

Lower Apple River Action Plan
SUMMARY
September 2011

Partner Strategies for Water Quality, Habitat, and Natural Beauty

Partner Organizations

Citizen Volunteers

Martells Landing

National Park Service

Polk County Land and Water Resources

St. Croix County Land and Water Conservation Department

St Croix County Planning and Zoning

St. Croix County Alliance of Sportsman's Clubs

St. Croix River Association

Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust

Town of Somerset

University of Wisconsin Extension

Village of Somerset

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Sponsored by: St. Croix River Association

Funded by: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources River Protection Grant

Facilitated by: Harmony Environmental

Project Background

Introduction

The Lower Apple River Action Plan was developed by convening a group of individuals representing organizations with an interest in water quality, habitat, and natural beauty of the river. The focus in the box at right guided the project.

The planning process began by sending a questionnaire to invited project participants. The questionnaire gathered information about organizational responsibilities and interests; concern related to habitat, water quality, and impacts of recreation (the original focus for the project); and potential recommended activities to address the concerns. Survey results and concerns identified in comments on the draft plan are included in Appendix D of the full plan. Background information was compiled from sources identified in the resource list in Appendix C. No original inventory was completed for the plan. The full plan is available at stcroixriverassociation.org.

The goals, objectives and action strategies identified in the action plan were developed through a series of four partner meetings held from March through June of 2011. Background information from various resources was used to help focus partner efforts.

Goals, objectives, strategies, and recommendations from existing plans and studies were considered during strategy development.

Lower Apple River Project

Our goal is the long-term protection and improvement of the Lower Apple River through partnership-based management. The project will emphasize habitat protection, water quality concerns, and recreational impacts on the river.

Project Objectives:

- ID shared goals
- Develop an action plan

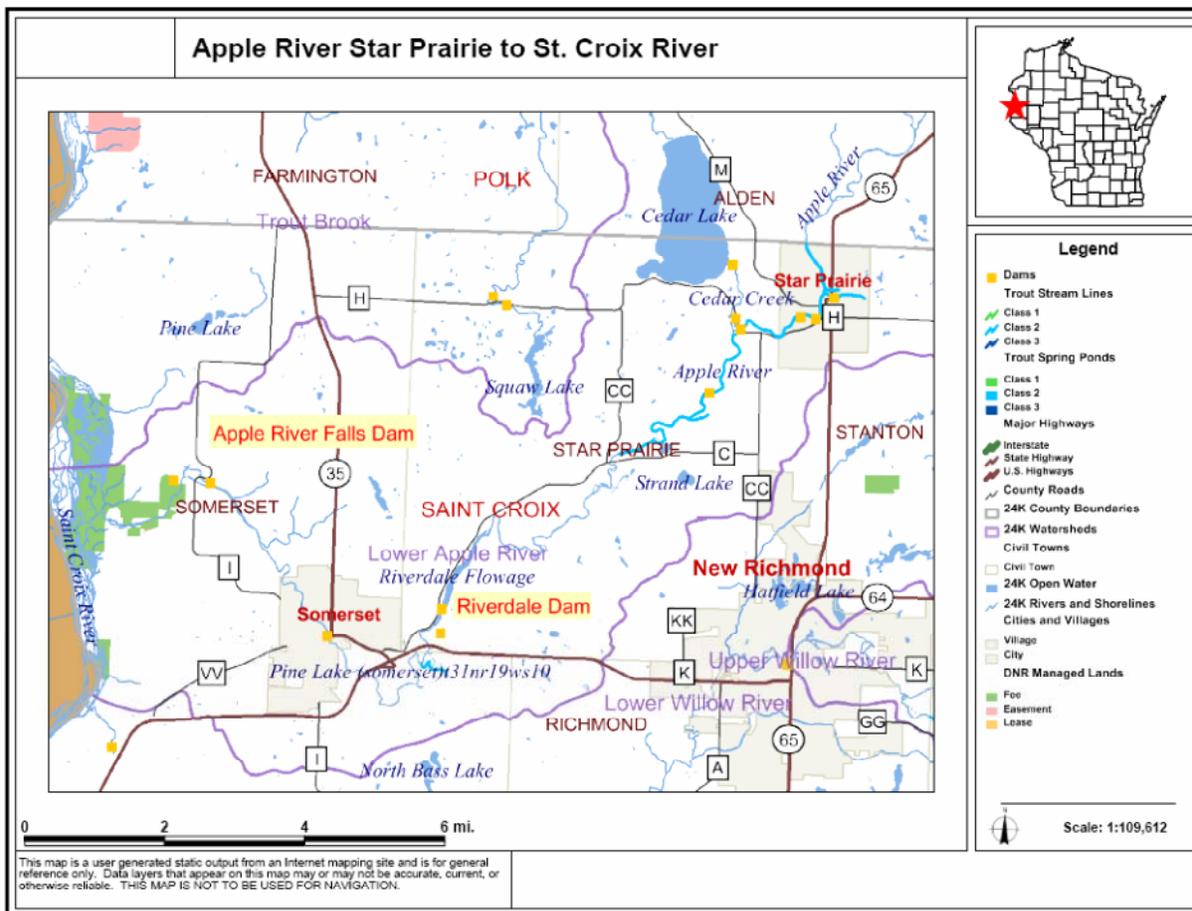
Project Strategy:

