GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Friends of the White River Goals and Objectives

Goal: To protect and preserve the White River between Hwy 63 (Bayfield County) and Hwy 13 (Ashland County) as a natural corridor for future generations to enjoy.

Objectives:
1. Research and maintain or improve water quality
2. Research and maintain or improve fishery
3. Provide walk-in public access to the river
4. Encourage ecological preservation/restoration in order to protect the scenic beauty and ecological health of the river corridor
Objective 1: Research and maintain or improve water quality

Current Situation:
The White River forms at the confluence of the East, West and South Forks of the White River. For its first two miles down to Pike's Branch at the Section 21/22 line (T46N-R7W: Town of Delta) the river is considered an outstanding water resource by the WDNR. From the Section 21/22 line (T46N-R7W: Town of Delta) to the boundary of the Bad River Indian Reservation, the stream is considered an exceptional resource water.

As the river passes through the Bibon marsh and down to the White River Flowage, it collects the waters of the Long Lake Branch and its tributaries and Schramm Creek. The river picks up discoloration here from the underlying red clay soils and while still a cold-water stream is less productive for trout. Bottom types are mostly clay, with areas of sand, gravel, silt and rubble.

A variety of water-quality problems are present in the middle section of the river, including a hydroelectric dam, large areas of agricultural land, and bank erosion. Specific “use problems” identified by the WDNR include: forestry activities, hydrological modification, unspecified nonpoint source pollution, low flow, and pollution from septic systems. These pollution sources have the following impacts: sedimentation, habitat loss, turbidity, and unnatural stream flow fluctuations caused by unnatural conditions.

Proposed actions:

1. Establish baseline water quality using the existing Bad River Watershed Association water chemistry and macroinvertebrate monitoring system. Establish monitoring sites for both tests in the middle stretch of the White River, and start collecting data (phosphate, nitrate, dissolved oxygen, pH, chloride, turbidity, macroinvertebrate sampling).

Current status: Water chemistry testing: In late 2002, The Bad River Watershed Association began a water-quality testing program throughout the Bad River watershed. This program includes monthly water-chemistry testing and biannually macroinvertebrate testing at various sites. Volunteers who conduct testing are given continual training and their work is subject to periodic quality-control checks. The program goal is to establish a baseline of water quality characteristics after gathering four years’ of data at established sites throughout the watershed.

Throughout 2003, BRWA conducted water chemistry testing on two sites on the White River, both of which were upstream of the “middle segment” which begins at Hwy 63. These two sites were at Long Branch and at Bibon Road.

Early in 2004, BRWA received gifts and grants enabling the purchase of several additional water chemistry testing kits which will enable additional testing sites, including White River sites at Maple Ridge Road and at Hwy 13—essentially at the beginning and end of the targeted “middle segment.” By the end of 2004, water chemistry testing will begin at these two sites.
Current status: Macroinvertebrate testing: The Bad River Watershed Association initiated a macroinvertebrate testing program in 2003; target sites are tested twice per year. Two of the three White River sites for macroinvertebrate testing are upstream of the "middle segment" at Pike's Creek and Long Branch.

The third site, at Maple Ridge Road just east of Hwy. 63, is in the target area. As the BRWA macroinvertebrate testing program continues to grow, priority will be given to establishing an additional testing site in the middle segment of the White River.

The only prior testing documented in this middle segment was a single instance on the White River Flowage that took place as part of the 1989-1990 study of the flowage fishery. On August 24, 1989, macroinvertebrate taxa were sampled in the flowage, in the bypassed channel, and in the tailwater below the dam powerhouse. Results of that testing are included in the appendix.

2. After baseline water quality characteristics have been established, examine continuing test results for evidence of degraded water quality. From these data, attempt to determine underlying causes.

3. Conduct visual inspection of the river with a conservation professional, looking in particular for bank erosion and other visible sources of pollution; along these areas, contact landowners and educate/provide resources about buffer programs (see objective #4).

4. Gather information from longtime landowners and river users about the state of the river corridor and the water quality in the watershed. This information may take the form of oral history interviews, news clippings, photographs, personal records, etc.
Objective 2: Research and maintain or improve fishery

Current Situation:

The White River is considered a Class I trout stream for brook and brown trout for its first two miles down to Pike's Branch at the Section 21/22 line (T46N-R7W: Town of Delta). From this point to the White River Flowage in Ashland County, and then from the outlet of the flowage to the river mouth, is considered Class II trout water, with the reach up to the dam supporting migratory species from Lake Superior. The river is identified in the Lake Superior Coastal Wetland Evaluation as an aquatic priority site.

Several of the White River’s feeder streams are considered trout waters. Most of the feeders to the river in this downstream portion are either intermittent or considered warm-water forage fishery waters. As the river passes through the Bibon Swamp and down to the White River Flowage, it collects the waters of the Long Lake Branch and its tributaries and Schramm Creek. The river picks up discoloration here from the underlying red clay soils and while still a cold water stream is less productive for trout.

A great deal of fishery work has been done on the White River in the Bibon Swamp area and farther upstream at the White River Fishery Area. By contrast, the fishery in the targeted middle segment of the White River, from Hwy 63 in Bayfield County to Hwy 13 in Ashland County, has received little scrutiny. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office in Ashland, Wis. reports that their office has no fisheries data on this section of the White River. Likewise, an examination of the Wisconsin DNR’s historic files of fisheries research on the White River, kept at the DNR office in Brule, revealed no information from the middle stretch of the White River, with the exception of a 1989-1990 fishery survey of the White River flowage at Hwy 112.

