

Reversing the Loss Action Plan

July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2010



To take steps toward achieving our vision for Reversing the Loss of Wisconsin wetlands, the Wetland Team developed the 2008-2010 Action Plan. The actions outlined below are geared to meet one of the eight goals of the statewide wetland plan and will be carried out by Wetland Team partners. These are not the only actions that are needed to accomplish this overarching goal and you can help by getting involved. For citizen action ideas, reference pages 14 through 18 of Reversing the Loss – A Strategy to Protect, Restore and Explore Wisconsin Wetlands at dnr.wi.gov/wetlands/strategy.html. If you have other ideas you would like to share please contact the Wetland Team Leader at 608-266-7360.

Goal 1: Strengthen and establish wetland partnerships to maximize wetland stewardship and conservation opportunities by:

Developing a stronger partnership with DATCP and UW-EXT (Agriculture) on what options farmers have with the wetlands on their farm.

- Draft white paper identifying and seeking UW-EXT-AG and DATCP partnership to develop and successfully communicate a common wetland message to the agriculture community.

Building wetland partnerships to ensure strong local, state, and federal partnership and informed advocacy for wetland protection and restoration.

- Seek full participation on the Wisconsin Wetland Team from within DNR and from other state and federal agencies and NGOs with strong interest and/or authorities in wetland protection and restoration and further define member roles and communication with DNR Policy Management Teams.
- Create partnerships at local and regional levels with organizations and individuals that care about wetland protection and restoration (land trusts, lake and river organizations, DU, Wetlanders).

Goal 2: Strengthen and develop incentives for wetland conservation on private lands by:

Encouraging DOR to work with DNR, DATCP and DOA to revise state property tax policy to remove disincentives that adversely impact wetland restoration and conservation on private lands.

- Request DOR to reconvene the Wetlands Working Group to discuss property tax policies and their impacts on conservation.
- Support adoption of a revised property tax code policy to define wetland conservation as agricultural use and develop mechanisms for the appropriate assessment and valuation of wetlands. Prepare a white paper to fully document the impact of these issues on wetlands.

Establishing a “Wetland Protection and Restoration Grant Program” to maintain desirable wetland functions and values or to restore altered wetlands and buffer areas.

- Promote, where appropriate, Aquatic Invasive Species Control Grant funding for the prevention and control of AIS and Lake Grants for wetland restoration.

Supporting the development of local incentives for protection and restoration of wetlands through county and local comprehensive planning efforts.

- Support an equitable valuation process for private landowners enrolling in WRP in order to utilize full funding levels and increase enrollment acres.

Goal 3: Advance public understanding and connection to Wisconsin wetlands by:

Promoting a common wetland message.

- Develop a common and consistent wetland message, highlight message in DNR web pages and create brochure or presentation that can be used by DNR and partners to provide a consistent wetland message to the public.

Building partnerships for wetland outreach.

- Seek support for the wetland strategy from potential partner organizations, such as local governments, builders, realtors, lakes partnerships and others. Guide these partners to find their role in helping to reverse the loss of WI wetlands.
- DNR submits a budget initiative to build funding to support the capacity of wetland-focused partner organizations to provide technical assistance to identified target audiences, such as hunters and anglers, wetland landowners, builders, and others.
- Support the Wisconsin Wetlands Association annual wetland science conference and sponsor, if resources are available.

Creating awareness of wetland laws.

- Include wetland protection and regulation in the communication plan and Wetland Toolkit, and conduct public survey after toolkit is released.
- Publicize enforcement cases on DNR wetland web pages.
- Participate in or conduct five wetland regulatory workshops with partners and identified audiences with greatest need.

Promoting and demonstrating wetlands are amenities.

- Identify and showcase high quality wetlands and their functions, especially the services they provide to society to engage landowners, resource managers and volunteers in actively restoring wetland functions, improving wildlife habitat and water quality, controlling invasive species and re-establishing native species.
- Highlight wetland success story quarterly on DNR website.
- Create a map identifying wetlands to visit on public land and place on DNR website.
- Create a fact sheet highlighting preservation and conservation options available to landowners with potential sources of assistance and post on DNR website.
- Promote existing wetland grant opportunities on DNR website.

