

**The Environmental Quality of our Lakes and Shorelines:  
A Community Workshop**  
April 16-18, 2003

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## Introduction

The Oshkosh Area Community Foundation, with assistance from by the Great Lakes Community Foundation Environmental Collaborative, a steering team of local leaders, and a professional facilitator, hosted a first-time gathering of representatives of 36 diverse organizations committed to charting a future for the environmental quality of the four Winnebago area lakes and their shorelines. The next morning, the Foundation hosted a breakfast to report the workshop findings to potential supporters and donors who can help the Foundation's environmental grantmaking program succeed.



The geographic focus of the workshop was the four Winnebago area shallow lakes (Winnebago, Buttes des Morts, Poygan, and Winneconne) and their immediate shorelands (within an approximate 2 mile zone around each lake). While a number of initiatives address various aspects of the larger Wolf and Fox River watersheds, this workshop focused on the lakes and shorelands within Winnebago County.

The **goals of the workshop** were to:

- ✓ Enhance communication and collaboration among groups who are committed to improving the environmental quality of the lakes and shorelines – and identify future actions we might take together.
- ✓ Examine the specific and varied roles played by the citizens, groups, and communities around the shorelines of Lakes Winnebago, Buttes des Morts, Poygan, and Winneconne;
- ✓ Identify the elements of our common vision for the future;
- ✓ Learn about what is being done, help identify needs and gaps, and outline the most important next steps;
- ✓ Offer input as the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation prepares to disburse \$10,000 from a new environmental grantmaking program for Winnebago County.
- ✓ Prepare and present a report of the workshop results to a breakfast meeting of funders and supporters on the next day.



The **main workshop outcomes** were the identification of nine priority areas of action for the next 5 years (on the left side of this working poster) in order to move towards a vision of the future 10 years from now (on the right of the poster). The central image of the 4 lakes system helped focus the group on their task to address this specific geographic area.



The **purpose of this report** is to summarize the results so they are available to support the next steps, including a follow-up meeting planned for June 2003. The amount and quality of the work produced is a testament to the experience, skill, and commitment of the 36 organizational representatives who participated.

## Our Best Experiences

To start out the workshop, each participant reflected alone, then in a small group of 3, on two questions.

1. As you recall the work that you've done to value and protect our area lakes (the ups & downs, highs & lows), reflect for a moment on the *best experience* you've had. Prepare to tell the story of this experience. What happened? What part did you play? What outcomes were especially satisfying?
2. If you had 3 wishes for the future of the area lakes, what would they be? (The 'three wishes' were saved to reference during the conversations about our common vision later in the day).

In addition to providing a warm-up to the day's activities, this type of sharing affirms previous successes and supports participants in continuing to learn from each other about the conditions that will foster ongoing successes.

Here is a summary of the "best experiences."

### *Commitment & Vision:*

There was a committed core group of leaders; we seemed crazy in the beginning; we kept holding the vision over time; we communicated the vision to others; key government agencies were committed.

### *Involvement & Good Process:*

We got everyone involved which led to a high level of project completion; it was a large project which was well-staffed and had good citizen involvement; people donated their time and worked well together; the partnership found things in common; we used "rounds" of full group to get all ideas; we clearly defined the problem; we affirmed stewardship by private landowners; three foundations spearheaded the effort together using effective facilitation; a combination of government regulation and cost-sharing was effective.

### *Visible Success:*

We succeeded at a series of cumulative small projects; we could identify and see on-the-ground changes; we completed a written plan; we created a certification program, with the feedback that 97% of participants felt it helped them in their business, avoiding the feeling of competition between business and environment; an innovative design led to a change in the law.

### *Some direct quotes:*

'Everyone can find things in common, accent those things and agree to work together. That's when things get done.'

'When conditions were right, things suddenly fell into place, leading to an outcome of 3½ miles of shoreline protected this past winter.'

## **Elements of Our Common Vision for 2013**

Three themes of a common vision for 10 years into the future emerged from the thoughtful, café-style conversations held during the workshop. The themes were Environmental Quality, Citizen Stewardship, and Innovative and Collaborative Management. Each element of the vision is worded below as a desired future condition, in the present tense, as if it is now 2013, and these conditions exist.

