

The Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc.
(Sweet Water)
Interim Report on Activities
Funded by the Joyce Foundation
February 1, 2010

Background:

In 2008, the Joyce Foundation funded several environmental non-governmental organizations (NGO) to participate in the creation of the Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc. (Sweet Water) collaboration and the development of the watershed restoration plans for the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic Rivers. In April 2009, the Joyce Foundation awarded Sweet Water a \$1.9 million grant over three years to continue the NGOs' work with other Sweet Water partners to develop and implement the watershed restoration plans and for the administration of the collaboration. This project is leveraged by the extensive efforts of the other Sweet Water partners.

General objectives of the project:

The Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc.'s (Sweet Water) purpose is to achieve significant improvements in water quality, esthetics and habitat in the southeastern Wisconsin watersheds and move the region forward toward the primary goals of the Clean Water Act—fishable, swimmable waters. The Joyce Foundation is providing support to Sweet Water and key non-governmental organizations' (NGOs) to assist Sweet Water in achieving its overall goals. The collaboration activities focus on regional implementation of a variety of projects to reduce pollution and improve the overall water quality and water dependent natural resources of the region. Sweet Water was formed to be a regional collaboration consisting of non-governmental organizations, municipalities, business, industry, state and local government agencies, academia and community groups to address and implement both the point and non-point source pollution reduction recommendations that are a part of an integrated water resources management strategy for the long-term improvement and stewardship of the Greater Milwaukee Watersheds and Lake Michigan.

As part of this grant, the NGOs are performing the following activities to further the objectives of Sweet Water:

1. Monitoring, Modeling and Science Work
2. Participate in the Development and Implementation of the Watershed Restoration Plans
3. Legal and Policy Analysis for Implementation of the Watershed Restoration Plans.
4. Developing an Outreach and Communications Strategy
5. Sweet Water Administration and Committee Support

Project progress to date:

The Sweet Water NGO partners, funded by the Joyce Foundation, have been instrumental in the development of the watershed restoration plans (WRPs). The NGOs' work ensured that sound science and policy were incorporated into the WRPs and facilitated public input in the process. The draft plans are being completed and will be presented to the Watershed Action Teams (WAT) in February. The NGOs will take a leadership role in working with the WATs to develop the implementation plans for the WRPs and to begin implementing the projects.

Activity 1: Monitoring, Modeling and Science Work

1. A. Citizen Monitoring

Participating organizations: River Alliance of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Riverkeeper

- Work towards developing a long-term water monitoring strategy and plan for the Greater Milwaukee Watershed is ongoing. River Alliance of Wisconsin is doing research on monitoring efficiencies, needs, and gaps and will present preliminary findings, as well as the challenges and opportunities to developing a comprehensive monitoring system for the entire Watershed, to the Science Committee for review in the first quarter of 2010. One key challenge is the disparity between available data inside the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) service area, and outside the service area, where there is currently little or no data being collected. To develop additional watershed restoration plans for areas outside the District, significant effort and financing is necessary for the data collection.
- Citizen-collected data were used by agency staff to inform the development of the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River Watershed Restoration Plans (WRPs).
- Recommendations to expand citizen monitoring have been incorporated into the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River Watershed Restoration Plans. Specifically, the planning process has engaged citizens as key participants to help fill data gaps, monitor the implementation of actions recommended in each plan, and monitor the effectiveness of implementation actions over time.
- Citizen monitors are invited to and have participated on the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River Watershed Action Teams.
- Milwaukee Riverkeeper, with assistance from River Alliance of Wisconsin, will coordinate recruitment and trainings of new volunteer stream monitors this spring. Currently, there are 15 citizen monitors gathering data at 22 locations in the Menomonee River Watershed and three monitors testing in the Kinnickinnic River Watershed, a significant increase from past years. Over 85 citizens currently monitor in the Greater Milwaukee Watersheds.
- Data acquired by the citizens, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) consultants and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) were used to inform the WRPs and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on their proposed 2010 impaired waters

list for the State of Wisconsin. Many waterways in the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River Watersheds were proposed by DNR for listing for violating bacteria standards.