- Prioritize resource concerns
- ID opportunities for cooperation
- Use resources and info from previous plans and studies
- Develop framework for working together

Geographic Extent

The Lower Apple River Watershed extends from the dam in the City of Amery to the river's mouth at the St. Croix River. For water quality purposes, the project encompasses the entire Lower Apple River Watershed. The geographic focus for habitat and natural beauty aspects of this project begins where the Apple River crosses St. Croix County HWY C near HWY CC. Development along the river increases at this point where the river is no longer classified as a trout stream. Two dams create flowages in this stretch of river. Heavy recreational tubing begins below the Riverdale Dam and continues into the village of Somerset.

The final two miles of the river are surrounded mostly by protected DNR lands. Periodic heavy algae growth near where the Apple enters the St. Croix motivated this project. This is an area of braided channel backwaters.



Lower Apple River Action Plan

Plan Goals

Understand the sources of algae blooms in the St. Croix River near the outlet of the Apple River.

Reduce watershed loading of phosphorus to the Lower Apple River by 26%.

Improve in-stream and shoreline habitat for fish and other wildlife in and along the Lower Apple River.

Preserve, enhance, and provide opportunities to appreciate the natural scenic beauty along the Lower Apple River.

Partner Commitment

Each partner representative was asked to complete and sign a commitment statement. The statements demonstrate commitment to support the goals of the Lower Apple River Action Plan and identify the strategies in which the partner group or individual plans to participate. The commitment statements are included as Appendix A of the full plan.

Public Involvement

An open house to inform and obtain feedback from the public will be held in September of 2011. Invitations were sent to members of local organizations, elected officials, and riparian landowners. The purposes of the meeting will be to review the action plan, raise awareness of watershed concerns, and to provide positive examples of plan strategies and opportunities for citizen involvement. Citizens will also be given the opportunity to express their concerns and to pledge participation in the action plan.

Plan Implementation

Initial implementation will focus on strategies established as priorities by the partner group or through citizen input. More detailed scopes of work found in Appendix B outline actions for those strategies selected as initial priorities by the partner group. Commitments are especially needed to sponsor and implement these strategies.

Locating the financial and human resources to complete initial priorities will be a critical next step. Funding sources may include existing organization budgets, grants, and private foundations.

Public outreach and involvement will be critical to implementing many of the project strategies.

Plan Review and Update

Project progress will be reviewed and future priorities selected in an annual meeting convened by the St. Croix River Association. This plan is intended to be a dynamic document.

The partner group discussed models of various forms of partnerships which might be used to implement this project. A summary of each including a description, advantages and disadvantages are presented for each in Appendix E. The partner model currently being followed is that of an informal coalition. The St. Croix River Association has committed to facilitate this information coalition – at least initially.

Water Quality Goals and Strategies

Goal. Understand the sources of algae blooms in the St. Croix River near the outlet of the Apple River.