### **Environmental Quality**

- The diversity and abundance of plants and animals in their habitats is high.
- Water quality is always suitable for swimming.
- There are no fish advisories.
- Water clarity and water quality are improved.
- Water level management now addresses ecological in addition to recreational and economic issues.
- Urban and rural shorelines along the lakes and tributary streams are well protected to minimize negative impacts from polluted runoff and wave action.
- Shorelines are restored and naturalized to benefit plants and animals as well as to prevent erosion.
- Invasive species are effectively controlled and new invasions are prevented.
- Groundwater quality and quantity is restored.
- The relationship of our actions in the 4 lakes area to the greater downstream system of the lower Fox River, Green Bay, and Lake Michigan is widely recognized.

### **Citizen Stewardship**

- A foundation of well-informed, enthusiastic citizens forms a broad-based constituency for environmental quality.
- Local governments all around the 4 lakes are leaders representing citizens' goals for the lakes and shorelines and putting them into action.
- Lake and river users are "environmentally literate," meaning they are well informed about the environment and can effectively engage in environmental issues in their community.
- People of all ages and walks of life understand that a healthy environment is fundamental to a healthy community.
- There is a broad understanding of the economic value of the lakes and shorelines in our community.

### **Innovative and Collaborative Management**

- A new system-wide authority coordinates water resource management on the Winnebago Lakes (e.g., Lake District) and provides cohesion, visibility, and funding.
- Water quality is incorporated into all elements of comprehensive planning (Smart Growth) and its implementation in our communities.
- The Winnebago Comprehensive Management Plan is continually updated and implemented.
- We have in place an effective balance of voluntary practices and enforced regulations that sustain a high quality environment over time.

## **Priority Areas for Action in the Next 5 Years**

The group identified nine areas of action as being the most important to move us effectively forward toward our vision. Each priority area is presented with notes taken during workshop sessions on issues and opportunities (from the June 16 discussion) and scope, needs, and gaps (from the June 17 discussion).

### **Priority Action #1: Form a Steering Committee to investigate the formation of a council, association, or district for the 4 lakes and their system.**

#### Issues/Opportunities:

- The four lakes are large surface area and are covered by many jurisdictions; we have an opportunity to form a lake district with authority to bring much needed cohesion and funding to management
- Opportunity to recognize the characteristics of these shallow lakes in our management strategies
- Huge potential to partner with existing programs
- Opportunity to work with and clarify role of regional planning commission
- Land trusts have history of working well with lake associations
- Opportunity to strategically direct traffic on lakes and rivers to allow big boats in some areas only
- Need to include ecological considerations in water level management
- Need to identify where federal policy contributes to management problems
- Coalition of diverse open-minded individuals

#### Scope: Groups currently involved in this issue include

- Existing partnerships that are more regional (e.g., Basin partnerships, Fox Wolf Watershed Alliance, East Central Regional Planning, Fox River Corridor)
- Existing hunting, fishing, boating groups
- Other conservation organizations

Additional participants will represent a wide range of interests in recreation, tourism, government, etc.

Overlap: No duplication exists among current efforts, but there are synergistic projects occurring between local associations and habitat-based organizations, DNR and Winnebago, Waupaca and Green Lake Counties

#### Needs and gaps:

- Designated, system-wide funding/authority/cohesion
- More people that are concerned about welfare of lakes and rivers

#### Recommendations:

- Form and fund a steering committee to develop lake management district
- Provide outreach and assistance to local “embryonic” lake and river interest groups (Wisconsin Association of Lakes, River Alliance of Wisconsin, other local groups)

## **Priority Action #2: Update Winnebago Comprehensive Management Plan.**

### Issues/Opportunities:

- Use ‘adaptive management’ as an approach to implement and improve the plan over time

Although this item is of very high priority, the group at the workshop chose not to spend more time on it because DNR will provide the leadership to make sure that it happens. The group agreed that the Plan needs to be updated in the near future.

Note: The Winnebago Comprehensive Management Plan (WCMP) is the outcome of the Winnebago Management Project (WMP). The WMP brought together diverse groups of stakeholders to “integrate Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources programs with those of other agencies, and, especially with the various interests of the system’s resource users. The WCMP “identifies resource use and management needs for the system, sets clear objectives to address those needs, and lists options for management activities.” The Plan has been in place since 1989 and over 70% (??) of the Plan’s objectives are underway or have been accomplished.

## **Priority Action #3: Incorporate water quality management issues into all aspects of comprehensive (Smart Growth) planning.**

Scope: ‘Smart Growth/Comprehensive Planning’ is happening now, fast, and independently in each community.

