit.
- **Drop-Off:** Samples must be delivered that same day to designated collection sites located throughout each county.
- **Results:** Participants will receive a private report of their results. In June, WEAL will present a generalized regional summary at public meetings.

The DAWS project is a collaborative effort between the three counties and UW-Stevens Point WEAL to monitor the primary drinking water source for the Driftless Area.

Residents who do not receive an invitation but wish to test their wells are encouraged to contact their local county Health Department for more information on available testing resources.