Strategies

- WQM 1. Study algae and the nutrients that lead to algae blooms.
- Existing conditions will be recorded by the National Park Service in 2011.
 - Further study is likely to involve sediment cores to profile phosphorus and date the core.
- WQM 2. Monitor water quality in various locations on the Apple River.
- Identify objectives for water quality monitoring more clearly.
 - Use guidance from the 2010 monitoring plan for the St. Croix River, and proposed 2012 Wisconsin Consolidated Assessment and Listing Methodology (WisCALM).

Goal. Reduce watershed loading of phosphorus to the Lower Apple River by 26%.

- Phosphorus loading is targeted because phosphorus leads to algae blooms.*
- Activities which reduce phosphorus loading may also reduce sediment deposition and improve aquatic habitat (among other benefits).*
- Numerical goals may be adjusted as more is learned about the river and its watershed.*

Strategies¹

WQ 1. Be involved in the TMDL implementation planning process to guide and fund water quality strategies.

- Implement financial, technical, and educational measures of the Wisconsin Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement program.
- Encourage federal cost share and incentive programs.

EVALUATION

To be identified in TMDL process.

WQ 2. Select priority areas/subwatershed using best available models. Within these priority areas:

- Identify more specific target lands: inappropriate practices on vulnerable lands.
- Identify and contact decision makers for these properties.
- Use local, technically competent, credible technical assistance providers to work cooperatively with decision-makers to develop solutions. Take a farm by farm, field by field approach.

¹ Strategies in bold are identified as initial priorities by project partners. Initial implementation of these priority strategies is outlined in Appendix B.

EVALUATION

- Monitor downstream of these priority areas prior to and after project implementation.
- Track implementation of projects.

WQ 3. Encourage and protect natural green corridors along the Apple River.

- a. Conservation easements are one tool that might be used to permanently protect these areas.
- b. Owners can also commit less formally to establishing and maintaining permanent native vegetation.
- c. Provide assistance for establishing permanent vegetative cover.

EVALUATION

- Identify priorities for protection.
- Track easements installed along the Apple River. Identify characteristics of protected property.
- Record landowner commitments to maintain permanent vegetation.

WQ 4. **Encourage local policies, plans, and ordinances which protect and improve water quality.**

- a. Contribute to the development of these by participating in the process.
- b. Develop the capacity for local volunteer involvement by providing training and networking opportunities.
- c. Assist municipalities in developing local stormwater plans and ordinances.

WQ 5. Develop an outreach and education plan to encourage implementation of water quality projects.

- a. Encourage local resident and business participation in projects to protect and improve water quality.
- b. Include outreach and education for both urban (residential and commercial) and agricultural audiences.

Habitat Goal and Strategies

Goal. Improve in-stream and shoreline habitat for fish and other wildlife in and along the Lower Apple River.

Objectives²

Improve in-stream habitat

No net loss of natural river shoreline

Reduce erosion and sediment from shoreline areas

Strategies

HB 1. Complete inventories to assess existing habitat and the need for improvements.

- a. Bank erosion
- b. Riparian vegetation (including invasive species present)

HB 2. Assess biological indicators and habitat conditions in various locations.

- a. Encourage volunteer participation, participate in, and/or provide training for Volunteer Stream Monitoring through the Water Action Volunteers (WAV) Program.
- b. Use biological and habitat indicators independent of the WAV Program.

HB 3. Complete in-stream, bank restoration, and stream restoration projects including installation of wood habitat.

- a. Offer financial and technical assistance to landowners
- b. Provide information about shoreland zoning ordinances and proper shoreland management options.
- c. Implement control measures for invasive species.

HB 4. Encourage and protect natural green corridors along the Apple River.

- a. See detail in WQ strategy 3.

HB 5. Encourage local policies to manage development and avoid fragmentation of habitat.

HB 6. Be involved in federal farm policy to encourage habitat and water quality incentives. Produce conservation, not commodities.

² An objective of increasing the area of designated trout waters was considered, but according to Marty Engel, WDNR Fisheries Biologist, water temperatures are not conducive to trout in our focus area. Trout are supported through stocking upriver, and where present, occur because of springs.

Natural Scenic Beauty Goal and Strategy

Definition

Pleasant views of natural landscapes such as forests, prairies, and waterways and the plants and animals they support.