### Issues/Opportunities:

- The time to participate in comprehensive planning is now

### Needs and gaps:

- Towns, Cities, Regional Planning Commissions do not appear to know each other’s goals actions or timetables. Need an information-sharing clearinghouse.
- Publicize and support Upper Fox Basin Partner Team efforts.
- East Central Regional Planning Commission role needs to be clarified.
- One entity must plan for the Winnebago pool water quality goals and actions

## **Priority Action #4: Raise \$1 million for an endowment for environmental projects in our area.**

### Issues/Opportunities:

- The Oshkosh Area Community Foundation has \$10,000 from an anonymous donor to start an environmental endowment.
- The Oshkosh Area Community Foundation will award a \$10,000 water quality grant this year.
- DNR Lake and River Planning/Protection grants program – opportunity for \$, get to ecosystem level
- Above grants are reimbursement grants (need \$ up front)

Scope: Provide information on the environmental endowment to current environmental supporters and attract new donors to provide a permanent source of support for environmental projects.

Overlap: We do not know the extent to which local funders may be supporting similar types of projects and whether or not there is a need to shift the focus of local funders to a new, or a wider range of, program areas.

Needs and gaps:

- OACF needs to build relationships with potential endowment donors who have a particular interest in environmental issues.
- Marketing materials
- Awareness of grants available (timelines for state and federal grants)
- Assistance with identifying partnership opportunities for grants
- Assisting with writing grants
- Loan program put in place for reimbursement grants
- Match grant dollars
- Buy-in from 'regional' partners and funders (including national funders)

**Priority Action #5: Develop and implement community-wide education on watershed and water quality issues.**

Issues/Opportunities:

- Opportunity for the public to widely recognize the ecological characteristics (and limitations) of these shallow lakes
- Opportunity to involve students, invest in the next generation
- Enforcement is not the best or only approach; need to educate about legislation that supports changes in environmental attitudes and behavior
- Support individual property owners' role in controlling storm water runoff
- Huge potential to partner with existing programs
- Opportunity for Earth Charter Summit to bring groups together every year
- Educate about alternative practices
- Outdoor skills programs – expand to include water quality and shoreline restoration
- Need shoreland protection demonstration sites
- 2003 is the Year of Water in Wisconsin
- Involve the press and other media
- Build a 'land ethic' over a long period of time (Coon Valley example)

Scope: Community-wide education on water quality and watershed issues to address all age groups and provide both formal and informal programming.

Overlap: Multiple programs exist in K-12 schools and the community, through specific groups and information centers.

Needs and gaps:



- Inventory of existing programs (that would reveal strengths, duplication, needs)
- Programs lack specific water quality focus
- Needs to be integrated into entire school curriculum
- Lack of high school programs
- Information and education for urban landowners
- Implement proposed water information center in Oshkosh's comprehensive plan

**Priority Action #6: Develop monitoring programs for long-term environmental quality (trends and conditions) and evaluation monitoring (of program success).**

Issues/Opportunities:

- Need to plan for scientific information that will be essential to support good decision-making in the future
- Water testing to guarantee safety for drinking, swimming, and aquatic life
- Central clearinghouse for scientific information needed

Scope:

- Develop better ways to determine the condition of the resource (appraisal monitoring and assessment).
- Develop monitoring programs for long-term monitoring (trends and conditions) and evaluation monitoring of program success.

Needs and gaps:

- Additional monitoring of microbial water quality (not just beaches)
- Enhance water quality monitoring for trophic/nutrient status of system
- Identify hot spots or critical sites that need immediate attention
- Enhance and develop watershed models
- Coordination of monitoring efforts
- Central clearinghouse for scientific information needed

**Priority Action #7: Develop and maintain buffers to protect shorelines and waterways in rural and urban areas.**

Issues/Opportunities:

- Huge potential to partner with existing programs
- Loss of riparian wetlands through shoreland and wetland erosion
- The combination of rip-rap and lawn decreases habitat quality
- Need shoreland demonstration sites
- Support individual property owners' role in controlling storm water runoff
- Need methods to involve private landowners in cost-sharing, grants, and other incentives
- Upgrade shoreline quality on high wave-action shores
- Shorelines 'friendly' to migrations and movements of waterfowl, reptiles, and amphibians
- Opportunity in new fabrics/bioengineering (demonstration projects)

- Apply biological solutions, rather than engineered ones
- Land trusts need “big plan” to identify which lands need to be protected
- Restore water tables via increased percolation and water retention

Scope: Develop and fund programs to assist riparian property owners (public and private) in shoreline protection and restoration.

