

CHAPTER 5: PRIORITY ISSUES AND ACTIONS 155

- I. MAKING PEOPLE OUR STRENGTH 155
- II. SUSTAINING ECOSYSTEMS..... 155
- III.PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY 155
- IV.PROVIDING OUTDOOR EDUCATION 1556
- ISSUES AND PRIORITY ACTIONS..... 156

CHAPTER 6: BAD AXE - LA CROSSE RIVER BASIN PARTNERS..... 162

- PRIVATE LANDOWNERS AS PARTNERS..... 162
- TROUT STREAM HABITAT RESTORATION PARTNERS 163
- COOPERATIVE FISH REARING FACILITIES 163
- ADDITIONAL COOPERATIVE EFFORTS..... 163
- COUNTY LAND AND WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS 163
- FORT MCCOY INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN..... 165

CHAPTER 5: PRIORITY ISSUES AND ACTIONS

The Bad Axe - La Crosse River Integrated Management Plan has attempted to discuss the issues and challenges facing the land and water resources of the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin. This chapter summarizes the priority issues and actions the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and partners have identified to work on over the next six years.



Mission Statement

*To protect and enhance our natural resources:
our air, land and water;
our wildlife, fish and forests
and the ecosystems that sustain all life.*

*To provide a healthy, sustainable environment
and a full range of outdoor opportunities.*

*To ensure the right of all people to use and enjoy
these resources in their work and leisure.*

*To work with people to understand each other's
views and to carry out the public will.
And in this partnership consider the future
and generations to follow.*

The Wisconsin DNR operates under a broad mission statement for managing the natural resources of the State. The WDNR Strategic Plan (www.dnr.state.wi.us/aboutdnr/plans/) separates the mission into four components outlined below. The Bad Axe - La Crosse River Integrated Management Plan outlines work priorities for the basin by issue rather than strategic plan component. However each priority action is labeled with an icon corresponding to one or more of the four strategic plan components.

I. Making People Our Strength



Promote people, organizations and officials to work together to provide

Wisconsin with healthy, sustainable ecosystems. Through partnerships, to find innovative ways to set priorities, accomplish tasks and evaluate successes in order to keep Wisconsin in the forefront of environmental quality and science-based management.

II. Sustaining Ecosystems



Recognizing that Wisconsin's ecosystems are balanced and diverse, they must be protected, managed and used through sound scientific decisions that reflect long-term considerations for a healthy environment and a sustainable economy.

III. Protecting Public Health and Safety



Our lands, surface waters, groundwater and air should be safe for humans and other living things that depend on them.

IV. Providing Outdoor Recreation










Our citizens and visitors should be able to enjoy outdoor recreation and have access to a full range of nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities.









The Wisconsin DNR also has drafted a Fisheries, Wildlife and Habitat Management plan for Wisconsin 2001-2007. This plan calls for specific types of recommendations to be outlined in every Integrated Management Plan. Each recommendation relating to the Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Plan will be identified by the following symbol: **FWH**

Issues and Priority Actions

Issue: Threats to the land and water resources of the basin from urbanization include: increased stormwater volume, increased development pressure, movement of people to rural areas, etc.

Priority Actions:






- 1) Work with communities asking for assistance with smart growth planning. 
- 2) Work with the regulated community to develop, implement, and enforce the La Crosse stormwater permit. 
- 3) Work with City of La Crosse and Town of Shelby to create a stormwater plan for Mormon Coulee Creek watershed with costs shared by new developments. 
- 4) Work with partners to preserve and protect the La Crosse River Marsh complex between West Salem and the Mississippi River.  **FWH**
- 5) Critically analyze all springhead development proposals to reduce the thermal effects such ponds may have on adjacent trout streams. 
- 6) Continue to work with partners to aid in implementation of urban non-point source best management practices. 
- 7) Continue to assess the biological, physical, and chemical conditions of streams and lakes in the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin. 
- 8) Coordinate with County Land Conservation Departments to share water quality data and habitat restoration expertise. 
- 9) Continue to restore in-stream habitat in the streams and rivers of the basin.  **FWH**

- 10) Work with the regulated community to effectively implement and enforce their existing erosion control and/or stormwater ordinances. 
- 11) Encourage counties to adopt and enforce erosion control ordinances that protects the fragile slopes and water quality of streams in the basin. 
- 12) Work with governmental units to effectively implement and enforce their existing floodplain ordinances and assist those communities in need of creating floodplain ordinances. 
- 13) Encourage developers to consider the unique interconnectedness of topography, groundwater and surface water when designing new developments in the basin. 
- 14) Provide technical assistance to owners, operators and patrons of drinking water supply systems and enforce the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requirements. 
- 15) Continue to enforce the Wisconsin Well Code, specifically proper siting of new wells and proper construction methods and documentation of new wells. 
- 16) Assist local governments in establishing public wellhead protection areas. 
- 17) Ensure compliance of permitted wastewater discharges to the surface water and groundwater of the basin. 

