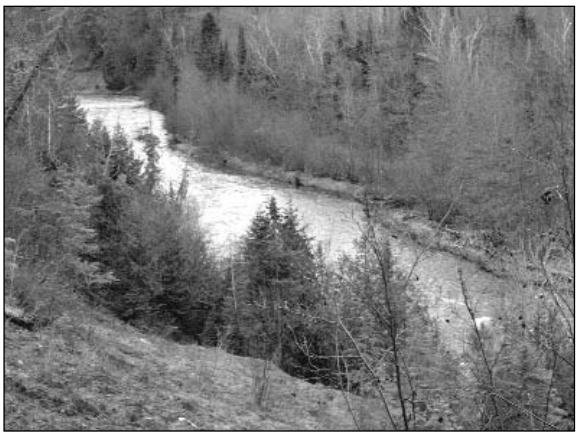
THE WHITE RIVER NEWS

SUMMER 2006

White River Celebration Planned for July 21

Show your support for the White River, meet and talk with other White River landowners and river users, and sit down to a fish boil at the "White River Celebration and Fish Boil" on July 21, 2006, at the Mason Town Park.

The event starts at 4:00 p.m. and is an opportunity to spend a summer evening on the White River and to acknowledge the progress that has been made the past several years by a group of citizens interested in the future of a river they love.



A view of the White River as it flows through eastern Bayfield County.

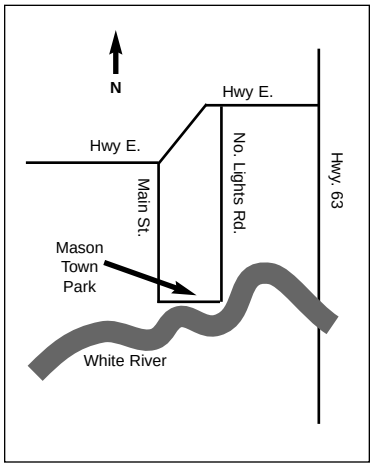
That group, now called the White River Citizen Involvement Committee, first took action in 2003 by securing a grant to hold a series of public meetings, gather citizen input, and create a management plan for the White River watershed. This plan, completed in May 2004, outlined the group's goals and priorities for conserving and improving the natural resource and recreational values of the White River.

In fall 2004, the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board approved expansion of the White River Fishery Area boundaries in Bayfield County by over 7,500 acres. The expansion created another tool that can be used in White River protection: willing landowners in the privately owned stretch of the White River roughly located between Highway 63 on the west and Highway 13 on the east now can sell land or conservation easements to the Department of Natural Resources, thus increasing the amount of public land in the White River Fisheries Area.

Recently, a memorandum of agreement has been signed that outlines expectations and responsibilities of both the White River Citizens Involvement Committee and the Wisconsin DNR regarding the fisheries area expansion project. A system has been developed for prioritizing available properties, and several properties are nearing acquisition.

The July 21 event is meant to acknowledge these and other accomplishments. In addition to the fish boil, an informal meeting will be held among members of the DNR, the WRCIC, local landowners, and interested citizens. Come join us on this special occasion! The fish boil is a first come-first served event; there is no cost, although donations will be gratefully accepted.

For more information, contact Bill Heart at 715-682-5307 or email wwheart@cheqnet.net; or Scott Toshner at 715-372-8539 Ext. 121 or email Scott.Toshner@dnr.state.wi.us.



Stop by the Mason Town Park July 21 to celebrate the White River!

CREP offers White River landowners money for conservation

Many landowners think that applying conservation measures to their land (a) is expensive, (b) may limit their recreational use of the land, or (c) means they have to allow public access to their land. With the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), this is not the case!

CREP is a federal-state-local partnership that provides funding to eligible landowners in the Lake Superior basin (that includes the White River watershed) who want to enroll their agricultural lands into conservation practices, such as planting buffer or filter vegetation along rivers, establishing wildlife habitat, or restoring wetlands or waterways on their land.