1. B. Modeling and Science Work

Participating organizations: Milwaukee Riverkeeper, Clean Wisconsin, River Alliance of Wisconsin

- In their roles on the Sweet Water Science Committee and the Watershed Action Teams (WAT) for both the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River watersheds, Milwaukee Riverkeeper and Clean Wisconsin helped ensure that modeling and data analysis helped guide the creation of Watershed Restoration Plans. New data were added to the runs of the watershed models used for this effort that had not been incorporated previously in the regional water quality planning effort that preceded Sweet Water. The Watershed Restoration Plans to be delivered in February will represent a scientifically-sound assessment of water quality problems in the watersheds.
- The NGOs have been active participants on the Science Committee and its modeling subcommittee. Clean Wisconsin serves as Vice-Chair of the Science Committee.
 - The River Alliance of Wisconsin advanced through the Science Committee the need to increase monitoring outside of MMSD's service area in the Milwaukee and Root River Watersheds as a first step to developing a baseline of information for use in developing additional Watershed Restoration Plans. On a companion track, MMSD, with Sweet Water partners, is considering developing Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) throughout the basin--opportunities for increased monitoring would most likely also present themselves in such a project.
 - The NGOs also proposed the efficiency measure of fusing the watershed restoration planning effort for the Lower Milwaukee River with the delisting effort of the Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern Remedial Action Plan.
- Milwaukee Riverkeeper, Clean Wisconsin and Sixteenth Street Community Health Center have worked to coordinate communication between the Science Committee and the Watershed Action Teams and will continue to do so through the implementation phase of the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River WRPs. Specifically,
 - The Science Committee reviewed draft versions of the WRPs for the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic Rivers and gave feedback to the consultants writing the plans.
 - Major emphasis was put on bacterial monitoring, creating a data baseline for bacteria in-stream and during a variety of flow conditions. This baseline will be important to measure effectiveness of implementation efforts aimed at this key human health parameter.

- The Science Committee also created a Habitat Subcommittee to analyze existing in-stream and riparian habitat information for incorporation into the WRPs. This information was reviewed by the Science Committee and Watershed Action Teams and incorporated into the plans, reflecting a significant early success for the NGOs in expanding the scope of these plans to include these additional aspects of overall watershed health that were not considered to the same degree in the regional water quality management plan.
- Milwaukee Riverkeeper has continued its work with the UW-Milwaukee Great Lakes Water Institute to better understand and work toward resolving human bacteria/pathogen sources entering the Menomonee River Watershed, both with dry and wet weather flows. Data is being collected in order to confirm illicit discharges. Wet weather sampling was difficult in 2009 due to dry weather most of the summer and early fall.
 - Milwaukee Riverkeeper began testing dry weather discharges in the Kinnickinnic River Watershed (between 6th and 27th Streets), as well as in the Holmes Avenue Creek Watershed, which has the highest bacterial loading per acre, with a significant load of “unknown” bacteria sources.
 - Sweet Water is putting together a proposal to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative for funding to continue and expand bacteria monitoring at stormwater outfalls. The expansion of this work will be a collaborative effort between Milwaukee Riverkeeper, UW-Milwaukee Great Lakes Water Institute, the City of Milwaukee, City of Wauwatosa, and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

Activity 2. Participate in the Development and Implementation of Watershed Restoration Plans

Participating organizations: Milwaukee Riverkeeper, Clean Wisconsin, River Alliance of Wisconsin, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, River Revitalization Foundation, Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, American Rivers

- The NGOs have worked with Sweet Water partners in successfully facilitating the completion of Draft Watershed Restoration Plans and have ensured Watershed Action Team participants’ comments and suggested modifications were addressed by MMSD and its consultants. Final versions of the WRPs are due to be delivered to MMSD and Sweet Water by the end of February 2010.
 - The NGOs have begun to make preparations for taking on the responsibility of WRP refinement and implementation. NGOs have developed a framework to guide a recruitment strategy that will serve to strengthen WAT membership and provide the technical capacity to lead the refinement and implementation of the WRPs.
- The NGOs, in collaboration with other Sweet Water partners, have identified early-out projects and have already approached, or plan to approach, several funding sources for these projects, including opportunities provided by the

Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, Sustain our Great Lakes, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), National Fish and Wildlife Federation, and more.

