

Section II. Introduction



*Sunset over Halfmoon Lake and Portage
Creek, Pinckney State Recreation Area
credit: C. Riggs*

A. Watershed Management Plan Purpose

Since 2000, the State of Michigan has pursued the development of watershed management plans for Michigan rivers as the best approach for their protection and restoration in accordance with the federal Clean Water Act (1972). Watershed management plans are necessarily holistic, in that they assess the full range of stressors and opportunities, and cross-jurisdictional since a rain drop cares not about political abstractions like county lines. The State of Michigan supports watershed management planning at the local level through grant funding from the U.S. EPA and through technical support from its own staff. Funding for the development of the Portage Creek Watershed Management Plan was awarded and the planning phase was conducted over a 24-month period from 2008 to 2010.

The primary goal of the planning phase was to produce a U.S. EPA-approved watershed plan that becomes integrated into the future decisions of local governments, positions communities to be eligible for state and federal implementation funds in order to address the priority needs identified in the plan, and fosters stewardship of watershed resources at the local level. This effort arose from the recognition that a holistic, cross-jurisdictional approach is essential for the long-term health of this high quality watershed. The Portage Creek watershed, unlike other parts of the Huron River watershed, is *not* listed as impaired or threatened on the state's Integrated Report for 2010 and no Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) are scheduled for development.

The Portage Creek Watershed Management Plan assesses current conditions of freshwater resources, identifies current and future threats to those resources, sets goals for watershed management, and presents a robust strategy for implementation of management practices.

B. Watershed Advisory Group

The watershed advisory group for the Portage Creek Planning Project met quarterly over the course of the two-year planning phase to: receive updates from the HRWC facilitation staff; and provide information, resources, and feedback. Group members served as liaisons to their communities/agencies/ organizations/peers for this planning effort in order to increase local involvement and long-term participation.

Members of the group included representatives from local community partners, county partners, state and federal partners, residents at-large, and interest groups such as science, farming, and recreation. Participation was voluntary but encouraged to give the watershed plan a local focus and promote long-term local stewardship of the Portage Creek area. The project partners, with varying levels of engagement, were:

Village of Stockbridge	Washtenaw County
Dexter Township	Washtenaw County Conservation District
Lyndon Township	Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment
Putnam Township	U.S. Department of Agriculture NRCS
Stockbridge Township	Livingston Land Conservancy
Unadilla Township	Michigan Mountain Biking Association
Waterloo Township	The Nature Conservancy
Ingham County	Legacy Land Conservancy (formerly Washtenaw Land Trust)
Jackson County	
Livingston County	
Livingston County Conservation District	

C. Public Participation

The watershed management team had several desired outcomes for public involvement during the planning phase:

- To reach the broadest range of vested stakeholders;
- To propose a meeting and venue schedule;
- To link the stakeholders to web-based data for their review and comment; and
- To develop a database from the stakeholders for potential participation in implementation strategies on activities identified in the plan.

The strategy included:

- 1) Identification of Stakeholder groups and/or individuals, and property owners
- 2) Compilation of a spreadsheet of Stakeholders
- 3) Formation of a Steering Committee
- 4) Sponsoring the kick-off public meeting and mid-project public meeting
- 5) Setup the e-mail information network

6) Develop the outreach strategy

During the planning phase, the watershed management team solicited residents' concerns, interests and queries concerning the condition and future of the Portage Creek watershed. To that end, residents were invited to participate in two public information meetings. The first meeting was held in March 2008 in Gregory, Michigan as an introduction of the watershed planning process. The second meeting was held in January 2009 in Dexter Township, Michigan to provide a mid-project update on the findings about the health of the Portage Creek watershed and priorities for protecting this special area. Both meetings were well-attended and produced lively discussions and useful information.

Members of the public participated in the data gathering phase of the watershed planning process. Both the stream flow study and the Unified Stream Assessment protocol, which is the rapid stream corridor inventory, required the assistance of trained volunteers. Some of these people expanded their participation by advocating for protection of the creek and lakes to their local elected officials.

Targeted trainings were developed for residents of the watershed based on their interests in lake and stream monitoring techniques. Several dozen people participated in the lake monitoring training on Portage Lake and the stream monitoring training on Portage Creek in July 2009. Many of the trainees expressed interest in "adopting" the lake or creek near them to chart the health of the resource; they were encouraged to join the state volunteer monitoring programs such as MiCorps, and local programs such as Adopt-A-Stream.

The team employed several techniques for communicating with residents interested in the watershed planning process. The project website hosted by HRWC provided an internet-based sign-up to receive project updates; a few dozen people utilized this option. Direct mail pieces were sent to all residents in the Portage Creek watershed to announce the public meetings. Advertisements in local print media supported the direct mailings. In addition, project facilitation staff from HRWC provided updates on the planning phase to local communities at regular meetings of the trustees and planning commissions.