

Two UW-L professors have found potentially toxic lead contamination in the La Crosse River marsh that could be a threat to the waterfowl, muskrats, turtles and other species that live there. The La Crosse Gun Club operated on the northeast side of Myrick Park between 1932 and 1963, and hosted regional, state and national trapshooting competitions. By the trail entrance on the marsh's south side, big slabs of concrete mark spots where sportsmen aimed their shotguns at clay pigeons. The lead shot fired from their guns fell into the muddy waters and sank. The bad news is all this lead is potentially contaminating the soil of the marsh.

Preliminary data from 2 UW-L professors collected shows the lead concentration at greater than 1,200 parts per million in some places — a level three times higher than what the Environmental Protection Agency considers safe. The two stress their research is preliminary and there may be no environmental concerns for the wildlife or vegetation in the La Crosse River marsh. Right now their goal is to determine how much lead is in the marsh and where .

Stephanie Hanna, education manager for the Myrick Hixon EcoPark, says the information Perroy and Belby generate could be used to help educate the public about the marsh, located in the EcoPark's backyard. Hanna says the research would ultimately help people make decisions about living sustainability within their environment. The data could also aid future chemical and biological studies at UW-L and elsewhere. While collecting aquatic insects in the marsh a couple years ago, Roger Haro, a UW-L biology professor, found several baby dragonflies with a deformed antennae. Potential follow-up research for Haro would be studying areas in the marsh where they've found high concentrations of lead to see if the incidence of deformities in invertebrates is higher in those areas.