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**Issue:** The changing business of agriculture, with increased herd size and the need to maximize land in cash crops, threatens surface and groundwater quality as well as land resources of the basin.

**Priority Actions:**



- 1) Work with communities asking for assistance with smart growth planning. 
- 2) Critically analyze all springhead development proposals to reduce the thermal effects such ponds may have on adjacent trout streams. 
- 3) Continue to assess the biological, physical, and chemical conditions of streams and lakes in the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin. 
- 4) Continue to work with partners to aid in implementation of forestry and agricultural non-point source best management practices. 
- 5) Work with expanding livestock operations to ensure compliance with water quality protection laws. 


6) To reduce nutrient and bacterial contamination of surface waters, work with county land conservation departments to implement the four agricultural prohibitions outlined by the Animal


Waste Advisory Council:  



- No overflow of manure storage facilities
- No direct runoff from feedlots to any stream
- No unconfined manure stacks located within a water quality management area
- No unrestricted livestock access to streams that prevents adequate sod cover



7) To reduce nutrient and bacterial contamination of surface waters, encourage counties to adopt and enforce an Animal Waste Ordinance.



8) Recognizing the unique issues of driftless area streams, work with partners to encourage agricultural conservation practices that benefit these unique water resources.  


9) Continue to restore in-stream habitat in the streams and rivers of the basin.  **FWH**

10) Provide technical and administrative assistance to counties with Targeted Runoff Management (TRM) Projects. 

11) Work with the regulated community to effectively implement and enforce their existing erosion control and/or stormwater ordinances.  

12) Work with governmental units to effectively implement and enforce their existing floodplain ordinances and assist those communities in need of creating floodplain ordinances.  




13) Provide technical assistance to owners, operators and patrons of drinking water supply systems and enforce the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requirements.  

14) Continue to enforce the Wisconsin Well Code, specifically proper siting of new wells and proper construction methods and documentation of new wells. 





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Issue: The Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin contains many sensitive and unique species, landscapes and ecosystems, some of which are threatened by changing land use patterns.

Priority Actions:

1) Work with partners interested in preserving the natural resources and scenic beauty of the bluffs adjacent to the Mississippi River.   **FWH**

2) All counties within the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin should consider adopting ordinances which prohibit the disturbance of steep slopes (>30%).   
















3) Work with partners to eradicate purple loosestrife from wetlands and streambanks within the Bad Axe – La Crosse River Basin.  

- 4) Work with communities asking for assistance with smart growth planning. 
- 5) Implement those recommendations in the Wisconsin State Forestry Plan applicable to the forests of the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin.
- 6) Work with partners to preserve existing grasslands and restore previous grasslands in the Bad Axe – La Crosse River Basin.   **FWH**
- 7) Continue to burn grasslands when necessary to restore and maintain native prairie species.  **FWH**



Issue: Recreation is a very important part of life for the visitors and residents of the Bad Axe – La Crosse River Basin. A wide variety of high quality recreational opportunities and facilities to the public should be available for public use in the basin.













Priority Actions:

- 1) Work with partners to establish a canoe access point to the La Crosse River between Veterans Memorial Park in West Salem and the Mississippi River.   **FWH**
- 2) Work with partners to create a La Crosse River canoe map for public use.  
- 3) Remove the partially submerged remnant concrete dam structure in the La Crosse River near West Salem. 
- 4) Continue to purchase access easements along streams in the Bad Axe – La Crosse River Basin.   **FWH**
- 5) Continue to purchase land within designated project areas (Rush Creek State Natural Area, Coulee Experimental Forest, La Crosse River State Fishery Area, Coon Creek State Fishery Area, etc.) and expand project area boundaries where recommended in the Bad Axe – La Crosse River Basin.   **FWH**
- 6) Implement the goals and objectives of the La Crosse River Marsh Master Plan.   **FWH**
- 7) Encourage governments, non-profit conservation organizations and landowners to protect remaining high quality natural areas in the basin.   **FWH**
- 8) Manage deer populations in the basin to provide hunting opportunities and deer population control in urban areas, agricultural areas, and forested habitats.   **FWH**



Issue: The forests of the Bad Axe – La Crosse River Basin are owned by both public and private entities. With land parcels shrinking, more landowners own small woodlots, which if managed independent of adjacent lots, can cause fragmentation of landscapes. Proper management of these forests can be beneficial to the environment, the landowner and the plants and animals living within.



