

The Milwaukee River Basin

- The Milwaukee River Basin encompasses approximately 900 square miles of land in portions of Dodge, Fond du Lac, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Sheboygan, Washington, and Waukesha counties.
- The southern quarter of the basin is the most densely populated area in the state, holding 90% of the basin's population, which is approximately 1.3 million people.
- The Basin includes 6 watersheds, 3 of the watersheds (Milwaukee River North, Milwaukee River East-West, Milwaukee River South) contain the Milwaukee River from start to finish. The other three watersheds (Cedar Creek, Menomonee River and Kinnickinnic River) are named after the major rivers they contain.
- Collectively the six watersheds contain about 500 miles of perennial streams, over 400 miles of intermittent streams, 35 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, 57 named lakes and many small lakes and ponds. Wetlands encompass over 68,000 acres or 12% of the basin land area.
- The predominant land uses in the Basin are generally grasslands, which account for 56% of the Basin land cover. As urban development proceeds further into the countryside, farmland decreases.
- The Natural Heritage Inventory (WDNR, 2000) has documented 16 endangered, 26 threatened and 65 special concern plant and animal species, and 30 rare aquatic and terrestrial communities within the Basin.
- Runoff from specific and diffuse sources, contaminated sediment, habitat modifications (such as channelization and dams) have degraded water quality throughout the Basin.
- Recreational highlights include wildlife watching, hiking, fishing, hunting, bicycling, horseback riding, snowmobiling, skiing, camping, picnicking, and water sports.
- State facilities such as the Kettle Moraine State Forest Northern Unit, in addition to county and local parks provide a variety of recreational opportunities.



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Basin Ecology

- The Basin includes the Southeast Glacial Plains, Southeast Lake Michigan Coastal and Northern Lake Michigan Ecological Landscapes.
- Some streams have the ability to support some trout populations. Others have spring and fall runs of stocked trout and salmon. Fishing opportunities also exist in the rivers and harbors for northern pike, small mouth bass, and walleye.
- Lake Michigan supplies drinking water to about 70 percent of the basin residents, as a function of population size. The remainder of the population receives their drinking water from groundwater sources.
- Wildlife include white-tailed deer, ring-necked pheasant, waterfowl, geese, gray and flying squirrels, raccoons, woodchucks, great horned owls, a variety of hawks, songbirds, and shorebirds.
- Grasslands and barrens are promoted through prescribed burns and mowing.
- Maple-basswood is the most common forest type and the tree species with the greatest volume in the Basin is ash followed by hard maple, basswood, soft maple and red oak.

Environmental Concerns

- Water quality problems are from in-place pollutants, runoff in urban areas, floodplain development, and agricultural practices. As people move to the more rural areas of the basin, groundwater quantity and quality issues will become very important.
- Preservation of biodiversity and protection of endangered and threatened species, this is done by preserving their habitat.
- A comprehensive approach to the protection and restoration of wetlands is needed.
- Educate people to help prevent the spread of exotic nuisance species, which can wreak havoc on ecosystem balance.
- Monitoring of wildlife populations, water quality, and ecosystem function are needed to understand the status and trends of resources.



Priority Actions

- Ten percent of the streams in the basin are listed as impaired, not meeting their potential. We need to fully understand the factors affecting water quality in the basin in order to make sound management decisions.
- Effectively managing the workload involved with the 1000 discharge permits to surface waters in the basin covering a wide range of activities from animal waste handling to construction sites to treating effluent.
- Protection of high quality and rare habitat and preventing further destruction, in addition to the restoration of degraded aquatic and terrestrial habitat.
- Work with local communities in developing "smart growth" plans & promoting wise land use and zoning.
- Work to better manage the excessive nutrients from known and unknown sources in the Basin.
- Improve the understanding of bacterial contamination of surface waters to make informed decisions for preventing future problems.
- Continuing efforts to work on the contaminated sediment concern.
- Continuing efforts currently being implemented (working with landowners, protection through acquisition, implementation of strategies found in Reversing the Loss: A Strategy for Protecting & Restoring Wetlands in Wisconsin).
- Keeping Lake Michigan safe and plentiful for drinking water needs.

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