Goal. Preserve, enhance, and provide opportunities to appreciate the natural scenic beauty along the Lower Apple River.

Objectives

Identify scenic natural areas along the river.

Preserve scenic natural areas.

Restore and enhance scenic beauty.

Encourage appreciation of scenic beauty.

Strategies³

NSB 1. Use a variety of techniques to identify scenic natural areas: GIS mapping based, information gathered from citizens (perhaps through a photo contest), etc.

NSB 2. Set aside scenic land and views through acquisition of title or scenic/conservation easements.

NSB 3. Support land use policies and ordinances that preserve scenic natural areas.

- Be involved in county and town planning processes.
- Advocate for scenic natural beauty preservation such as through mitigation requirements and adherence to shoreland buffer standards in updates to the shoreland ordinance.

NSB 4. Provide technical and financial assistance for restoration of native vegetation and other scenic enhancements along the river.

NSB 5. Evaluate best options for access which provides views and allows recreation to encourage appreciation of natural scenic beauty.

NSB 6. Enhance natural scenic beauty through projects which prevent and pick up litter along the river.

³ Strategies in bold are selected for initial, priority implementation.

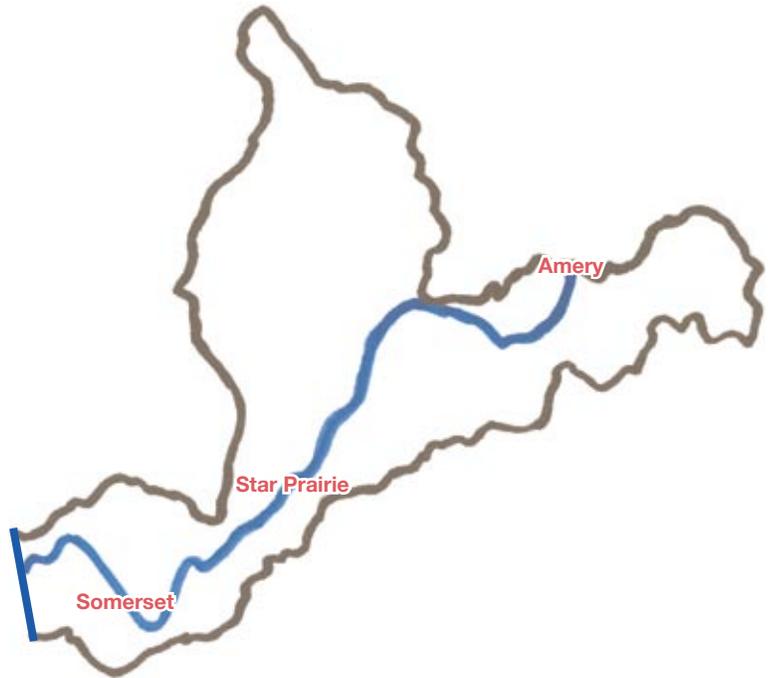
My Lower Apple River Individual Commitment

Thanks for your interest in the Lower Apple River and for taking the time to come to this open house.

Agency Partners have made commitment statements that endorse the plan goals and describe how they will be involved in its implementation. We are asking you to do the same.

Please tour the tables here tonight to learn more and offer your comments.

As you review the information and talk to project partners, consider making a personal commitment to river protection and improvement.



I am interested in protecting and improving the Lower Apple River.

I pledge to do so in the following ways:

Please check appropriate boxes, add your contact information, and return this form as you leave. A partner representative will contact you when we are ready for your help.

- Inventory vegetation and bank erosion along the river
- Take water quality samples
- Participate in a photography contest to document the natural beauty of the river
- Promote plan goals as an elected or appointed local official
- Do what I can on my own property to protect and improve water quality, habitat, and natural scenic beauty
- Participate in local plan and ordinance development with river protection in mind
- Participate in the formation of a Lower Apple River organization
- Provide input to the St. Croix Lakes TMDL water quality project
- Consider donation of a conservation easement along the river
- Not sure, but keep me informed
- _____

(please list)

Signature _____ Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please turn this sheet in as you leave or mail to: Harmony Environmental • 516 Keller Ave. S. • Amery, Wisconsin 54001