Promoting citizen wetland monitoring networks and results.

- Compile and promote wetland monitoring opportunities on DNR wetland web pages and link to Citizen Based Monitoring website.
- Establish and sustain an Ephemeral Pond Citizen Monitoring Network in southeast Wisconsin.
- Establish capacity for volunteers to put Ephemeral Pond Monitoring data into DNR SWIMS database.
- Incorporate one wetland component into an existing citizen-based monitoring program, such as lakes and rivers.
- Create wetland invasive species fact sheet that can be used by monitors, wetland owners and the public to identify invasive species in wetlands and provide invasive species control options.

Promoting and enhancing wetland youth education.

- Inventory and promote existing wetland youth education programs and resources.
- Develop wetland youth activities for WI State Fair that can be used at other public events.

Increasing public awareness of wetlands through outreach and public events.

- Develop a wetland communications plan.
- Assist Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) with their WI Wetland Gems and promote results and outreach products upon completion.
- Participate on the WWA led WI Ramsar Committee to seek Ramsar designation for additional WI wetlands.
- Nominate candidate for National Wetlands Award.
- Promote opportunities to explore and discover wetlands at WI State Fair and other public events. Identify and inventory annual field trips through WWA, NRF, nature centers and others providing wetland education opportunities.

Goal 4: Avoid and minimize wetland loss and degradation by:

Ensuring all wetlands are protected at local, state and federal level.

- Develop, support and participate in federal and state legislative and congressional processes to assure full protections of wetlands, and keep partners informed of legislative activity. For example, the federal Clean Water Restoration Act or the state wetland notification legislation.
- Provide high quality wetland delineation, wetland assessment and regulatory training for department staff and the wetland professional community.
- Continue the Wetland Delineation Professional Assurance Pilot Program. Evaluate program and make improvements, if necessary.
- Improve DNR's wetland web pages with wetland law and permit information.
- Submit DNR budget initiative that requests adequate staff and funds to administer wetland regulatory program, including compliance and enforcement.
- Develop a general permit for cranberry production, in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. EPA.
- Apply for a grant to evaluate the Superior Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) and Superior coastal wetlands.

Implementing an efficient and effective compensatory wetland mitigation program.

- Request DNR reallocate an existing position and dedicate the position to implementation of the wetland compensatory mitigation program.
- The Mitigation Bank Review Team (MBRT) will:
 - Review new federal mitigation guidelines, and WI wetland mitigation guidelines while seeking to maintain consistency.
 - Each agency on MBRT will have a permanent staff member to represent their agency.
 - MBRT will meet at least three times per year to coordinate mitigation policy issues.
 - Update the WDOT mitigation bank document.
 - Conduct a study to evaluate database tracking of the location and status of mitigation sites and the role of different MBRT agencies in database maintenance.

Assuring standards, policies and guidance fully addresses threats to wetlands.

- Conduct a high level gap analysis of all WDNR regulations addressing wetland impacts and utilize WWA's Threats Analysis results when complete to make recommendations for law or guidance changes where applicable.
- Develop and implement performance standards as a means of compliance with wetland water quality standards in NR103 for department activities including recreational trails and wetland restorations.
- Review and amend state water quality standards to achieve point source goals for wetlands.

Minimizing impacts and preventing stormwater discharges to wetlands whenever possible.

- Include language in MS4 permits that lists wetlands as waters of the state.

- Capture stormwater outfalls to wetlands in WPDES permit database (SWAMP).
- Develop wetland hydrology (quantity) standards and include in NR 216.
- Develop guidance for DNR staff on how to minimize hydrologic impacts to wetland in stormwater management plans.

Reducing illegal wetland filling activities and increasing water quality certification permit compliance.

