

PFAS Contamination in and around the Town of Stella: Health Information

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) first discovered contamination of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) during their statewide groundwater investigation in late 2022. Additional surface water and groundwater testing has shown high levels of PFAS throughout the region. High levels of PFAS may pose a health risk to people who become exposed to them. This document from the Department of Health Services (DHS) provides guidance, tips, and resources for area residents and visitors for safely participating in activities that may expose them to PFAS.

Drinking water

Drinking water that has PFAS in it is the primary way that people can be exposed to the largest amounts of PFAS.

- ▶ **DO** respond to the DNR to have your private well water tested for PFAS if you are within the eligible area for DNR-led private well water testing.
- ▶ **DO** contact the DNR if you have PFAS levels above DHS's health guidelines in your private well water. You may be eligible for short-term emergency bottled water and a well replacement.
- ▶ **DON'T** consume water from wells with PFAS levels above DHS's health guidelines.

Fish and wildlife consumption

Eating fish and wildlife that contain PFAS can expose you to high levels of PFAS and other contaminants because these contaminants can bioaccumulate, or build up, in fish and wildlife over time. Consumption guidance for this area is based on new science-based guidelines set by the Great Lakes Consortium for Fish Consumption Advisories, which includes Wisconsin.

- ▶ **DON'T** eat ANY fish caught from **Snowden Lake, Sunset Lake,*** or the **Moen Lake chain**. This is because PFAS levels in these fish are too high. This is also because mercury levels in walleye from these lakes are too high.
- ▶ **DON'T** eat any liver from deer harvested within 5 miles of the Stella Town Hall.
- ▶ **DON'T** eat more than one meal per month of muscle from deer harvested within 5 miles of the Stella Town Hall.
- ▶ **DO** review all DNR fish and wildlife eating advisories.

*Note: Fish from Sunset Lake were not tested so these recommendations are based on surface water testing and fish testing data from the Moen Lake Chain, which receives water from Sunset Lake. PFAS levels from fish in these shared bodies of water would have similar levels.

Gardening

Scientists are still learning how PFAS move through soil and into plants, fruits, and vegetables. The PFAS of highest concern tend to stay in the roots of plants, rather than in the plant's fruits and vegetables. However, when PFAS levels are high in water, plants may still take up that PFAS into fruits and leaves.

- ▶ **DO** use water with PFAS levels below DHS's health guidelines when watering fruit and vegetable gardens.

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Surface water recreation

Surface water testing shows that some lakes and rivers are impacted by high levels of PFAS while others are not:

- PFAS levels are **above** DHS's health guidelines in Snowden Lake, Jewel Creek, Starks Creek, Sunset Lake, Second Lake through Fifth Lake, and the north branch of the Pelican River. The highest levels of PFAS are in Snowden Lake and Sunset Lake.
- PFAS levels are **below** DHS's health guidelines in Moen Lake, George Lake, Lake Thompson, Stella Lake, Spur Lake, Ginty Lake, Pine Lake Creek, Lily Bass Lake, Tom Doyle Creek, Jennie Webber Lake, Jennie Webber Creek, Skunk Creek, Shepard Creek, Gudegast Creek, Del Stengl Lake, and Lela Creek.

There are many health benefits to swimming and other water recreation, and safe ways to recreate while limiting your exposure to PFAS. The following recommendations will not only protect you against exposure to PFAS in affected lakes, but will also protect you from other hazards commonly found in surface water.

For Snowden Lake, Jewel Creek, Starks Creek, Sunset Lake, Second Lake through Fifth Lake, and the north branch of the Pelican River:

- ▶ **DO** participate in boating, canoeing, wading, paddleboarding, or other activities that have a lower chance of swallowing water. Limit your time swimming, waterskiing, tubing, or doing other activities that have a higher chance of swallowing water.

For all lakes and rivers:

- ▶ **DO** look for clear water when choosing a spot to swim or wade. Steer clear of water with noticeable discolor, odor, and any surface scum or foam.
- ▶ **DON'T** swallow lake or river water. Besides PFAS, lake and river water can also contain bacteria and parasites that can make you sick if you swallow it.
- ▶ **DO** keep an eye on children and encourage them not to swallow surface water. Children tend to swallow twice as much water as adults do while swimming and playing in water.
- ▶ **DO** wash your hands with clean water and soap before eating food after you've been in the water or touching sand or soil.

Contacts

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Resources

DNR Town of Stella website



DHS PFAS website



DNR PFAS data viewer

