



The Friends of the Mukwonago River Strategic Plan 2011 -2015

August 13, 2011

This strategic plan has been developed by Holt Community Consulting in order to provide a disciplined approach to the management of The Friends of the Mukwonago River over the next five years. From January to June 2011, various meetings with board members and member volunteers provided the content that follows.

Friends of the Mukwonago River P.O. Box 21, Eagle, WI 53119
www.mukwonagoriver.org

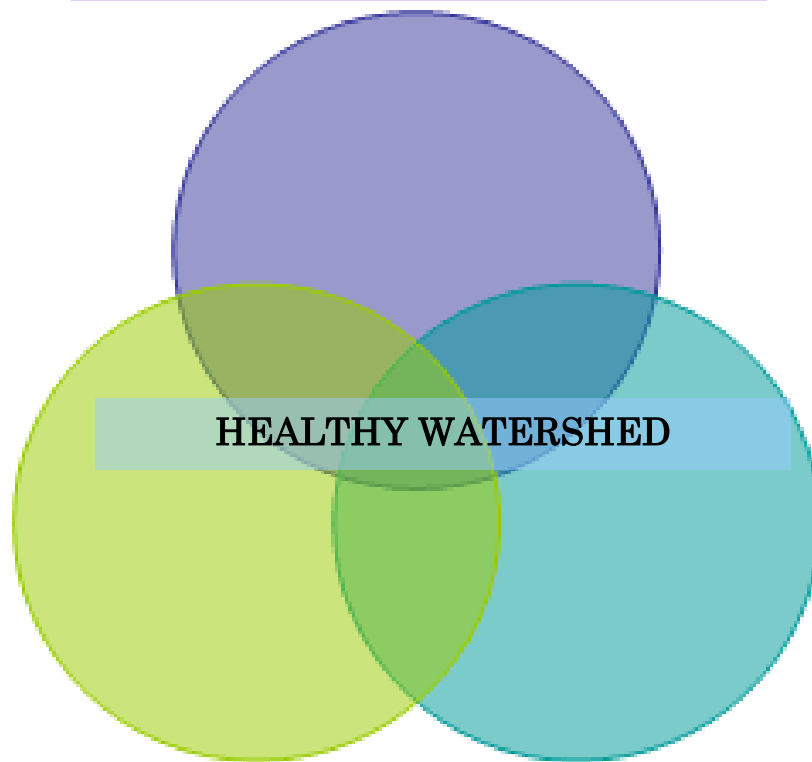
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THE FRIENDS OF THE MUKWONAGO RIVER OVERARCHING GOALS

As we imagine 20 or 30 years into the future, we envision the following system that will support a healthy watershed.

HEALTHY ORGANIZATION



HEALTHY COMMUNITY

HEALTHY PARTNERSHIPS

THE FRIENDS OF THE MUKWONAGO RIVER

Executive Summary

Formed in 1999 to mitigate potential threats to the watershed's outstanding water and land resources, the Friends has worked collaboratively since then with key partners to affect an integrated approach to water and land management. This has been done effectively through close work with municipal leaders and development interests on policy change, through educational efforts aimed at key decision makers and by supporting scientific research on the Mukwonago River and its watershed ecosystem.

For over a decade, the Friends have been a forward-thinking, hands-on, volunteer organization. By efficiently using limited human and financial resources, the organization has been a catalyst and leader in critical decisions that have benefited the Mukwonago River watershed. Successes include: conservation of the 970-acre Rainbow Springs property, now part of the Southern Kettle Moraine State Forest; the formation of the Mukwonago River Initiative, a coalition of public and private-sector watershed partners; water quality improvements to key local development proposals; Eagleville Elementary School's designation as an environmentally-focused charter school; work with the Town of Mukwonago to create its Conservation Subdivision ordinance; and enlisting WDNR to stock native Brook Trout instead of non-native Brown Trout.