- Develop local and interagency baseline commitment to compliance monitoring with federal agencies.
- Develop statewide guidance that identifies criteria for having timely, effective enforcement actions for Water Management Specialists.
- Promote legal authority for wetland citation authority for federal and non-federal wetlands including abatement and restoration provisions, increased forfeitures, and criminal provisions for repeat violators.

Developing and implementing wetland protection tools for use in local planning and development processes for purposes of increasing public awareness and improving wetland protection and stewardship initiatives.

- Provide technical assistance to local units of government with initiatives to enact proactive wetland protection policies and procedures, such as wetland buffer provisions.
- Develop criteria for superior environmental performance in the context of the wetland regulatory program.
- Develop/propose legislation to require disclosure of wetlands on properties in real estate transactions.

Identifying priority acquisition opportunity areas and existing funding sources.

- Form a work group to create a matrix that identifies wetland acquisition priorities and corresponding funding sources. Distribute matrix within the Department and to partners.

Goal 5: Restore lost wetlands and improve wetland health and functions by:

Restoring wetlands in an efficient manner to maximize limited funding, address identified needs, and benefit both the natural resource and Wisconsin residents. Where appropriate, restore and acquire rare and declining wetland types and wetland complexes, as well as consider historic by type for WI ecoregions.

- Update the Wisconsin Plan to reflect changes to the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture plan and to address landscape-scale habitat needs.
- Identify wetland restoration opportunities on existing public lands and carry out restoration on these lands.

- Annually evaluate the permit process for wetland conservation projects and improve as needed.
- Conduct annual inter-agency “summits” to address wetland issues. Among the agencies to be present at such a summit: Wisconsin DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Implement the Wisconsin Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan.
- Submit a DNR budget initiative requesting adequate staff and budget to conduct wetland restoration on private and public lands. In addition, identify two new funding sources for wetland restoration and maintain the current federal, state and private funding levels that currently available.

Managing existing wetlands in an effective manner to obtain desired functional values over time and provide benefits to Wisconsin residents.

- Provide information and education on the impacts of invasive species and on effective methods of control to the public and property managers.
- Submit a DNR budget initiative requesting the resources necessary to maintain and repair existing wetland infrastructure (water control structures, dikes, etc.) to effectively manage wetlands on public lands.

Identifying wetland research topics to improve wetland restoration and management in Wisconsin, while providing wetland education to professionals and private wetland owners.

- Conduct biennial wetland training to wetland conservation practitioners in Wisconsin and develop forums to allow information sharing regarding wetland restoration and management.
- Conduct further research on the control of invasive species.
- Initiate a minimum of two new wetland research projects that will provide information to improve our ability to effectively restore and manage wetlands.
- Identify or develop new methods of wetland education to identified new target audiences.

Goal 6: Report and track the status of Wisconsin wetlands by:

Increasing the production, use and accessibility of the Wisconsin Wetland Inventory (WWI) and related data for staff and the public using best available technology.

- Update six county wetland inventory maps in digital format by June 2010.
- Pursue DNR budget initiative to increase staff and funds for updating wetlands maps (WWI).
- Create and provide a “wetland indicator” layer on the DNR internet mapping application.
- Join consortium to acquire new aerial photography that is leaf-off, color infrared and in stereo-images.
- Evaluate the QA/QC process used by Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) and DNR for wetland map updates to determine if applicable for statewide use.

Having an integrated program for tracking wetland quantity; providing incentives to participate in wetland tracking database; and maintaining adequate staffing levels to QA/QC wetland tracking data.

- Produce Annual Wetland Status Report on trackable wetland gains and losses.
- Obtain 100% reporting to the Restoration Tracking Database by DNR restoration staff on their projects through: (1) Holding annual training sessions for Tracking Sheet Entry and Submission and (2) Providing Guidance to Wildlife Managers on Tracking Sheet Entry and submission.
- Develop a mechanism in the Restoration Tracking Database to track expiration dates and alert staff to renew contracts for restorations on private lands.

Developing and using new tools and Potentially Restorable Wetland mapping to evaluate wetland function at the watershed scale (e.g. hydrologic stability, sediment and nutrient trapping, wildlife habitat, etc.).

