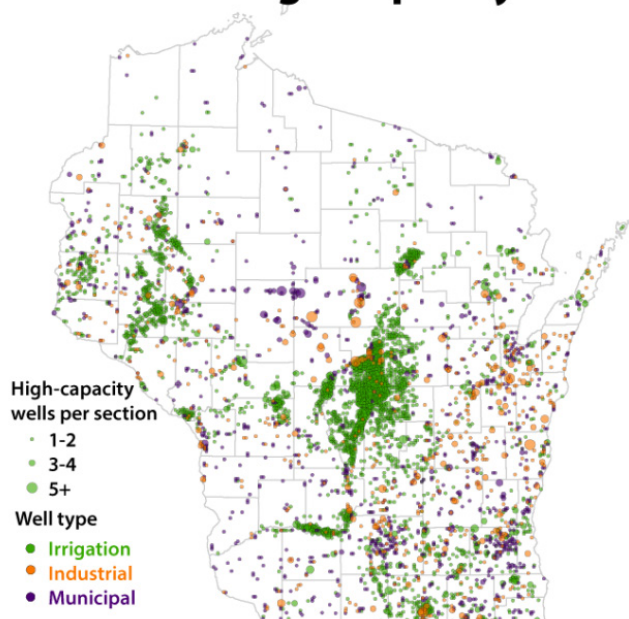


Protecting Groundwater for Future Generations

Groundwater supply is a growing concern in Wisconsin. Luckily, Wisconsin is not yet facing a water crisis of the magnitude that many western states are facing. If we take smart action now, we can manage our groundwater to ensure that adequate supplies are available for future generations. On the other hand, if Wisconsin fails to take action to limit the cumulative impacts of high-capacity wells, the prospects for future generations of farmers and the outlook for the state's \$88 billion agricultural industry will be in jeopardy.

Wisconsin's high-capacity wells

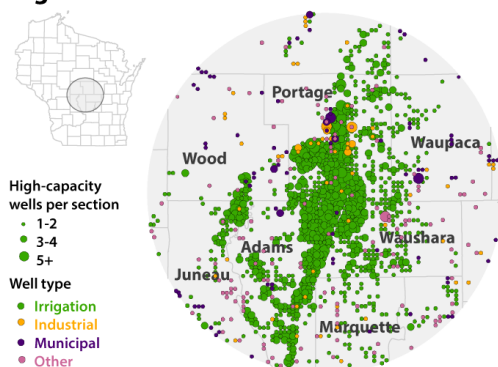


Data: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Credit: Kate Prengaman/Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

This fact sheet is brought to you by:



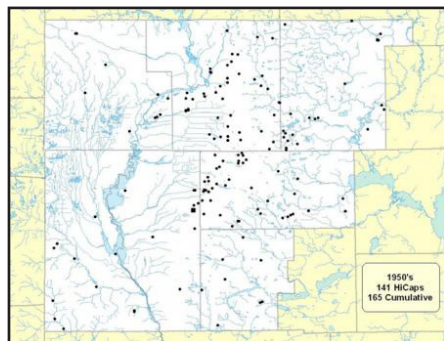
Irrigation wells dominate the Central Sands



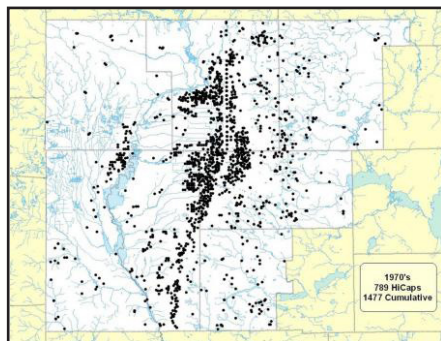
Data: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Credit: Kate Prengaman/Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

There are currently 8,402 permitted high capacity wells in Wisconsin, defined as wells with the capacity to pump over 70 gallons per minute or 100,000 gallons per day. In 2013, over 2,200 of those were located in the Central Sands region of Wisconsin, and there are even more today. The Central Sands consists of six counties: Wood, Portage, Waupaca, Adams, Waushara, and Marquette. Most wells in the Central Sands are not operating at their full permitted capacity, and yet water levels in the region are still declining enough that some farmers have had to drill newer, deeper wells (at significant expense) as groundwater levels drop.