The Mukwonago River system, including seven large, developed lakes, several smaller natural lakes and numerous tributaries, supports a variety of fishes, mussels, and other aquatic organisms, including nearly 80 state-listed threatened and endangered species and species of special concern. The Mukwonago River is sustained by ground-water recharge, seepage from wetlands and moraines, and precipitation runoff from about an 86-square-mile watershed. The river has unique ecological, aesthetic, and recreational values and is one of the most diverse aquatic ecosystems within the Southeastern Wisconsin Region (SEWRPC, 2010).

The Wisconsin Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has designated the Mukwonago River watershed one of its four "Last Great Places" in Wisconsin. Because of its high quality waters, the Mukwonago River watershed was selected in the early 2000's as one of three focal sites globally to be reviewed by the international Nature Conservancy Wetlands Network. The other two sites are the Amazon River and the Great Salt Lake Marsh.

Even with these successes and recognized treasures, challenges loom. Communities within the Mukwonago River watershed have grown significantly in recent decades. Ongoing and forecast changes in land use will affect hydrology, groundwater recharge, water quality and quantity, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

Behind the scenes the Friends have successfully affected policy change. However, limited financial and people resources have restricted their ability to be visible and fully engage a diverse citizenry towards comprehensive watershed conservation. In light of these strengths and challenges, the board and members have considered:

1. How can the communities of the Mukwonago River Watershed best be served through our programs?
2. How can the Friends of the Mukwonago River implement practices that cultivate leaders and volunteers who demonstrate passion for the mission and feel personally vested in the future of the watershed?
3. How can the Friends of the Mukwonago River best achieve financial stability and effectively serve our membership and community partners?

The 2011- 2015 Strategic Plan, which aligns with the organization's mission, directs the board, staff and member volunteers to concentrate resources towards prioritized objectives that will address these questions.

THE FRIENDS OF THE MUKWONAGO RIVER

Who Are We?

Our Board of Directors

The Friends of the Mukwonago River charter limits the organization to seven board members. Currently, three of those positions are filled by the following volunteers:

Ezra Meyer – President

Ezra grew up in the watershed on Eagle Spring Lake - 4th generation. He has degrees in Water Resources Management, Economics, and Urban & Regional Planning from UW Madison. He's been the Water Resources Specialist at Clean Wisconsin for over three years. Ezra is passionate about building on the watershed's long history of people and nature coexisting in a mutually beneficial way. Ezra is a founding member of the Friends.

Jean Weedman – Vice President

Jean and her husband moved to the watershed 20 years ago and are devoted to environmental issues. While in Milwaukee, Jean was an active board member in many civic organizations. Jean's restored her own prairie and serves as co-chair for the Eagle Nature Trail. She's passionate about providing habitat for area citizens and began the Friends turtle project. As a retired English teacher, she's happy to lead educational outreach events.

Pamela Meyer - Treasurer

Pamela grew up on Eagle Spring Lake, raised three kids and still lives there today. She is a private landowner with a conservation easement on 1500 ft of the Mukwonago River– Crooked Creek Tree Farm – 60+ acres of designated land. She has served three terms on the Waukesha County Board, currently serving on the Finance and Public Works Committees. She is passionate about water recharge and municipal water use planning.



Our Members

With over dozens of active members and nearly 200 active contacts, in a very short time the Friends have engaged a very passionate, loyal and committed group of volunteers. Simultaneously, we understand that there is an abundance of untapped potential within our general membership and watershed community.

Our Community

Our community includes all those who live in, learn in, work in, recreate in, and visit the watershed. Specifically, our community includes: watershed residents – suburban, riparian owners, farmers, land owners; recreation users –birders, paddlers, boaters, hikers, naturalists, cyclists, and campers; elected officials - municipal officers, county officials, state officials; local businesses and corporations; youth, environmental and civic organizations; K – 12 schools - students, staff, administration, and PTO/PTA groups; colleges, technical schools and universities; and scientists and researchers.

THE FRIENDS OF THE MUKWONAGO RIVER

Organizational Tenets

Our Mission

The mission of the Friends of the Mukwonago River is to protect the Mukwonago River and its associated watershed ecosystems by way of education, advocacy, and promotion of sound land use throughout the watershed.