On the national level, the CREP program's purpose is to protect water quality and wildlife habitat. In Wisconsin, the program focuses on safeguarding environmentally sensitive lands next to rivers and streams by improving impaired water resources. One program goal in the state of Wisconsin is to protect and create new wetlands, install 85,000 acres of riparian buffers and filter strips, 15,000 acres of native grasses.

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White River Citizens Committee Sets Priorities

This past spring, the White River Citizen Involvement Committee (WRCIC) met several times to discuss progress on the White River Watershed Management Plan and to set priorities for the near-term future. With help from UW Extension Lake Superior basin educator Nancy Larson, the committee first identified major themes and then voted on the importance of each theme. The votes revealed which items the committee felt needed work right now in order to enable future work or to take advantage of present opportunities that could be lost if not acted upon. Following are the major themes, listed in the order of highest priority:

Item #1: Improve committee capabilities

The committee felt it important to establish some organizational autonomy and basic tools, such as establishing a bank account, and seeking state and federal non-profit status in order to seek certain grants and tax-deductible donations.

Item #2: Investigate ways to respond to land sale opportunities

Although through the partnership with the Wisconsin DNR, the committee can work with landowners to sell or establish easements within the state's White River Fisheries Area, there are other conservation and land-acquisition tools available. Private land trusts (also called "conservancies" or "foundations" are becoming increasingly popular as a way for private landowners to establish conservation protection on their land, whether through outright sale of the land, sale of certain rights to the land, or establishment of certain restrictions.

The WRCIC agreed to explore the possibility of creating such a trust to give additional options to White River landowners who might want to sell their land or establish conservation easements on their land.

Item #3: Address the problem of sedimentation

Much of the White River cuts through high clay banks; the legacy of logging, agricultural practices, and land development has resulted in significant erosion throughout the watershed, leading to sedimentation in the river. This in turn degrades water quality and has negative impacts on the fishery.

The WRCIC highlighted landowner education activities as a critical step toward addressing and remediating these problems. One tool already available to landowners is called the Lake Superior Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) whereby landowners can receive federal and state funding to voluntarily establish conservation practices on their lands (see article on page 1 of this newsletter).

In addition to these top three priorities, the WRCIC identified additional focus areas:

Item #4: Look into the use of GIS technology

Geographic information system (GIS) technology is a powerful, computer-based tool that combines layers of information about land and land use into a visual format. The WRCIC discussed partnering with Northland College or another regional entity with GIS capabilities in order to produce informational maps of the White River watershed that would help identify opportunities for land acquisition or conservation work, and track progress toward the committee's goals.

Item #5: Support continued water-quality monitoring on the White River

The White River watershed is encompassed within the larger Bad River watershed; a group called the Bad River Watershed Association currently conducts regular water-quality tests throughout the larger watershed. Several testing spots are on the White River. The WRCIC discussed ways to support the BRWA effort, and to sustain or increase monitoring on the White River in particular.

Item #6: Establish walk-in access to the White River

One of the goals articulated in the White River Management Plan was to establish a walk-in access points at different spots along the White River.

Item #7: Document the history of the White River

The natural and cultural history of the White River might be documented through the collection of various materials, including photos, documents and interviews with landowners. This material might be presented on a web site.

The White River Citizen Involvement Committee was formed in 2005 to serve as an information resource for White River landowners and river users, as an advocate for the protection and preservation of the White River, and as an advisory group to the Wisconsin DNR regarding the management of any state-acquired land in the newly expanded White River Fisheries Area segment of the watershed.

Publication and distribution of this newsletter was made possible by a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources River Management Grant.

At left: The White River cuts a deep canyon through the clay soils of eastern Bayfield County.

CREP *(continued from page 2)*

IS MY LAND ELIGIBLE?

If your land falls within the designated towns of the county CREP map, you have a crop history (that is, you have planted a commodity crop in four years between 1996 to 2001), or the land meets qualifications as marginal pastureland, you may be eligible. The land also must be within 200 to 300 feet of an eligible stream or water body.

HOW DOES CREP BENEFIT ME?