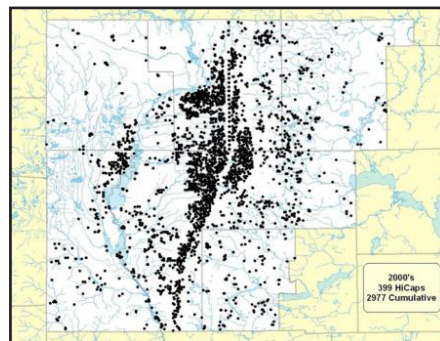
The Growth of High Capacity Wells in Wisconsin



1950s



1970s



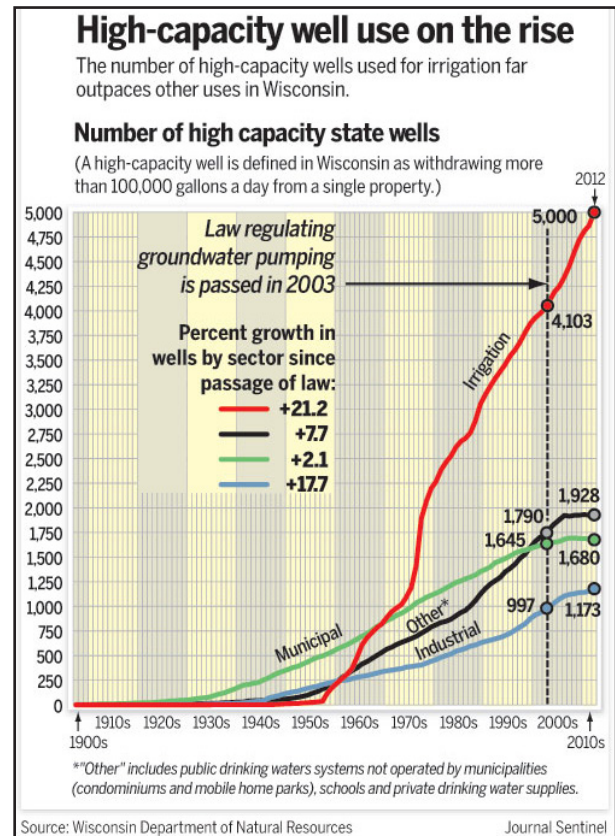
2000s

Managing Groundwater: What can the state do?

Give the DNR funding, legislative guidance and rulemaking authority to regulate the cumulative impacts of high-capacity wells.

The experience of states such as Michigan and Minnesota demonstrate that it is possible to regulate the cumulative impacts of high-capacity wells without stifling agriculture or other industrial development. A sound framework for managing groundwater is necessary to ensure economic growth. Prohibiting the DNR from taking cumulative impacts into account is short-sighted and harmful to farmers and industry in the long run.

Key components of a cumulative impacts framework include: establishing baseflow allocations for maintenance of surface waters, development of a model (either regional or statewide) that predicts how a proposed well would impact surface waters and existing wells, and creation of procedures to ensure that all water users can exercise their right of reasonable use in the case of conflicts.



Include periodic review of all well permits in any high-capacity well bill.

Senate Bill 76, authored this session by Senator Fitzgerald, would make it easier for farmers to repair, replace, or transfer high-capacity wells without review by the DNR. Wisconsin Farmers Union supports this general concept, but is concerned that the bill as written would lock in perpetual water rights for existing well owners, at the expense of new farmers or other businesses seeking to access to water in the future. Wisconsin Farmers Union calls upon the legislature to amend SB 76, or any other high-capacity well bill, to provide for periodic review of all high-capacity wells. Periodic review is a typical practice for all other DNR permits. Water withdrawal permits should be no different.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven farm organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors and civic engagement. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