- The NGOs continue to facilitate coordination between Watershed Action Team members, the Science and Policy Committees, and MMSD's staff and consulting team. Milwaukee Riverkeeper and Sixteenth Street Community Health Center serve as co-chairs of the Watershed Action Teams for Menomonee River and the Kinnickinnic River, respectively. Clean Wisconsin is a member of both Watershed Action Teams, participates on the Policy Committee and serves as Vice-Chair of the Science Committee.
- The NGOs convene, provide leadership and participate on the Watershed Action Teams.
 - Watershed Action Team meetings were held for each watershed in the fall of 2009 to discuss progress of the draft Watershed Restoration Plan chapters and to elicit feedback from members.
 - Attendance at the meetings of the Menomonee River Watershed Action Team in particular increased significantly through the end of 2009, reaching more than 30 people at the last two meetings of the year.
 - The Watershed Action Teams were given presentations on habitat information collected by the Science Committee's habitat subcommittee, and were able to make comments. Many Watershed Action Team members requested additional work on biodiversity planning for the watershed to go beyond in-stream habitat. This will lead to more detailed implementation planning.
 - The Watershed Action Teams reviewed draft Watershed Restoration Plan chapters and provided Watershed Action Team co-chairs with comments, which were collated and submitted for consideration by the consultants in January.
 - Several NGOs joined the Watershed Action Team co-chairs in a concerted effort to recruit more key stakeholders and necessary partners to the watershed restoration planning process. This effort will continue in 2010 and is of particular relevance and importance as the process shifts to the implementation phase.
 - The next Watershed Action Team meetings, planned for February 2010, will focus on the transition of responsibilities related to Watershed Restoration Plan development from MMSD and its consultants to Sweet Water and its Watershed Action Teams.
- The NGO leaders of both the Science Committee and Policy Committee convened meetings of both groups in the fall of 2009 to give each group an opportunity to learn about the contents of the two draft Watershed Restoration Plans and to make substantive comments to the consultants writing the plans.
- The Menomonee River Land Protection Plan recommendations have been incorporated into the Menomonee River Watershed Restoration Plan.
 - River Revitalization Foundation:

- Is in the process of developing a project plan and securing grant funding to conduct work in 15 areas identified for habitat and riparian buffer restoration.
 - Has initiated partnerships with the City of Wauwatosa and Milwaukee County Parks to assist in restoration efforts on publicly owned riparian lands.
 - Have undertaken efforts to outreach to landowners of priority parcels within the upper reaches of the Menomonee River watershed in Milwaukee County on land management practices and opportunities for conservation. Achieving commitments from the landowners, however, is proving to be difficult.
 - Has pursued a partnership opportunity with Marquette University's service learning programs to support and promote restoration work in the Milwaukee and Menomonee Watersheds.
 - Has analyzed priority parcels identified in the plan, for restoration needs and addressed project feasibility in cooperation with landowners and municipalities.
 - Has explored the feasibility of expanded trail linkages along the lower reaches of the Menomonee River, in relation to the Milwaukee County Trails Network Plan and the City of Wauwatosa's Comprehensive Plan.
- The work of the NGO team and other Sweet Water partners in 2010 will focus primarily on the implementation of the Watershed Restoration Plans. That will entail facilitating Watershed Action Team engagement; coordination with the Sweet Water Science Committee, Policy Committee, Steering Council (formerly the Executive Steering Council), and Executive Director; outreach to partners (including municipalities and others); and the creation of a strategy to attract financial and institutional resources necessary to implement the Watershed Restoration Plans.

Activity 3: Legal and Policy Analysis for Implementation of the Watershed Restoration Plans

Participating organizations: MEA, Sixteenth Street Community Health Center and Clean Wisconsin

- Over the past year, the Sweet Water Policy Committee has been exploring potential policy and legal approaches for effectively implementing the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River watershed restoration plans.
 - The NGOs chair the Policy Committee and a work group on water quality trading and are also helping to lead the efforts on watershed-based permitting. They have convened meetings of leading experts on both water quality trading and watershed-based permitting over the past year. They have developed documents and reports summarizing their work over this period of time

- The Policy Committee's work group on water quality trading is attempting to achieve a consensus document that would include recommendations to the Steering Council on how and to what extent trading could be considered as a tool to help accomplish Sweet Water's watershed restoration objectives and what approach(es) might be required to enable trading in appropriate watersheds or sub-watersheds. This will be forwarded to the Joyce Foundation when complete.
- The Policy Committee, working with an MMSD consultant who is a national expert on watershed permitting, has provided comments on a draft document (white paper) outlining the various approaches by which watershed-based permitting may be undertaken in implementing restoration plans (**see attached White Paper/Analysis for Watershed-Based Permitting Primer**).
- The NGOs and members of the Policy Committee have met with the Wisconsin DNR on the Department's efforts in developing internal guidance on water quality trading and permitting. The DNR staff has welcomed the input of Sweet Water's detailed analysis and comments on these subjects and expects to have its guidance or white papers completed during 2010.
- With the delay in the development of the watershed restoration plans, it is now expected that the Policy Committee will review the restoration plan documents for the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River watersheds for further determinations on which legal tools will be needed for implementation.
- One major new development with respect to potential policy and legal analysis that may have to be undertaken by the Policy Committee is the decision made at the end of 2009 to move forward on the development of third-party TMDLs one or more of the priority watersheds in Southeastern Wisconsin. It is anticipated that the Policy Committee will need to coordinate and connect the various work products involving TMDLs, watershed-based permitting, and possible water quality trading to ensure that the watershed restoration plans and the impaired waters listing are being effectively addressed and implemented.
- The Policy Committee will provide its recommendations on these issues to the Steering Council, Watershed Action Teams and the DNR's regional and headquarters staff by April 2010 and on an as needed basis in the second year of the grant.
- Additionally, the Policy Committee, in cooperation with the Science Committee members, convened a meeting in late-summer 2009 of the MMSD, SEWRPC and DNR in response to DNR's request for data to inform its amendments to the 303(d) list of impaired waters for the EPA. This meeting resulted in significant amounts of data that had been gathered over several years by MMSD, SEWRPC and US Geological Survey (USGS) being shared with DNR and led to amendments to the impaired waters list.
 - The NGOs have also followed up with more detailed comments on the listing (submitted January 15, 2010), and it is anticipated that additional adjustments to the 303(d) list will be made prior to its submission to the EPA early in 2010.
 - The NGOs and the Policy Committee will provide a report to the Steering Council at its April meeting on the status of the DNR/EPA 303(d) list and potential implications for the work being undertaken as part of the watershed restoration plans.