If your land qualifies, the federal partner in the project (the USDA) makes annual payments to you for up to 15 years. The rate of payment depends of current pasture rental rates and soil types. In addition to the annual payments, USDA also provides an additional annual incentive payment and an annual maintenance payment, and a $100 per acre up-front, one-time signing incentive for filter strips, riparian buffers and grassed waterways. The state of Wisconsin also offers an additional up-front incentive payment.

In addition to annual and incentive payments, the federal government pays 50 percent of installing the eligible practices on your land. The practices eligible for federal incentive payment (that is, filter strips, riparian buffers and grassed waterways) also are eligible for an additional 40 percent federal subsidy. Wetland restorations receive additional funding as well. Finally, in addition to the federal share, the state pays 20 percent of installing eligible practices.

WHAT ARE MY OBLIGATIONS?

In exchange for the federal and state incentive payments and cost-sharing agreement, you would sign a contract with your county land conservation department saying that you will install and maintain the agreed-upon conservation practices on your land for 15 years. During this time, you have full recreational use of the land; any restrictions would be specified in your agreement. If you sell the property while the contract is in effect, the state may require a transfer of the agreement to the new owner.

You also may establish a perpetual easement on your land. This is a permanent land-use restriction that would be held by the county or the state in addition to a federal 15-year contract. The landowner enjoys recreational use of the land in perpetuity. The restrictions on the land use are specified in the easement and generally state that the land must be maintained in the vegetation type indicated in the conservation plan. No structures may be built on the enrolled lands.

After expiration of the federal 15-year contract, the landowner may indicate what types of uses they desire for the land, including: timber harvest, limited pasturing or haying, prescribed burns, or other management techniques.

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC ACCESS?

Landowners enrolled in the CREP program are not obliged to open their land to the public.

HOW DO I LEARN MORE OR APPLY?

Contact the Ashland office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at (715) 682-9117, or the Ashland-Bayfield-Douglas-Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department at (715) 682-7187 and ask for a federal and state CREP applications. Somebody will make a site visit to your land, and based on that visit you will be notified if your land is eligible.

Northern Rivers Conference Planned for Riverfront Property Owners

All the attention given to the White River lately may have river property owners wondering what's going on in terms of conservation and protection of other rivers in northern Wisconsin.

A two-day conference called "Hear the Currents," to be held Aug. 18-19, 2006, is the place to find out. The event will be held at the Lac Courte Oreilles Community College campus near Hayward.

The conference will begin with informative presentations on river ecology, cold-water resources, shoreland management and regulations, and stewardship of river shoreland resources. One presentation will feature the work that's been done thus far on the White River. The second day of the conference will feature optional field trips with natural resource professionals.

Program highlights include sturgeon biology, cold-water resources and trout management, starting your own river group, shoreland zoning, river ecology, shoreland buffers and native plants, aquatic invasives and conservation options for property owners. In addition, participants staying for the field trip portion of the conference may choose from hands-on experiences in cold-water habitat restoration; wildlife and fisheries management; mussels, insects and aquatic invasive species identification; and volunteer river monitoring.

"The conference truly will offer something for everyone," said Kris Tiles, UW-Extension Upper Chippewa basin educator. "And since our northern river shorelines are under increasing development pressure, it's important to provide property owners with the information they need to be effective and positive river stewards."

Registration fees for the conference are $30/person for Friday, August 18, and an additional $10/person for those wishing to participate in a field trip on Saturday, August 19. Registration is required by August 1.

For more information or to request a registration form contact Kris Tiles at 715-762-0036. On-line registrations will also be accepted at http://go.communityseason.com/goto=uwex.

The conference is co-sponsored by the US Forest Service, Trout Unlimited, Hayward Fly Fishing Company, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Upper Chippewa Basin Partnership, River Alliance of Wisconsin, LCO Ojibwa Community College, LCO Conservation Department and UW-Extension.

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THE LATEST NEWS ABOUT THE WHITE RIVER

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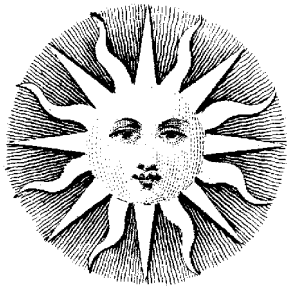

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