- Use Potentially Restorable Wetland Maps and Water Quality Tool to evaluate wetland restoration as part of Rock River Basin TMDL project.
- Use Wildlife Tool to create a map of potential restoration sites and evaluate land use scenarios in Mukwonago River Watershed, MMSD Greenseams program and other local planning efforts across the state, as opportunities arise.
- Map Potentially Restorable Wetlands (PRW) in Milwaukee River Basin using new WWI and soils data.
- Share PRW mapping process with other interested parties by placing map layer on the SWDV and placing report on the DNR website.
- Develop user-friendly automated versions of Wildlife Habitat Quality Tool and Water Quality Tool, to distribute to WDNR and local planning users.
- Develop guidelines for using a watershed approach in evaluation of mitigation proposals.
- Develop a Wetland Flood Storage Tool to evaluate existing and restored wetland function in watershed hydrology using radar data and potentially restorable wetlands mapping.
- Provide a wetland assessment component for Clean Water Act Integrated Reporting.
- Assemble a package of wetland planning materials and distribute to Basin Teams to assist with including wetlands in integrated watershed scale planning.

Creating site specific tools for assessing wetland function, condition and restoration success.

- Revise WI Rapid Assessment as a functional assessment method for both regulatory and planning use.
- Apply for an EPA Wetland Development Grant to develop a Rapid Assessment for Wetland Biological Condition.
- Develop methods to evaluate restoration success.
- Prepare a report that analyzes monitoring data from mitigation sites and other wetland restoration projects.

Collaborate with the EPA's National Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Working Group to prepare for a survey of Wisconsin's wetlands as part of the national wetland condition survey in 2011.

- Select a set of reference wetlands sites to use in setting indicator benchmarks and testing monitoring protocols for Wisconsin's part of the national survey.
- Participate in development of protocols to be used in Wisconsin and surrounding region.
- Participate in planning for Wisconsin monitoring field teams to conduct the national survey in Wisconsin wetlands

Goal 7: Develop wetland science and address research needs by:

Developing a mechanism for making wetland research needs high priorities within Wetland Team agencies and to take full advantage of funding opportunities.

- Identify and prioritize research needs by gathering a collective wetland science and management community to discuss.
- Share wetland priorities with funding agencies so they can factor them into their decision making process.
- Include wetland research needs in the priority setting process for internal WDNR research.

Expanding capacity to map, monitor and control wetland invasive species on a statewide basis.

- Evaluate existing web mapping sites, such as GLIFWC and IPAW, to determine if they can be used to map other wetland invasives.
- Submit DNR budget initiative requesting Regional Wetland Ecologists positions and funding to provide technical assistance on wetland invasives species.
- Establish an ongoing list of plant and animal invasive species that occur in Wisconsin wetlands.
- Include wetland invasives control in research needs.

Identifying and minimizing hydrologic impacts to wetlands.

- Analyze wetland impacts from high capacity well-pumping.
- Analyze wetland impacts from impervious surface.
- Identify wetland impacts from global climate change.

Goal 8: Secure stable funding for wetland conservation and stewardship by:

Obtaining full Federal funding for Wetland Restoration

- Seek full federal allocations for federal wetland conservation programs for future Farm Bills and appropriations and support funding that is allowed to roll over into the next fiscal year, referred to as “no year funding”.
- Prepare a list of funding sources and identify priorities.
- Expand partnerships into conservation organizations and seek new funding for wetland restoration and protection.

Expanding and improving coordination with partners to maximize the use of limited financial resources for wetland conservation and stewardship.

- Identify DNR’s highest priorities for wetland conservation, education & management, including state properties and programs.
- Draft a 3-year strategy that includes priorities, budgets and funding mechanisms.
- Apply for eligible grants and initiate short- and long- term fund raising campaigns to fund priority wetland needs.
- Develop strategy for creating a permanent Wetland Conservation Endowment funding source in coordination with the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.