Our Core Values

The Friends of the Mukwonago River is committed to a long term, sustainable coordinated effort to promote land and water use within the Mukwonago River watershed and surrounding areas. Organizational courage, integrity, and quality relationships will help achieve our goal. Because we have a deep respect for nature, we believe that it is through science and growing ecological awareness that we can affect the changes necessary for a healthy watershed.

Our Guiding Principles

The Friends of the Mukwonago River will be:



- Driven by the mission that supports the river and entire watershed
- Governed by committed volunteers and managed by competent staff
- Committed to serving all of the people and creatures who live in the watershed
- Fiscally sound and supported through diverse funding streams
- Involved in community partnerships and collaborations
- Focused on watershed leadership



Our Vision:

The Friends of the Mukwonago River will seek to:



- Support a resourceful, inquisitive, adaptive, supportive, and respectful watershed culture
- Be a respected watershed leader recognized locally, statewide, and nationally
- Create and maintain a sustainable organizational structure of volunteers, members, and staff
- Build a full capacity visioning board representing the diverse communities within the watershed
- Incorporate sophisticated planning, training, and evaluation processes into our organization
- Increase watershed resources including the people, budget, and science to support program goals

LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY

In our position as a provider of quality not-for-profit services we will develop all Friends human resources by recruiting, training and retaining dedicated, committed volunteers and staff to fulfill our mission and establishing ourselves as a key watershed leader within the region.

We will

- ✓ Ensure that our board and committees attract individuals with the talent, resources and passion to meet our mission
- ✓ Build in benchmarks to transition from a “working board” to a “visioning board”
- ✓ Create a Board Development Committee with a charge to create and maintain board development plan including board definitions and representation goals
- ✓ Secure additional professional leadership by creating and implementing a phased staffing plan for part and full time staff
- ✓ Establish a volunteer recruitment, recognition, and retention program
- ✓ Create professional development opportunities to encourage leadership, program innovation and management skills
- ✓ Conduct annual recognition and appreciation event for staff and volunteers
- ✓ Review staff benefits with the purpose of retaining and attracting quality staff
- ✓ Establish regular watershed and organizational evaluations
- ✓ Increase board and member representation from the scientific/academic communities
- ✓ Expand pool of educated watershed advocates
- ✓ Become a pro-active watershed leader



Local and national trends suggest:

- A strong and highly visible leader is an important way to increase participation within an organization.
- A strong force behind volunteering is the need to belong and feel connected.
- Four out of five charities use volunteers.
- Retention of good performers is vital for optimal organizational performance.

MEMBERSHIP

To maintain a healthy, vibrant, and mission-driven organization, we will expand membership by 100% annually in five years.

We will:

- ✓ Establish a Membership Committee focused on member cultivation and satisfaction including a Membership Drive and recruiting incentives
- ✓ Help new members connect to the organization and the watershed with a welcome letter/email, packet and/or events
- ✓ Provide access to regularly scheduled and anticipated educational, advocacy, and social programs for members and volunteers
- ✓ Establish levels of volunteering to provide a system for members to deepen their involvement over time
- ✓ Create an annual membership outreach calendar of activities and events that support recruitment
- ✓ Track membership retention with goal of increasing total retention over the next five years
- ✓ Promote member involvement by increasing “building relationships” opportunities with the Friends’ community



Local and national trends suggest:

- Voluntary donations and/or memberships are influenced by the overall health of the U.S. and local economies.
- Activities – whether social or educational – support and potentially increase membership.
- Membership connotes a personal connection and shared ownership.
- Increased membership numbers provide credibility for outside funding sources and political advocacy efforts.
- Members provide a first step for future volunteers, donors, and board members.
- Waukesha and Walworth Counties will continue to grow with expected growth within the Mukwonago area to include families and commuters.

EDUCATION

The Friends of Mukwonago River is committed to preserving our watershed by strengthening our membership and community through educational activities that ultimately grow leaders and change systems to facilitate better outcomes for water quality and watershed health.