This survey showed that northern pike were the most abundant gamefish species in the flowage. Of the other sport or non-game species in the flowage, all except black bullhead, white sucker, and shorthead redhorse were present in very low numbers. Largemouth bass, black crappie, bluegill, pumpkinseed, and yellow perch were among the rarer species. Brown trout were found in the narrow, upper end of the flowage where conditions more resemble the river.

WDNR Fisheries Biologist Scott Toshner noted that the little is known about the fishery in the riverine portion of the middle segment of the White River, and that this system has long been in need of fisheries research.

Proposed actions:

1. Seek funding to support basic research on the status and health of the fishery in the middle section of the White River. Collaborate with the Wisconsin DNR, Trout Unlimited, and other partners to seek resources and design studies.
2. Gather information from longtime landowners and river users about the state of the fishery in this segment of the river corridor. This information may take the form of oral history interviews, news clippings, photographs, personal records, etc.
Objective 3: Provide walk-in public access to river

Current Situation:
Along its entire length, the White River provides exceptional opportunities for anglers and paddlers. Along its “middle segment,” however, there is limited access to the White River because of very few road crossings and an absence of public waterfront land. Currently, anglers and paddlers wishing to enjoy the middle segment of the White River must put in at the Maple Ridge Road crossing, just east of Hwy 63 in Bayfield County, and cannot legally step on shore again until they reach the boat landing at the White River Flowage on the west side of Hwy 112 in Ashland County. This stretch represents a length of about 20 river miles.

River users in the middle segment also can put in below the dam on the east side of Hwy 112 and take out at the Hwy 13 crossing, a more manageable stretch of about 8 river miles.

Proposed actions:

1. Establish one walk-in public access trail to the White River through land or easement donation or purchase in the river segment between the Maple Ridge Road crossing and the White River Flowage boat landing.

   Current status: A White River landowner in the Town of Kelly has expressed interest in donating an easement across a portion of his land to enable walk-in public access to the White River (See Maps 9 and 10).

   The Bayfield Regional Conservancy, a regional land trust based in Bayfield, Wis., has been involved in discussion about the White River since the formation of the Friends of the White River group. At its March 2004 meeting, the board of directors of the Bayfield Regional Conservancy approved a motion to serve as managers of this public-access easement should the opportunity arise.

2. Create one primitive campsite accessible by river users along the river between Maple Ridge Road crossing and the White River Flowage boat landing

   Current status: Yet to be determined.
Objective 4: Encourage ecological preservation/restoration in order to protect the scenic beauty and ecological health of the river corridor.

Current Situation:
Land along the “middle segment” of the White River corridor between Hwy 63 and Hwy 13 is almost entirely privately owned. By contrast, the upper and lower segments of the White River watershed comprise a patchwork of federal, state and tribal land, and as such enjoy a level of study, scrutiny and ecological protection not available to private land.

Ecological health and protection of this privately owned middle stretch of the watershed depends on county and township land-use plans, zoning ordinances, and the awareness and good will of private landowners. A concerted effort to protect and restore this middle segment of the White River could, in effect, provide the final piece to a patchwork of conservation that when viewed as a whole, would offer protection to the entire White River watershed.

Proposed actions:

1. Pursue an existing opportunity to purchase land and easements along the White River in the Town of Kelly, Bayfield County.

   Current status: Two White River landowners in the Town of Kelly have expressed interest in selling riverfront land and easements totaling 121 acres to an entity that would protect and preserve that land. The Friends of the White River currently is investigating funding sources to enable that purchase (See Maps 11 and 12).

   If a land sale proceeds, the ultimate owner of these 121 acres will be the Bayfield Regional Conservancy, Inc., a regional land trust based in Bayfield, Wis. that has agreed to hold title to and write conservation easements for the land. At its March 2004 meeting, the board of directors of the Bayfield Regional Conservancy approved a motion to serve as owners of this White River land parcel should the opportunity arise.

   A grant request made in May 2004 by BRC to the Wisconsin DNR currently under review would, if received, provide funding for BRC to purchase a 27-acre parcel (part of the 121 total acres). This parcel is labeled “f” on Map 12.

2. Work with public and private conservation organizations to educate White River watershed landowners about their options to put land into trust or to attach conservation easements to their land.

   Current status: The director and board of the Bayfield Regional Conservancy are aware of and support the activities of the Friends of the White River. The BRC director presented a program on conservation options through private land trusts.
to a group of White River landowners on January 29, 2004, and has maintained contact with the group.

3. Contact White River landowners willing to consider and discuss the sale or donation of land or conservation easements along the White River in the middle segment of the watershed.

4. As title or easements are purchased or donated in this stretch of the river corridor, encourage management of the protected land for low-impact, non-motorized public recreational value, and discourage or prohibit if possible the development of any high-impact or commercial enterprise.

5. Work to educate White River landowners about best management practices and county and federal conservation programs that provide funding for conservation and restoration practices.

Current status: Both Diane Daulton, director of the Ashland-Bayfield-Douglas-Iron Counties Land Conservation Department, and Gary Haughn, an ecologist from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, presented programs on cost-share conservation options available to private landowners to a group of White River landowners on January 29, 2004. Diane and Gary both serve on the Bad River Watershed Association’s technical advisory committee.