

HEALTHY SOILS & HEALTHY WATERS

A Community Strategy for the Eau Claire River Watershed



May 2016 **WORKING DRAFT**



About the Watershed

The Eau Claire River watershed encompasses five different counties, three lake districts, and one lake association. Agriculture, forestry, and low-density residential development are the dominant land uses within the watershed, including large areas of public-owned forest lands.

Phosphorus loading and sedimentation can:

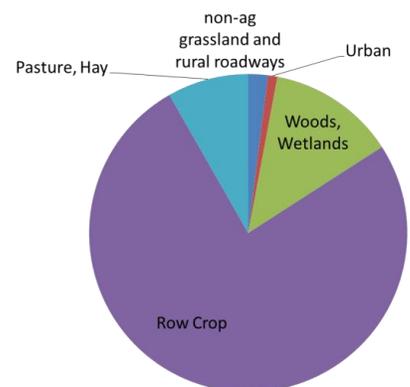
- degrade wetlands & fish habitat
- destabilize channels & shorelands
- result in toxic algae blooms
- reduce recreational opportunities
- reduce property values

listed or proposed as impaired 303(d) surface waters due to water quality concerns. Additional water bodies will be reviewed and may be proposed as impaired as information becomes available.

To meet Wisconsin water quality criteria, it is estimated that phosphorus-loading in the watershed must be reduced by 54%. The majority of the current phosphorus load comes from row crops, though there is room from improvement everywhere.

The watershed includes numerous trout streams and surface waters that have received special designations due to their good water quality and wildlife habitat. However, the watershed also has a number of causes and sources of pollutant loading, with phosphorus and sedimentation among the most prevalent concerns. Numerous waters have been

Current Estimate of Phosphorus Loads by Land Use in the Watershed



About the Planning Effort

The draft Watershed Strategy will be submitted to WDNR for review by July 13, 2016. The Strategy will then be sent to EPA for review to ensure it meets 9-Key Element Plan guidelines under the EPA Nonpoint Source (Section 319) Program. An EPA-approved plan will enable plan participants to pursue Section 319 grant dollars for projects identified within the Strategy. The plan goals and strategies must be reasonable, achievable, and supported by the participants. True change will take time and require action by all partners.

We've tried regulations and incentives, yet water quality continues to be a problem in the watershed—so this plan takes a new approach. During the project, we engaged in a community conversation on local needs, actions, and benefits. It is your property, your farm, and your lakes, rivers, and streams. Participants were asked, “What can we do to help you reach your goals?” Concerns, ideas, and strategies from watershed residents, lake groups, County Land Conservation Department, and other stakeholder groups were then incorporated into the plan.

A few things make this Watershed Strategy especially unique:

- The Eau Claire River Watershed is a HUC-8 encompassing 882 sq. miles in five different Wisconsin counties, so the level of detail in the plan must be broad and flexible enough to encompass the entire watershed.
- A Coalition was formed to guide development of the plan. The Coalition desired that the plan “tell a story”, provide information on existing plans and the different sub-watersheds, and reflect why we love our streams and lakes (e.g., recreations, fisheries, habitat). As such, the plan scope grew beyond the typical 9-key element plan.
- The plan places a great emphasis on soil health, citizen engagement, and civic governance. Our new approach must foster stakeholder attitude change, peer-to-peer networking, and build the capacity of residents to take action, instead of the regulatory and incentive-based approaches of the past. To this end, the document stresses the importance of soil health concepts for the economic benefit of farmers (not just for water quality) as the overall strategy for addressing phosphorus loading.

The Eau Claire County Land and Water Conservation Division is the lead project agency for the planning effort with project facilitation provided by West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (WCWRPC), modeling support from Olson Environmental Research (OE Research), and a brief sociological assessment performed by UW-Stevens Point Center for Land Use Education.

Who is the Eau Claire River Watershed Coalition?

The Coalition is a broad network of watershed residents and stakeholders who support the vision and goals of this Watershed Strategy. Anyone who values good, clean water and believes that our Watershed's lakes, rivers, and streams are important is a potential coalition partner. A Coalition member is willing to talk to their neighbors, co-workers, and others about doing something for better soil health or water quality. Special efforts were made to engage lake districts/associations, county land conservation offices, agricultural agencies, outdoor and environmental groups, 4-H, FFA, area farmers, and local municipalities in the process.

At their final planning meeting on June 21, 2016, the Coalition will be discussing next steps, including the potential formation of a Plan Implementation Team to foster communications and coordination as the plan is implemented.

There are many GREAT things already being done in the watershed to improve soil health and water quality. It is not the intent of the Watershed Strategy to supplant or prioritize the efforts of these individuals and stakeholder groups. It is the role of the Coalition and this Watershed Strategy to recognize these efforts, provide support if needed, and explore ways in which we can best coordinate resources to everyone's benefit.

More information on this planning effort is available at: <http://wcwrpc.org/Eau-Claire-Watershed-Plan.html>