Priority Actions:

- 1) Develop and implement forest stewardship plans factoring in adjacent land ownership and management. 
- 2) Work with partners to promote tax laws that discourage farmers from pasturing woodlots and protect the many beneficial qualities forests provide. 
- 3) Promote oak regeneration in the forests of the Bad Axe – La Crosse River Basin. 
- 4) Promote professional management of private forests to ensure sound stewardship of forest ecosystems.   
- 5) Work with partners to monitor and treat gypsy moth infestations in the basin. 
- 6) Work with partners to educate landowners about the absorptive capacity of forested hillsides and resultant groundwater recharge to adjacent trout streams. 
- 7) Manage deer populations to allow natural regeneration, reforestation, and afforestation of basin woodlands and forests.  
- 8) Implement appropriate elements of the State Forestry Plan when finalized.  

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**Issue:** The natural beauty of the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin draws many people to live, work and recreate here. The unique qualities, problems and solutions to minimizing any negative effects we may knowingly or unknowingly create must be communicated to those living in and visiting the basin.

**Priority Actions:**

- 1) Work with business organizations and municipalities to educate their members and citizens on friendly environmental use and protection of the basin's natural resources. 
  - 2) Work with partners to coordinate involvement of schools, environmental groups, civic organizations, and the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse in the monitoring, management and education of the unique resources of the basin. 
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**Issue:** A small portion of the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin lies in Crawford County, which is part of the DNR South Central Region. The majority of the basin lies in the West Central Region. Coordination of issues and decisions between the two Regions is crucial for the benefit of the natural resources in the basin.

***Priority Actions:***

1) Wisconsin DNR staff from both South Central and West Central Regions work closely to coordinate funding of projects, workload assessments, and implementation of priority actions listed in this report. 



## CHAPTER 6: BAD AXE - LA CROSSE RIVER BASIN PARTNERS

DNR staff from the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin have a long history of working cooperatively with local citizens, sporting groups, non-profit organizations, Fort McCoy, counties, state and federal agencies in order to better manage, improve and preserve the natural resources of the area. It wasn't until 1998 that a basin partnership group was formally organized. Members include staff from federal, state, and county government, private citizens, sporting groups and non-profit groups.

The purpose of the Bad Axe - La Crosse Partner Team is to strengthen working relationships among agencies, industries, groups and citizens who are committed to protecting, restoring and sustaining the natural resources of the basin. The Partner Team will accomplish this by:

- ◆ Identifying and prioritizing resource issues
- ◆ Developing potential resource projects
- ◆ Implementing and promoting resource projects
- ◆ Advocating scientifically sound resource management policy development
- ◆ Promoting comprehensive resource management
- ◆ Exchanging information
- ◆ Supporting the ecologically and environmentally sound coexistence of social, residential, agricultural, economic, military, recreational and preservation/conservation activities

The Bad Axe - La Crosse Basin Partnership Group currently has five working groups focusing on specific issues:

- Monroe County Invasive Plant Species
- Smart Growth
- La Crosse River Volunteer Monitoring
- La Crosse River Conservancy Project
- La Crosse River Marsh

To get involved with the Bad Axe - La Crosse Basin Partnership Group, please call the La Crosse DNR Service Center at (608) 785-9000.

### ***Private Landowners as Partners***

The vast majority of land in the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin is privately owned. The future of natural resources in this basin depends on what private landowners choose to do with their land. Credit is due to past landowners who have a long history of improving and protecting the natural resources of the basin - soil, trees, plants, streams, and wildlife. Credit is also due to present basin landowners who use, improve, conserve, and/or preserve their land without harm to the natural resources. Many basin landowners took the initiative to get involved with the many soil, land and water conservation programs that have developed since the 1930's. Many landowners also have become involved with protecting their land into the future with non-profit land trusts. It can't be emphasized enough that without the desire of past, present, and future landowners in the basin striving to be good land stewards, the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin would be in far worse shape than it is today.

### ***Trout Stream Habitat Restoration Partners***

Since the 1950's, local sporting groups (i.e. rod and gun clubs, trout unlimited chapters), municipalities, and civic groups in the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin have donated their time and money to improve in-stream habitat for trout. These groups have regularly planned in-stream structure construction days and donated materials and money. All projects take place on either publicly owned land or land with public fishing easements. Some in-stream habitat restoration projects in this basin have been augmented with handicap access. The successful habitat restoration of approximately 100 miles of stream in this basin could not have been accomplished without the help of these enthusiastic partners.

