

New regulations aimed at reducing the number of blue-green algae blooms, fish kills and contaminated wells will be the subject of public hearings later this month and during February.

The Department of Natural Resources is proposing stronger regulations to curb runoff from farm fields and construction sites. The agency also will require municipalities to reduce by 40% the pollutants carried in their storm water.

The regulations are a revision of rules approved in 2002. Gordon Stevenson, who heads the DNR's runoff management program, said the modifications are designed to reduce the amount of soil and the pollutants that stick to soil and wash into waterways.

The big concern is phosphorus, which is a major contributor to runoff pollution and a major reason 700 lakes and portions of rivers are expected to be added to the state's 2010 list of impaired waters.

A national panel of experts convened by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in August 2009 calls nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen a "growing environmental crisis."

Under the rules, farmers would have to meet standards for phosphorus coming off the land. Standards would be more stringent for farmers in watersheds with impaired waters. Farmers also would be prohibited from plowing within 20 feet of lakes and streams.

Municipalities would have to reduce their levels of runoff by 2013, but also will be given more time if they are showing a good faith attempt to cut the runoff flow.

The hearings will all begin at 1 p.m. on:

Jan. 25, Appleton: Outagamie County Highway Department, Highway Shop conference room, 1313 Holland Road

Jan. 28, Eau Claire: Best Western Trail Lodge, 3340 Mondovi Road

Feb. 2, Waukesha: State Office Building, Room 151, 141 NW Barstow St.

Feb. 10, Madison: Lyman F. Anderson Agricultural and Conservation Center, Classrooms A and B, 1 Fen Oak Court

Feb. 11, Wausau: Rib Mountain Municipal Center, 3700 N. Mountain Road

Feb. 25, Platteville: University North Room, Pioneer Student Center, UW-Platteville, One University Plaza