

Chippewa County

New Opportunities through Locally Led Conservation

In Wisconsin, we are committed to “Locally Led Conservation.” Resource management challenges vary widely across the state. It is the responsibility of each County Land Conservation Committee to work with stakeholders to define the resource management issues of local concern, and to work with those stakeholders to meet community needs.

There is a growing awareness that “Government” cannot do it all, and that local leadership and collaboration are the keys to success. In Wisconsin, there is also a growing interest by industry leaders to invest in community-based projects that protect and improve the environment.

About the Project

The Little Lake Wissota Stewardship Project is a good example of a public and private partnership, co-sponsored by the Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company and the Chippewa County Land Conservation Committee to meet local conservation needs.

Why would a company sponsor a major watershed project? As explained by corporate leaders in a recent call for volunteers; “At Leinenkugel’s, our connection to water quality and love of the outdoors is at the core of who we are and what we do”.

Little Lake Wissota is an impounded embayment of Lake Wissota, located in the Chippewa Falls Urban Area, and is an important community asset. The lake receives its water from a 67 square mile watershed and has been listed as an “impaired water”. The DNR established a Total Maximum Daily Load limit (TMDL) for the lake, and established phosphorus reduction goals to reduce the frequency of late summer algae blooms.

In creating the project, the sponsors wanted to develop and evaluate a new community-driven business model for lake and watershed

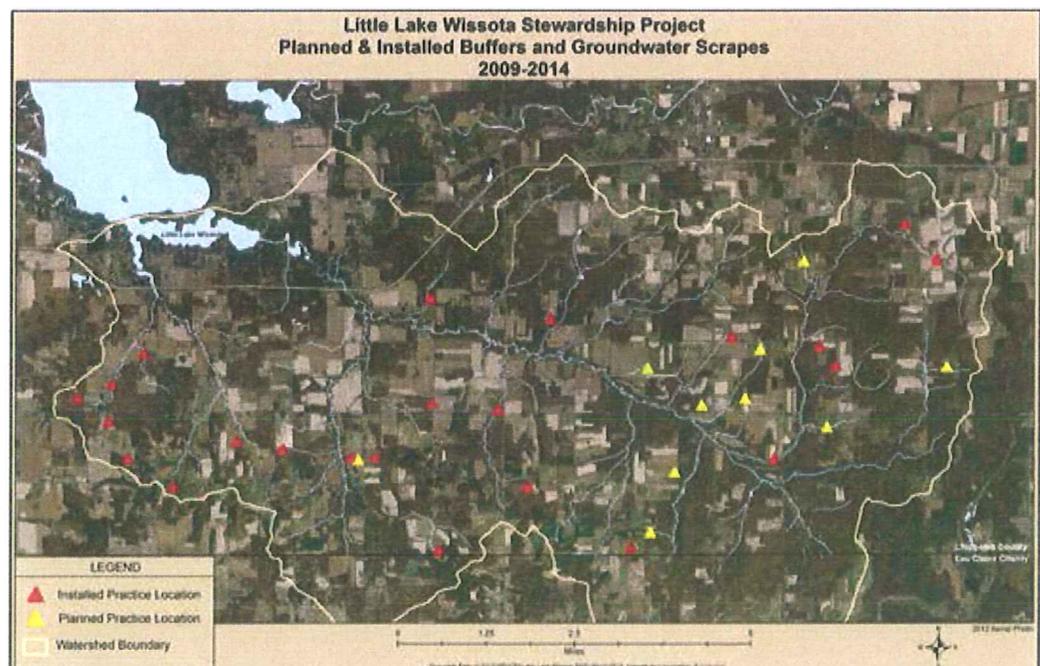
management. The environmental goals of the project were established in collaboration with the funding agencies to reduce phosphorus loads to target levels, keep the lake fishable and swimmable, and increase the number of recreational user days.

The project is funded through community contributions provided by area businesses and corporations, community organizations and foundations, and by individual citizens. These private contributions are augmented by a large-scale WDNR TMDL watershed grant, DATCP Soil and Water Resource Management funds, and by USDA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds.

Progress to Date

Initiated in 2009 as a five year pilot project, significant progress has been made. During the initial stage of project development, the project oversight team met with state and federal agencies, including the DNR, DATCP, UW-Extension, and the USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service to review TMDL goals and project objectives.

The team then developed a detailed project design and framework, drafted a cooperative agreement that defined the specific roles and responsibilities of





On May 17, 2014, community volunteers, led by the Leinenkugel's family and corporate staff, planted over 1,000 trees to establish a permanent stream buffer that will improve the water quality of Little Lake Wissota.

the project sponsors, and established performance measures to track progress and to assure accountability. To implement the project, the project team developed a framework for community giving (working through the local community foundation), secured state and federal funding sources, and developed a multi-year operational plan that outlined the work to be done.

For simplicity, the project has been planned and is being managed using three components common to most watershed projects: community outreach, getting “conservation on the land”, and resource monitoring. To date, the project has been well received with significant progress being made under each component.

To advance community outreach, a public information and education plan has been prepared, fact sheets and Power Point presentations developed, and a Facebook page created. Members of the project team routinely present progress reports to community organizations, supporting agencies, and donor groups. Most recently, there have been volunteer opportunities created by the Leinenkugel's “Canoes for a Cause” program to encourage direct citizen involvement through tree planting and lake shore clean up.

To get “Conservation on the Land”, the project team completed an extensive watershed inventory to define areas for targeted resource protection, and conducted direct mailings to rural landowners and agricultural producers to inform them of program opportunities. Field visits are then arranged to explain the project and to present site specific cost estimates for water conservation practices, including riparian tree buffers, wetland restorations, and upland sediment

basins and groundwater infiltration scrapes. To date, 25 landowners have participated, installing over 125 acres of riparian buffers and wetland restorations, with nearly all areas permanently protected through use of conservation easements.

To reduce implementation costs, the project developed and implemented a turn-key process for group contracting and installation of conservation practices.

To track and monitor progress toward achieving lake and water management goals, the project team keeps a cumulative record of modeled phosphorus reduction,

compiles available lake water quality monitoring records, and met with DNR lake and water quality specialists to evaluate long-term lake management and monitoring needs. Most recently, the project gained a commitment from each of the five Chippewa Falls area Boy Scout Troops to conduct lake monitoring on a bi-monthly basis following DNR Citizen Science protocols over the next five years.

Moving Forward

The project team is now developing an outline of the methods used to plan and implement the project with the hope that some of the lessons learned may be transferrable and of benefit in other projects. The project team is also reaching out to the local lake association and the town government to explore long-term institutional arrangements that can be used to further advance lake management needs.

Ongoing project updates, including the 2013 project summary, are routinely posted online to keep the community engaged and moving forward. These can be viewed on Facebook by searching for “Little Lake Wissota Stewardship Project”.

For more information about the Little Lake Wissota Project, please contact Jane Tetzloff- Jensen, Project and Grants Manager, Chippewa County Dept. Land Conservation & Forest Management, at (715) 726-7922 or Dan McCabe, Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company, LLC., General Manager & Plant Manager at (715) 720-2218.