Activity 4: Developing an Outreach and Communications Strategy

Sweet Water Outreach and Communication

- The Steering Council approved the formation of a standing Communications Committee and selected members. A wider group, the Communications Advisory Team, comprised of professionals with expertise in communications, was also recruited to assist on an ad hoc basis.
- The draft Communications Plan, with priority actions identified, is completed (**see attached draft Plan**). The Plan will be submitted to the Steering Council for review and approval at its meeting on February 10th.

Municipal Stormwater Education/Outreach Program

- 1000 Friends now serves as the coordinator and facilitator for Menomonee River Group (MRG), a group of municipalities coordinating efforts on stormwater outreach in the watershed, and is helping to advance the consortium's goals.
 - In that role, 1000 Friends reviewed municipal stormwater education/outreach plans and worked with municipalities to identify and prioritize program components for future development. These include a speakers' bureau, on-line best management practice project photo site, educational materials for elected/appointed officials, and a pharmaceutical collection program.
- 1000 Friends has also:
 - Conducted a survey of MRG members which provided feedback on the program and confirmed the value of having 1000 Friends facilitate and coordinate the group. Results at: www.surveymonkey.com. The login is kjmorgan; password, Cars0n.
 - Developed and submitted proposal to Wisconsin Coastal Management Program for survey of public knowledge and opinions regarding water resources. The proposal has been recommended for funding.
 - Coordinated with other municipal consortiums to foster communication and sharing of information and materials.
- 1000 Friends' work with the MRG is being used as a resource for other consortiums for stormwater education in the region.

Communicate Health of and Progress of Restoration Efforts in the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic Rivers

- Building awareness of, support for and engagement in Sweet Water initiatives and projects has been identified in the draft communication plan as a key objective. Prioritized actions have also been identified.
- An ad hoc working group has begun research to develop a report card as an initial communication tool in support of this objective.

Activity 5: Sweet Water Administration and Committee Support.

- In December 2009, the Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc. (Sweet Water) was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in Wisconsin. The organization is now preparing documents to file for a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS.
- Jeff Martinka, the recently hired executive director, will work closely with the Steering Council to oversee the coordination of the Sweet Water committees and working groups and ensure that the work of the NGO stakeholders is fully integrated into the work of Sweet Water.
- As chair of the Policy Committee, Sixteenth Street Community Health Center's Peter McAvoy leads discussions on a variety of legal and policy issues associated with implementing the watershed restoration plans. He also serves as the NGOs' representative on the Steering Council. McAvoy's time and efforts in these capacities are supported by the Brico Fund as a match to the Joyce Foundation. The Brico Fund also funds administrative support for Sweet Water Steering Council, Policy Committee and NGOs.
- Sweet Water has developed an internal communication structure to keep all the partners informed and to integrate the NGO project with the collaboration's work. The NGOs provide regular updates on their project work through their participation on all the Sweet Water committees, presentations to the Steering Council and formal reports to the Grant Review Board. There are monthly meetings of Sweet Water's committee chairs and Watershed Action Team Co-chairs to facilitate coordination among the various operations of the collaboration.
- Nancy Frank, Interim Chair of Sweet Water, Kevin Shafer, Acting Vice Chair, Peter McAvoy, Policy Committee Chair and Jeff Martinka, Executive Director, meet every two weeks, and more frequently as needed, to coordinate activities between the Sweet Water Committees, NGOs' projects, and MMSD.
- Sweet Water has identified three projects for which it will take the lead in working with partners to develop and seek funding through the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). In addition, Sweet Water provided supporting materials or letters of support to nearly 20 other GLRI projects, significant to the southeastern Wisconsin watersheds.

