

## Final Report – **Winnebago Lakes Council Organizational Development**

The Lake Poygan Sportsmen’s Club sponsored this grant to support the organizational development of the Winnebago Lakes Council.

**Exploring Options.** Coordinators were paid to take charge of planning, calling and facilitating meetings of the Winnebago Lakes Council (Council) steering committee and interim Board of Directors. These coordinators were charged with helping the group identify the benefits and challenges of different types of organizations that the Council might become, and the types of activities it will conduct. Although the original project scope outlined the Council as an organization of organizations, during the project a shift occurred that led the group toward a lake association model of operation.

Leaders of the Council summarized the main issues to be addressed and the chosen organizational structure in a white paper (attached), which gave the group a common understanding of the steps that needed to come next.

**Incorporation.** Council leaders filed incorporation papers under Section 181 in December 2004, and set their sights on becoming a Qualified Lake Association in December 2005. A membership structure was chosen, as follows:

Annual memberships shall be for the calendar year. Dues are \$25 per year for individuals or families, or \$100, \$200 or \$500 for businesses and clubs. By-laws (attached) were adopted which give each member one vote, and do not restrict the rights of any member or group of members to vote.

**Kick-Off Forum.** A kick-off breakfast forum was held in Oshkosh on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The Breakfast Forum was co-sponsored by Citizens Natural Resources Association and the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation. An initial mailing list of 354 area residents and leaders was developed for the purpose of inviting local leaders and legislators from the four-lake area to the breakfast. Invitations (attached) that introduced the Council and its history and formation to invitees were developed, printed and mailed.

54 People attended the breakfast forum. After introducing themselves, they listened to a program about the history of the Winnebago lakes, our desire to protect and improve them, and current efforts to do so. The program was very well-received, and 25 “Founding Members” (attached) of the Council joined immediately after its conclusion.

**Board and Non-Profit Status.** The Council’s interim Board of Directors and its advisers have been meeting about every 3 weeks for program planning and decision-making on other aspects of the organization’s development. There are currently seven Board members, and 4 vacant seats to fill. The coordinator assists with communications to support the Board. All the steps have been completed for ensuring that the Winnebago Lakes Council will be issued an advance ruling from the IRS that it is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt non-profit organization, and the application has been filed. (Activities narrative attached).

**Membership Plan.** A membership brochure (draft attached) highlighting the mission, history and activities of the Council has been developed, and members are now seeking donations to get them printed. Several meetings have been devoted to strategies for developing the membership of the Council, and a tentative membership building plan is in place.

**Lake Monitoring Project.** Most of the Council's founding members have been trained as Self-Help lake monitors (flyer attached) and are participating in a project to monitor the four lakes in 2005 and 2006. The monitoring project, coordinated by the UW-Oshkosh Aquatic Research Center, has generated a great deal of interest in the environmental health of the lakes as well as a new volunteer base for other efforts.

**Work Plan.** The Council is finalizing its work plans for the upcoming year (9/1/05 – 12/31/06). The largest amount of time will be spent on communications and outreach activities. In addition to providing education to citizens, these activities will lead to increased collaboration between the Council and its partner organizations. Several grants have been received, and others are pending, in support of this work plan.

**Grants.** The Council has received grants from the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation and the WI-DNR River grant program to create and support a Watershed Network of clubs, agencies, and municipalities undertaking projects related to the Council's mission. Rather than undertaking habitat improvement or pollution prevention projects itself, the Council plans to support these activities undertaken by other clubs, agencies and municipalities through its communication and outreach program, and through development assistance such as collaborative project planning, grant-writing, other fundraising and project administration. (budget attached)

The Council is applying for grants to conduct social science research that will enable us to plan effective programs for protecting and restoring habitats and preventing pollution on private lands with our partners in the watershed. This strategy was chosen over other more immediate campaigns (i.e. supporting a phosphorous ban) for achieving measurable long-term success in improving the lakes. We plan to implement a Clean Lakes or Healthy Lakes recognition program to highlight the actions that individuals, businesses, clubs, and municipalities are taking to protect and improve the environmental quality of the lakes.

**Partner Support.** The Council has already supported the projects and efforts of several partners by offering logistical help or letters of support. These include:

- A watershed modeling project of East Central WI Regional Planning Commission which will give citizens in urbanizing areas of the Lake Winnebago watershed more information about how land use impacts run-off.
- A citizen forum project of the League of Women Voters to involve citizens in understanding the impacts of invasive species in the system
- Support for increasing the resources available for citizen monitoring programs in the watershed such as the Self-Help lake monitoring project coordinated by the UW-Oshkosh Aquatic Research Center.

**Recommendations for the future:** We feel that we have created a good structure for citizen involvement in protecting and improving the environmental quality of the Winnebago lakes, which was our charge from the Oshkosh area community workshop in April 2003. The most important next step is to develop a large and broad base of citizen members who will in the long run support the other eight actions identified by workshop participants:

- Buffering our shorelines and adjacent lands
- Considering ecological impacts in water level management decisions
- Including water quality management tools in local comprehensive plans
- Educating citizens about the quality and importance of the lake environment
- Monitoring the environmental quality of our lakes and shorelines
- Funding environmental quality projects
- Sustaining cooperation among groups

We feel that initial membership growth will be most successfully accomplished by attaching the Lakes Council's name and support to projects of other individuals, clubs, agencies and municipalities that have measurable impacts, and communicating the success of these projects to the public. The primary goal of the Council is to create a voice for the lakes and the projects that protect and improve them.