Conservation Corner

*Conservation Corner is a weekly article produced by the Forest County Land &Water Conservation Department. For more information contact Steve Kircher, County Conservationist-Land Information/GIS Director at 715-478-1387 or by e-mail at* *lcc@co.forest.wi.us**.*

Lately in Wisconsin media there has been a lot of talk about PFAS. I did some research and would like to share my findings.

**What are PFAS and Why are They a Problem?**PFAS is a catch-all term for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, which is a group of more than 5,000 synthetic chemicals. They can make surfaces non-stick or waterproof, so these chemicals are used in furniture, carpets, paper products, textiles, cookware and cosmetics. They are also used in firefighting foams, chrome plating and in the production of fluoropolymers like Teflon.

**Why should you be concerned about PFAS?**PFAS has drawn a lot of attention because of concerns about human and ecosystem health. There is also some evidence that ties PFAS to cancer, primarily among people who lived or worked near contaminated manufacturing locations.

**Where are PFAS found?**PFAS are not just a Wisconsin issue. PFAS are commonly associated with military sites and airports due to the use of firefighting foams. The contamination near Marinette is associated with activity at the Tyco Fire Technology Center, which has led to high PFAS concentrations in private drinking water wells as well as nearby drainage ditches.

**What is Wisconsin doing about PFAS?**At the state level, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is working on multiple fronts to determine the extent of PFAS contamination in Wisconsin. In Forest County, we are fortunate that Northern Lake Service has the method to test for PFAS and did the testing for the contaminants found in the Rhinelander wells. Given the active interest in PFAS and the persistence of these chemicals, Wisconsinites can expect to hear much more about them in the years to come.