

Sioux River Watershed Council Establishment

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

River Protection Planning Grant RP-006-00

April 1,2000 – June 30,2001

Final Report

Pre-Planning:

The early phase of the project centered on gathering and reviewing all available information. Historical accounts, natural resource management plans, and geographical information were considered in the scope of the investigation. The Inland Sea Society hired a part time staff person to provide support and continuity to volunteer efforts. An office was established on Highway 13 next to the Onion River in the old Onion River Tavern that had begun to be retrofitted for office space. The following activities were critical to the formalization of an outreach strategy and action planning process in the early stages:

- Watershed delineation: due to the fact that there had never been a comprehensive delineation it was necessary to determine the project boundaries. Using USGS, USEPA, NRCS, WDNR data with local knowledge and field reconnaissance a digital boundary was established. Sub-watershed boundaries were generated to provide additional detail to the process.
- Landowner database of all parcels within the project boundaries was purchased from the Bayfield County Land Records Department.
- Detailed Plan Review: the following plans and reports were acquired and reviewed for pertinent Sioux River information. Lake Superior Basin Water Quality Management Plan (1999) Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources; Lake Superior Coastal Wetland Evaluation (1997); Lake Superior Binational Program Habitat Assessment; US Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference Report (1996);

The Feasibility Study for the Sioux River Fishery Area (WDNR 1992); A Brook Trout Rehabilitation Plan for Lake Superior by the Great lakes Commission (1999); Town of Bayview Land Use Plan (2000); Town of Washburn Land Use Plan (2000); Bayfield County Forestry Management Plan (1998); Chequamegon – Nicolet National Forest Management Plan (1996); Ashland and Bayfield Counties land and Water Management Plan (1999); Clean Water Action Plan of the US Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Agriculture (1998).

- Key Contacts: In order to inform and solicit participation by key landowners, agencies and individuals the following personal contacts were initiated: US Forest Service – Washburn Ranger District supervisor; Bayfield County Forest Administrator; WDNR Land and Water Team Leaders, fishery biologists, foresters and aquatic biologists; WDNR Natural Heritage Inventory Program, Bureau of Endangered Resources staff; Wisconsin Coastal Management Program wetland and nonpoint source pollution staff; US Environmental Protection Agency, Mid-Continent Ecology Division staff; University of Wisconsin Extension Basin Educator and Community Resource Development Agent, Bayfield County Conservationist, Red Cliff Band Natural Resources Department fishery biologist, Trout Unlimited Wild River Chapter, Ashland-Bayfield Counties League of Women Voters, Hazel and Vera Maki, local history experts, Bill Volavka, retired forester, interested landowners and citizens.
- Field Activities: Throughout the early stages of the project staff and volunteers conducted windshield surveys and field trips to determine the logistics for future monitoring sites and group activities. These efforts assisted with determining the scope of the project and provided critical information to aid prioritization of locations and events.
- Watershed Council: From the beginning a core group began to materialize and collectively they developed a draft mission with goals and objectives. This group included representatives from diverse ownerships and active citizens. Meetings included informal strategy sessions and public forums.

Action Planning:

The outcomes from pre-planning and public processes provided the basis for developing the strategic action plan. Drafts generated at all phases guided dialogue between diverse groups and interests. At public meetings concerned landowners inquired about what additional regulations and zoning restrictions would be developed as a result of protection efforts. Consistent assurances and open participation provided opportunities for dialogue and questions. The watershed council made a point to follow up with information and provided individuals and groups additional attention as necessary. The relationship between the watershed council and the sponsor (Inland Sea Society) was repeatedly clarified and strategies to continue council activities and funding developed. Throughout the project the concept of “watershed thinking” was emphasized and reinforced through newsletter articles and presentations. Core principles for the council evolved and provided the foundation for establishing action items. The Action Plan (attached) reflects the increased awareness by all involved that the issues for the immediate future included the Onion River, coastal wetland development pressure, water / road interaction, and watershed health. The need for special area planning to address the coastal wetland, a roads assessment, citizen monitoring, Big Rock County Park and Forest Road 697 at the headwaters of Four Mile Creek consistently were the top priorities. Funding to support implementation of the established action items will be sought in conjunction with activities and plans of management units, public and private interests.

Issues and Concerns:

- The need exists for continued information and education regarding non-governmental organizing for natural resources.
- There are problems with sustaining volunteer efforts in support of natural resources in a consistent and timely manner
- Funding support is necessary for watershed efforts to be successful but administration of grants often is contrary to an action agenda.
- The educational system needs to reflect an integrated approach to understanding the natural world.

Public Process:

The results of pre-planning activities provided the foundation and background information sufficient to engage a public information campaign and meeting schedule. Public information materials included a series of newsletters designed to inform and engage landowners in the process. Issues included meeting notices, watershed information, historical references and photographs. A Fact Sheet displaying the watershed boundaries and land ownership patterns was developed and distributed. Watershed information from other groups and entities was reproduced; maps and photographs were laminated and backed for public display. A core group of Inland Sea Society members, landowners and interested citizens provided consistent support for all public meetings and events. The public phase included:

- A series of four public forums held at the Bayview Town Hall.
- Three newsletters direct mailed to all landowners, agencies and interested parties.
- Water Quality Monitoring training sessions for the core group and a session for the public. Assistance for the June public session was provided from the University of Wisconsin water quality specialist and local expertise.
- Sioux River Field Trip: a group of fifteen individuals toured selected sites including the coastal wetland, floodplain, Big Rock County Park, Forest Service critical road sites and the Bayfield County Forest.
- Attendance at all pertinent meetings of regional natural resource collaboratives, town boards and sports clubs.
- Presentations to the Bayview and Washburn Town Boards.
- The watershed council formalized allowing for fluctuation of participation and representation.
- A watershed display was presented at the Inland Sea Symposium in Bayfield and at all public meetings at the Bayview Town Hall.
- A partnership with Project NEMO (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials) of the University of Wisconsin Extension provided additional watershed analysis and geographical information to the process.