Needs and gaps:

- Organize and quantify existing programs
- Identify potential areas not served and establish criteria/programs
- Maximize use of existing programs
- Dedicate the necessary staff
- Implement existing programs
- Interagency cooperation
- Insufficient funding for staffing

**Priority Action #8: Establish an ecologically sound approach to water level management**

Issues/Opportunities:

- Water level management needs to lead to healthy ecosystems (using ecological as well as recreational and economic criteria)
- Water levels – wetland restoration is complex; storm water runoff also plays a role in wetland restoration
- Need to understand that more water in the lakes does not necessarily mean better water (higher water and habitat quality?)
- Note: this also relates to Priority Action #1; one entity must plan across current jurisdictions for the Winnebago pool water quality goals and actions

Scope: Partners would include Corps of Engineers, DNR, UW-Extension, Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department, Lake Poygan Sportsman’s Club, River Alliance and others.

Gaps:

- Effectively engage the Corps of Engineers.
- Education: Lake users need to understand how water levels impact the lake ecosystems.
- Strengthen community support for proposals from organizations such as the Lake Poygan Sportsmen’s Club.

**Priority Action #9: Sustain communication and coordination among environmental groups.**

Issues/Opportunities:

- This was the first-ever gathering of these groups
- Participants were enthusiastic about the need to continue as demonstrated in their written and informal evaluations

- Continue to build coalitions of diverse and open-minded individuals

#### Needs and Gaps:

- More systematic networking among groups
- Increased business and industry involvement in environmental issues
- Implement a website to keep communication lines open between environmental groups.
- Assigned staff to this task

### **All Potential Areas for Action**

Listed below are all suggested actions from the workshop, listed in two tiers. A first tier contains the highest priority items that were selected by the workshop participants for discussion and/or attention in the next steps (see previous section). The second tier contains all other items that were not moved forward at this time.

Note: Some items from the second tier are listed under a closely related first tier item because they were combined for the small group discussions at the workshop.

#### First tier

1. Form a Steering Committee to investigate the formation of a council, association, or district for the lakes and their system.
2. Update Winnebago Comprehensive Management Plan. Use 'adaptive management' as an approach to implement and improve the plan over time.
3. Incorporate water quality management issues into all aspects of comprehensive (Smart Growth) planning.
4. Raise \$1 million for an endowment for environmental projects in our area.
  - Develop a priority 'nutshell list' to describe priorities for funders
5. Develop and implement community-wide education on watershed and water quality issues.
  - Develop demonstration projects on shoreland protection, restoration, water retention, wildlife, habitat, and native vegetation.
  - Develop a water/environmental quality curriculum for public schools
  - Curriculum includes students getting involved in projects
  - Establish a Water Quality Information Center
6. Develop monitoring programs for long-term environmental quality (trends and conditions) and evaluation monitoring (of program success).
  - Develop better ways to determine the condition of the resource (appraisal monitoring and assessment)
7. Develop and maintain buffers to protect shorelines and waterways in rural and urban areas.
  - Develop and fund program to assist riparian landowners in participating in cost-sharing riparian protection programs
8. Establish an ecologically sound approach to water level management
9. Sustain communication and coordination among environmental groups.

## Second Tier

- Have media become an advocate for land and water issues. Develop and maintain a list of media contacts.
- Clearinghouse for technical information.
- Integrate/coordinate existing county land and water management plans.
- Mitigate/reduce damaging boating activities.
- Recognize good work already done (and the groups).
- Change the motorboat gas tax formula.
- Re-start Fox Wolf Legislative Caucus.
- Increase staff to manage environmental programs.
- Assist groups to access lake and river grants program (DNR).
- Advocate for Watershed Management Programs (e.g.: Basin Partnership Teams).
- Build the choir: Identify and connect with decision-makers that need to help implement 'the plan'
- Consider Earth Charter as another guidance document.
- Develop shoreland regulations to implement our vision.
- Coordinate management of environmental efforts.
- Work through existing institutions as much as possible.
- Connect with TMDL group (UW-GB, etc.)
- Implement the Fox River Heritage Parkway.
- Focus on natural drainage ways and other issues.
- Elect an environmental president or local officials.
- Install carp barriers in key places where lacking. —
- Raise deposits for bottles/cans for water-related projects.