Major Successes

- Watershed Restoration Plans for both the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic Rivers will be delivered from the MMSD-funded consultant team to Sweet Water and the Joyce Foundation-funded NGO team for implementation.
 - These plans reflect significant input and direction from key Sweet Water partners, the Watershed Action Teams, and the Science and Policy Committees.
 - The NGOs' work through the Watershed Action Teams and the Science Committee helped facilitate a broader look at watershed health and

restoration in the Watershed Restoration Plans, including the substantial focus on habitat and aesthetics.

- The watershed restoration plans are built on sound science, driven by new / updated modeling and data analysis reflecting a refinement of the regional water quality management planning efforts that preceded the creation of Sweet Water.
- Sweet Water's Policy Committee is providing important coordination and leadership in the analysis and development of legal tools for implementing the watershed restoration plans including the potential use of watershed-based permitting and water quality trading.
- Increased citizen monitoring in the Greater Milwaukee watersheds, and the acceptance of using trained citizens as collectors of valued data. Long-term monitoring considerations have been incorporated into the Watershed Restoration Plans for the Menomonee and Kinnickinnic River watersheds.
- The human health issues surrounding bacteria in surface waters have been elevated to a high-level priority, and interest in collaborative efforts to address this issue continues to emerge.
- The NGOs, in collaboration with other Sweet Water partners, are working together to develop grant applications to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) for funding for "early-out" implementation projects for the watershed restoration plans. This is a huge collaboration effort and since the individual organizations and partners have limited resources to devote to this, Sweet Water has contracted with a grant writer to assist in developing these grants. In addition, MMSD has also provided assistance in developing grants.
- The work of Sweet Water and the Joyce Foundation funded NGO partners continues to act as a bridge between ongoing projects and programs with similar purposes. Examples include efforts to implement the Menomonee River Land Protection Plan, work with the Menomonee River Group on stormwater outreach, and the coordination between Sweet Water's policy analysis efforts and parallel efforts by MMSD, DNR, and other key stakeholders.
- Sweet Water has hired an executive director, generated a draft communications plan, and built a capacity for coordination of myriad organizations and activities, all of which bode well for future collaboration and shared successes.

Lessons Learned and Challenges:

- With the expansion of Sweet Water's organization and scope of work, the need for coordination and effective communication has grown significantly. The NGOs play a critical role in ensuring there is good communication among the Sweet Water committees. The NGOs have a representative on the Steering Council and one or more representatives on each of the Sweet Water Committees, working groups and Watershed Action Teams (WAT). In several cases, a person from one of the NGOs is leading the committee or working group and the NGOs co-chair the WATs. The NGOs attend all the committee meetings and are therefore in a position to share important information between the committees.

- One of the earlier challenges for Sweet Water was the fact that the watershed restoration plans were being developed at the same time that Sweet Water was trying to develop its structure as an organization. The NGOs and other stakeholders did not have a clear framework for participating in the process as early decisions were being made. Sweet Water has addressed this and coordinates efforts through monthly Committee Chairs meetings. Stakeholders have a clearer idea how and when they can be involved in decision-making. Sweet Water has also formed a Communications Committee to not only develop a communications strategy and plan to raise awareness of Sweet Water's work with the public, but to also develop an internal communication framework for the stakeholders and different parts of the collaboration.
- The commitment to having diverse stakeholders as part of this process and a commitment to general agreement on complex issues has proven to be time-intensive—obtaining the necessary input to reach consensus on some issues takes time. This effort represents a significant challenge but one well worth it in making the outcomes more effective and more likely to succeed. Working with broad, diverse stakeholders opens Sweet Water to more innovative solutions and creative approaches to improving water quality. Sweet Water offers a framework that allows the different parties to feel comfortable working together, and the leadership anticipates over time, as people become more familiar with each other and the issues, a trust relationship will continue to build and evolve.
- Another major challenge has been that the Watershed Restoration Plans (WRP) do not contain the level of specificity that was anticipated. Of particular concern is that there will be significant needs for technical (science and modeling) work through the implementation phase. Sweet Water and its NGO partners have and will continue to seek funding to further refine the WRPs to get to a level of detail where specific projects can be identified and prioritized for implementation. The NGO partners and the co-chairs of each Watershed Action Team will lead this effort. A grant was also submitted to Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to help with additional planning work that will be needed to further identify and prioritize projects at a smaller scale than that outlined in the Watershed Restoration Plans.