We will:

- ✓ Partner with the long standing camping communities that exist within the watershed to support watershed service-learning programs and educational opportunities for campers, parents, staff, and board members
- ✓ Target architects, engineers, facility staff, and construction companies with educational training, workshops, and information regarding best-practices
- ✓ Find educational opportunities to address the interest and needs of watershed individuals and groups including but not limited to prescribed burn trainings, invasive plant identification and removal techniques, and planting native species
- ✓ Incorporate educational activities that provide easy access for participants to experience the watershed first-hand
- ✓ Work with the Mukwonago River Watershed Initiative partners to initiate and support feasible “Bricks and Mortar” projects providing the educational component when possible



Local and national trends suggest:

- Local citizens seem to have a connection with individual parts of the watershed like a specific lake or fishing hole but do not have a strong concept of the entire system.
- Our watershed has a significant number of youth organizations and camps that include at least seven that have significant land and waterfront property.
- Engaging university personnel in organizational work adds credibility and visibility.
- Given current school district financial constraints and testing expectations, educators have limited time to integrate outside curricula but often welcome outside projects that support classroom goals if the projects don't have a cost or require excessive time commitment for preparation.

COMMUNICATION

Our goal is to improve and deepen the understanding of watershed issues among the general public and targeted populations through a strategic social marketing campaign and outreach program. We aim to create a culture shift that will support the coordinated implementation of the Friends' strategic plan and compatible overlying plans including SEWRPC's Mukwonago River Watershed Protection Plan. This work also helps to maintain the visibility of the Friends in the community and to celebrate the successes of the Friends and its partners.

We will:

- ✓ Provide consistent member and volunteer communication through our website, social media, e-blasts, newsletters, events and personal thank you notes
- ✓ Ensure stakeholders are aware of the mission and accomplishments by implementing a strategic social marketing campaign
- ✓ Establish a Communications Committee that supports this campaign
- ✓ Create a public relations Tool Box to facilitate consistent and successful messaging for volunteers
- ✓ Create a targeted press release and P.S.A. schedule for the greater watershed region
- ✓ Create a speakers bureau and training to support regular presentations to targeted civic, business, municipal, and organizational partners
- ✓ Publicize volunteer activities regularly to the general public, targeted partners, and current partners
- ✓ Create a targeted communication and outreach strategy for the business community especially those that could directly impact the watershed
- ✓ Maintain a consistent presence at municipal and civic meetings and support broader membership attendance when necessary



Local and national trends suggest:

- Consistent and regular communication, with a goal of seven times per year, can be the cornerstone to successful non-profit organizations.
- Consistent and regular communication of an organization's mission is essential to increased community participation and support.
- It's important to train board members, volunteers and members in communication strategies and provide them with a toolbox so that they can communicate the same message in the community.
- Asking constituents regularly what they understand about the organization and their programs through formal evaluations, questionnaires and casual feedback can provide a litmus test as to how accurate your communication strategy is working as well as engages members in improving the lines of communication.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Friends of the Mukwonago River seeks to expand and diversify our financial capacity sufficiently to advance our mission, support current and future programs, and successfully transition our organization into the next stage.

We will:

- ✓ Establish a Fundraising Committee to recommend and help meet organizational and campaign goals with consistent campaigns, activities, and a Finance Committee to support financial oversight
- ✓ Cultivate new donors through outreach activities, social marketing campaign, community partnerships, research, and volunteer support
- ✓ Maintain grant submissions and on-going research
- ✓ Create organizational foundation to support long-term capital donors
- ✓ Establish annual and anticipated fundraising events
- ✓ Consider program fee structures
- ✓ Utilize up-to-date technology to streamline giving opportunities including but not limited to on-line giving and text donations
- ✓ Establish and implement an endowment program



Local and national trends suggest:

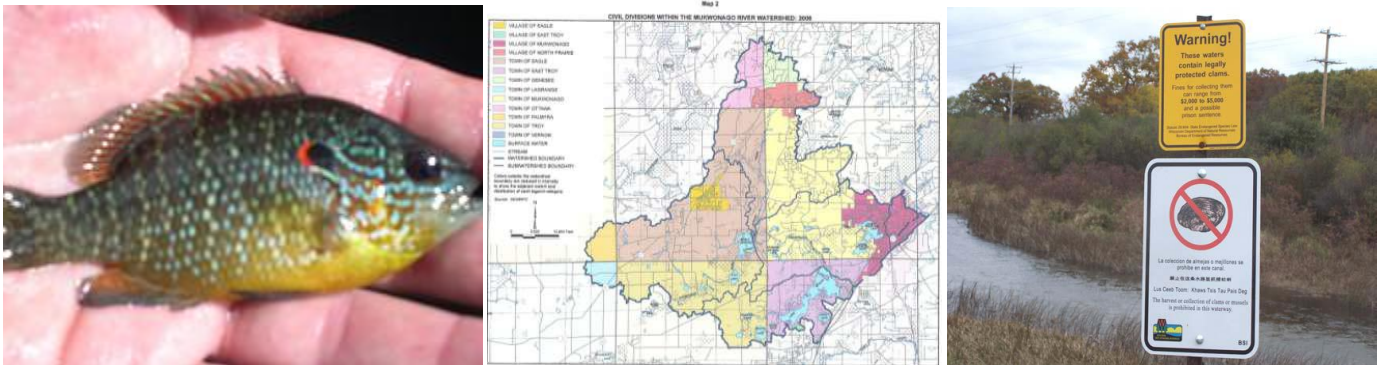
- The availability of government and private funds is strongly influenced by the economic conditions of the area, state, and nation.
- People give to people they trust and know. Growing long-term relationships with potential consistent donors is critical to long term sustainability.
- Tying an organization's mission into giving campaigns or fundraising events not only can help raise more support but also strengthens commitment to the cause and raises general public awareness.

SCIENTIFIC RESOURCES

The Friends seek to establish a continuous science-based program that supports strategic planning goals, annual programs, and long-term watershed objectives.

We will:

- ✓ Increase partnerships with colleges and academics
- ✓ Recruit scientists and researchers for our board and committees
- ✓ Share research and statistics to validate our work to funders, partners, and the community at-large
- ✓ Utilize information to educate private and corporate landowners who have the greatest impact and to educate local municipal decision makers
- ✓ Integrate scientific data gathering into educational, training, and community programs as often as we can, partnering with existing scientific or conservation organizations.



Local and national trends suggest:

- Improving and increasing consistent scientific data about the watershed can provide a groundwork to enlist skeptics who are not necessarily seen as watershed advocates.
- Polluted run-off is the top threat to our waterways. State, county, and local government regulations to curb run-off will vary depending on the changing political climate.
- Though largely invisible, the quality and quantity of groundwater, which provides drinking water for 70% of the state and helps maintain lake and river levels, plays a vital role in our daily lives.
- The 2010 SEWRPC Mukwonago River Watershed report provides critical analysis, scientific resources, and important strategies for local watershed work.

STRATEGIC PLAN EVALUATION & REVIEW

To ensure that this strategic plan remains relevant organizationally, it will be reviewed annually by the board members and committees. Recommendations for amendments will be made at the annual meeting and reviewed by the membership. If no recommendations are made, then the plan will remain as is. This formative evaluation is critical in order to respond to any organizational or community changes that may affect the success of the plan.

A summative evaluation will be performed at mid-point and final point of the strategic plan term to review what goals have been met or those that still need to be attained. This evaluation will also review whether the organization has espoused the tenets within the plan: which values have been practiced, missions accomplished, and visions achieved. Any discrepancies within the detailed goals and actual outcomes should be noted and addressed with recommended amendments to the plan as well as updated organizational decisions.



Thank you to everyone who shared their ideas and spent time to create this document.
Photograph credits include: Julie Bender, Jean Weedman, Cynthia Holt, and other Friends' volunteers.

Friends of the Mukwonago River P.O. Box 21, Eagle, WI 53119
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