## Miscellaneous items regarding policy, regulations and enforcement

- Enforcement of zoning regulations
- Need to develop shoreland regulations
- Need for regulations that affect behavior
- Rigorous enforcement of the public trust doctrine

## **Current Programs & Activities of the Groups Represented at the Workshop**

Each representative at the workshop indicated the primary and secondary areas of programming and activity for their organizations on poster-sized versions of the following table, under the headings Shoreland Habitat, Wetland or Aquatic Habitat, and Citizen Stewardship.

Options for continuing to use this information include:

- In following up Priority Areas for Action in this report, use the information in the tables as a resource to consider who might be involved in the next steps for each topic area and to continue asking questions to analyze needs and gaps.
- Use the tables as a resource for other types of future networking.
- Complete the tables so that they give an even more comprehensive view of the cumulative work being done. Determine what groups were not represented at the workshop and develop a strategy to add their information.
- Use the tables to design and conduct a more detailed survey/inventory that will allow a more specific analysis of scope, synergy, overlap, and gaps in programming.

## **Appendix A: List of groups represented at the workshop <sup>1</sup>**

### **Government Agencies**

City of Oshkosh, Department of Community Development  
City of Oshkosh, Water and Utilities Department  
Town of Algoma Parks Committee  
Town of Algoma Plan Commission  
US Dept. of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service  
University of Wisconsin-Extension Horticulture and Master Gardening Program  
University of Wisconsin-Extension Basin Education Program  
Winnebago County Local Advisory Group  
Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department  
Winnebago County Zoning Department  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

### **Elected Officials**

Town of Winneconne  
Winnebago County Board  
Winnebago County Land Conservation Committee

### **Educators**

UW-Oshkosh Earth Charter Community Summit  
UW-Oshkosh Biology and Microbiology Department

### **Non-Profit Organizations**

Citizens' Natural Resources Association  
Fox Cities Greenways  
Fox River Graziers  
Friends of the Fox  
Fox Wolf Watershed Alliance  
Lake Poygan Sportsmen's Club  
Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust  
Pheasants Forever  
River Alliance of Wisconsin  
Rush Lake Watershed Restoration, Inc.  
Sturgeon Trail  
Upper Fox Basin Partnership  
Walleyes for Tomorrow  
Wild Ones  
Winnebago Audubon Society  
Winnebago County Master Gardeners Association  
Wolf Basin Partnership

### **Civic Groups**

League of Women Voters  
Southwest Rotary Environmental Beautification Committee

### **Business**

Radtke Contractors, Inc.

### **Funders**

Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region  
Oshkosh Area Community Foundation  
Elizabeth Kimbrough  
Zaiga Maassen

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<sup>1</sup> Contact the Oshkosh Area Community foundation for names of individual participants.

## Appendix B

Winnebago • Buttes des Morts • Poygan • Winneconne  
**The Environmental Quality of our Lakes and Shorelines:  
A Community Workshop**

April 16-17, 2003 (April 18 breakfast meeting optional)

### Agenda

#### Wednesday April 16

- 8:00 am Arrival and registration  
8:30 am Welcome, overview, and introductions  
***What are the Workshop's Purposes?***  
***Where are we now?***
- The four lakes area: current issues and opportunities
  - Each group: Current programs, projects, and activities
- 11:45 am Lunch  
12:30 pm ***Where do we want to be?***<sup>2</sup>
- 10 year vision
  - Important actions for the next 5 years
- 3:00 pm Summarize today's work and prepare for tomorrow  
3:30 pm Adjourn

#### Thursday April 17

- 8:30 am Welcome back and review  
8:45 am ***How will we get from here to there?***  
Build on yesterday's work: What is the scope of the combined work of all groups? Where is there overlap or synergy? What are the current gaps in programming and how will we close them?
- Small group work
  - Reports and discussion
- 11:00 am ***Our next steps***
- Specific projects, activities, or follow up actions
  - Ongoing communication and collaboration among groups
  - Environmental grantmaking program of the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation
- 11:45 am Evaluation  
12:00 noon Closing

***Breaks are scheduled throughout both days.***

On the morning of April 18, the Foundation will host a breakfast to report our findings to potential supporters and donors who can help the environmental grantmaking program succeed. You are welcome to attend the breakfast in addition to the workshop.

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<sup>2</sup> This session is modeled after The World Café, a method for creating a collaborative dialogue around questions that matter to the real-life situations of your organization or community. See [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com).