### ***Cooperative Fish Rearing Facilities***

Since at least the 1950's local rod and gun clubs have been rearing fish in cooperation with DNR fish hatcheries. Approximately one dozen cooperative fish rearing facilities exist in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe and Vernon Counties. The DNR supplies small fish (fingerlings) to the cooperatives who are responsible for their care and feeding for a period of 12 to 18 months. Once the fish reach legal size, they are then stocked in area streams. More than half of the cooperative fish rearing facilities in the area raise wild brook and wild brown trout.

### ***Additional Cooperative Efforts***

Sporting groups such as local rod and gun clubs, local trout unlimited chapters, local pheasants forever chapters, among others have contributed a variety of services to the DNR and the people of Wisconsin. Such contributions include providing hunter safety classes and youth target shooting days, working with disabled hunters, rearing pheasants for release on public lands, building and maintaining trails, coordinating fund raising events, donating money to the DNR for specific needs such as a traveling 600 gallon fish tank, and purchasing equipment for cooperative fish rearing facilities and DNR state fish hatcheries. The commitment of these groups to the people and environment of the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin is vital to the quality management of the basin's natural resources.

### ***County Land and Water Resource Management Plans***

Chapter 92 of the Wisconsin Statutes was amended in 1997 to require counties to develop land and water resource management plans. This planning requirement is intended to foster a locally led process that improves decision-making, streamlines administrative and delivery mechanisms, and better utilize local, state, and federal funds to protect Wisconsin's land and water resources. Counties across the State recently developed Land and Water Management Plans which address issues and problems, coordination opportunities and informational programs for their citizenry. These plans are available from each County Land Conservation Department. The State of the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin report includes the goals and objectives of these county plans. In summary, major issues identified by each county plan within the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin are listed below.

Crawford County

- \* Bring all agricultural fields in the county to within acceptable soil loss factors
- \* Reduce erosion on non-agricultural lands
- \* Increase funding available to reduce soil erosion
- \* Maintain groundwater integrity and supply
- \* Maintain and enhance surface water quality
- \* Encourage the judicious and economically beneficial use of nutrients
- \* Provide guidance and expertise from cooperating agencies to assist townships with land use planning
- \* Enhance the county recycling program
- \* Provide for the proper disposal of unwanted hazardous waste products

La Crosse County

- \* Reduce nutrients reaching surface and groundwater
- \* Reduce soil loss from agricultural and urban lands
- \* Promote sustainable forestry
- \* Reduce environmental risk by encouraging good manure management techniques
- \* Implement county animal waste ordinance
- \* Implement county erosion control and land disturbance ordinance
- \* Monitor water quality throughout the county

Monroe County

- \* Reduce sediment delivery to surface waters
- \* Reduce environmental risks by improving nutrient management techniques
- \* Reduce contamination of surface and groundwater from animal waste
- \* Improve the cold water fisheries
- \* Reduce environmental and aesthetic damages from solid and hazardous wastes
- \* Improve forest management on private lands
- \* Maintain or increase wetland acreage and wetland quality

Vernon County

- \* Reduce gully and cropland erosion
- \* Work with real estate agencies and absentee landowners in promoting conservation
- \* Provide cost-sharing assistance to reduce streambank erosion throughout the county, not just on agricultural lands
- \* Plant seeding mixtures on disturbed areas to stabilize topsoil and provide cover for wildlife
- \* Prioritize streams and watersheds for potential streambank stabilization and trout habitat improvement projects
- \* Monitor the water temperature of streams
- \* Provide landowners technical services in the design and construction of barnyards and manure storage facilities
- \* Develop a manure storage ordinance
- \* Restore wetlands and educate landowners about their benefits
- \* Reduce purple loosestrife populations
- \* Reduce erosion from roadside banks
- \* Protect woodlots from grazing

- \* Encourage proper forestry management techniques

### ***Fort McCoy Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan***

The Fort McCoy Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan ensures that Army activities and natural resource conservation measures on Fort McCoy are integrated and consistent with the Federal stewardship requirements. The plan explains how natural resource management decisions are made, provides goals to guide programs, and serves as a reference manual for understanding the management of Fort McCoy natural resources. Since much of the Upper La Crosse River Watershed lies within Fort McCoy, the State of the Bad Axe - La Crosse River Basin report includes the natural resource goals and objectives within the Fort McCoy Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan.