

RIVER ALLIANCE OF WISCONSIN

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2001 – 2004

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INTRODUCTION

This three-year strategic plan is the foundation of the planning that will take the River Alliance of Wisconsin through its first decade of existence. The organization has grown to be one of the largest statewide river protection groups in the country in part because of a strong commitment to planning. When the group was formed, the Board and first executive director adopted a development plan that emphasized slow steady growth and a conscious decision to focus the limited resources of the organization on carefully targeted and key river protection programs.

By the end of 1998, the organization had a stable and growing member base and budget. The alliance was widely recognized, both regionally and nationally, for its work advocating for the selective removal of old, uneconomical dams and for its work on hydropower relicensing cases in the state. In addition, the River Alliance was building its capacity to serve as a technical and educational resource to the dozens of local river and watershed groups across Wisconsin.

Today, the organization has six staff, 1500 members and a strong commitment to do even more to protect and restore the flowing waters of our state. This strategic planning effort began in the early part of the new century when staff, the board and key volunteers gathered for two days to begin to map out a vision for the next three years. Over the intervening months much thought, discussion and debate has gone into the document you see before you. The plan provides a roadmap for the next three years but is also flexible enough to recognize that new information and opportunities may create “construction detours” that require us to adjust the roadmap.

MISSION

The River Alliance of Wisconsin is a non-profit, non-partisan group of citizens, organizations, and businesses dedicated to advocating for the protection, enhancement and restoration of our rivers and watersheds.

OVERALL VISION

Clean, healthy and sustainable rivers, creeks, streams and watersheds throughout the state.

Specific Goals

The board and staff identified the goals of the organization, following an extensive strategic planning process. We have looked at what we want to achieve, the tools we will

use and the spirit in which we will use those tools. We believe that we must “be what we want to see”, hence our emphasis on creating a healthy and sustainable organization.

We seek to:

- ❖ Assist, maintain and build an issue-focused network of local groups dedicated to the protection and restoration of their “home waters”
- ❖ Galvanize Wisconsin’s citizens to work together to sustain our heritage of healthy rivers, creeks and watersheds
- ❖ Serve as the lead voice for our rivers in the legislature
- ❖ Sustain an organization that reflects the values that we espouse
- ❖ Act as a partner, when appropriate, and a watchdog, when necessary, for governmental agencies entrusted with the protection of our natural resources
- ❖ Employ sound science and the best available information to guide our river protection, enhancement and restoration efforts

ORGANIZATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The River Alliance of Wisconsin has developed a philosophy for river protection that is based on years of work and the collective wisdom and expertise of the organization’s board, staff and members. All of our programmatic efforts are grounded in our dedication to education, research, and advocacy.

Our philosophy is based on the belief that local activism, combined with statewide vigilance, is the key to river protection. We focus on assisting the citizens of the state to take action to protect and defend their natural riverine heritage. We also believe that providing citizens with reliable and credible information, on issues of direct relevance to their deeply held values and beliefs, will empower them to take direct action.

Consistent with this belief in the power of the individual, we also embrace the notion that the elected representative and governmental employees of the people must be held accountable for their decisions and actions.

As the only statewide group speaking for the rivers of Wisconsin, the board and staff believe that it is important to form partnerships with other nonprofits, businesses and governmental agencies when the goals identified for a project are mutually beneficial. At the same time, the organization is ready to advocate for the best interests of the rivers and streams of the state, even when key policy and decision makers hold a different view.

Some of the key guideposts for this philosophy include:

- To be an assertive but respectful advocate for the rivers and streams of the state.
- To employ sound science and the best available information to guide the organization's river protection and restoration efforts.
- To involve the organization in issues of local concern only when those issues have statewide significance.
- To maintain credibility with the public as a respected voice for Wisconsin's rivers, even among those with whom the organization disagrees.
- To take action based on program priorities and strategic planning, so as to maximize resources and maintain organizational focus.

Finding this balance for our rivers requires education, research, leadership, training and advocacy. Each tool is an essential ingredient if we are to protect, enhance and restore rivers – our ribbons of life – in this new millennium.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The River Alliance of Wisconsin has grown into one of the largest statewide river protection organizations in the country – all in seven short years. Begun in 1993 by a small group of dedicated volunteer activists, the group now has five staff, fifteen board members, a program that includes five major issue areas, and is supported by a membership of over 1,500 people... Etc.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The program of the River Alliance of Wisconsin has been developed in direct response to our philosophy and goals - we seek to create opportunities for the citizens of Wisconsin to directly affect the health and well being of our rivers and waterways. Our program has been designed to meet our goals and is focused on five primary areas: local group assistance, watershed-based education initiatives, river restoration through small dam removal, controlling polluted runoff, and hydropower relicensing.

LOCAL RIVER GROUP ASSISTANCE

The Local Group Assistance Project is aimed at empowering and fostering the effectiveness of river and watershed groups around the state. Through a combination of one-on-one assistance, workshops, conferences/annual meetings, and other forms of

outreach, the Alliance will directly affect the capacity and capabilities of existing and newly formed groups to affect their local resources and participate in statewide initiatives.

WATERSHED-BASED EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Using the watershed as a measurement of neighborhood and “home place” this set of projects seeks to foster scientific research, support community-based efforts at demonstrating good management principles, create a useable set of messages to build public support, promote a headwaters to mouth clean-up of the Wisconsin River to generate awareness of and support for a clean and healthy river system in the state, and create a watershed toolkit of materials for local advocates to use to help build their capacity and programs.

RIVER RESTORATION THROUGH SMALL DAM REMOVAL

This already highly successful program will diversify its projects to include: evaluation of the feasibility of purchasing ‘dollar dams’ with the specific intent of removal, sponsoring training events for citizens, groups and agencies, undertaking actions in support of stronger 303d list development, researching sediment management relating to planned dam removal, and the development of site-specific dam removal projects.

CONTROLLING POLLUTED RUNOFF AND WATER WITHDRAWALS

The focus of the polluted runoff program is on the initiation of hands-on demonstration projects (both agricultural and urban). In addition, the organization is pursuing new strong statewide rules to control polluted runoff as part of a comprehensive effort currently underway to rewrite all of the nonpoint regulations in Wisconsin.

Excessive water withdrawals, especially those involving groundwater resources are increasing and posing surface water quantity problems in Wisconsin. The River Alliance is analyzing existing regulations in order to make a set of recommendations to improve the protection of groundwater that is a vital supply line to surface water flows and water quality.

HYDROPOWER RELICENSING

The hydropower project will continue to focus on specific relicensing projects, monitoring and affecting settlement agreements and pursuing measures and policies to ensure safe fish passage.

FAMILY OF PROJECTS

AN OVERVIEW

Each of our primary program areas includes a variety of projects that, in the aggregate, will meet the identified goals for the program.

In turn, each project has a specific set of goals and objectives, as well as a work plan. The project work plans include specific work tasks, an identification of staffing needs, a budget and an individualized fundraising plan. Importantly, each of our projects also includes a set of measurable outcomes and an evaluation process, to ensure that our project strategies are effective. Our family of projects is outlined below.

Family of Projects

Local River Group Assistance

The projects within the Local Group Assistance Program are:

- Local River Group Support
- Grassroots Leadership Project
- Grassroots Workshop Series
- Annual River Groups Conference
- Group Formation Initiative
- Message Development Initiative
- Watershed Activists Tool Kit

Watershed-Based Education Initiative

The projects within the Watershed-based Education Initiative are:

- River Ecology, Education and Research
- Wisconsin River Clean-up
- Riparian Land Use Collaborative

River Restoration Through Small Dam Removal

The projects within the Small Dams Program are:

- Local Dam Removal Project
- 'Dollar Dam' Initiative
- Dam Removal Demonstration Project
- Training Events: Citizen Workshops, Technical Conference
- Impaired Waters 303(d) List Revision
- Sediment Management Research Project

Polluted Runoff/Water Withdrawals

The projects within the Polluted Runoff Program are:

- Agricultural Demonstration Project
- Urban Demonstration Project
- Polluted Runoff Rules Redesign
- Groundwater Withdrawals Project

Hydropower Relicensing

The projects within the Hydropower Relicensing Program area:

- Settlement Implementation
- Relicensing Cases
- State Policy Initiatives
- Hydropower Education

Implementation Schedule

In order to ensure that each of the programs, projects and initiatives is launched or sustained in a systematic and effective way, The Alliance has developed an implementation strategy for each program. The strategy is geared towards ensuring that the resources of the organization are not spread too thinly, that the staff has a manageable workload, and that the objectives of the program can be met in a successful manner.

LOCAL RIVER GROUP ASSISTANCE INTRODUCTION

A key component of our mission and a central tenant of our organizational philosophy is the importance of local action and empowerment. Experience has shown that, given the right tools and support, local action can result in direct and dramatic changes in the ways that individual watersheds and waterways are managed and improved. The impetus for restoration, protection and enhancement is, generally, most effective when experienced on a local level.

The programs within the Local River Group Assistance Program are all aimed at building capacity increasing leadership abilities, providing forums for networking and information transfer, and/or assisting in the formation of new groups.

LOCAL RIVER GROUP SUPPORT

Goal: To assist local grassroots river and watershed groups to reach their full potential as forces for building community around river protection, enhancement and restoration activities.

Objective: To provide direct assistance to three to five local groups each year.

Tasks: Provide organizational development assistance to strengthen individual groups – training and direct consulting on such issues as board development, fund raising, membership development, community outreach, message development and developing strategic campaigns to advance their issue work.

Provide a Needs Assessment Process for local groups to enable RAW to target assistance to actual group needs.

Provide assistance through a variety of vehicles including: electronic (i.e. the web site, e-mail, a “chat room”, a bulletin board and monthly “How To” pieces); telephone (individual consulting); one-on-one assistance (i.e. meetings, creation of individualized work plans, etc); and, on-site group work sessions aimed at educating and assisting groups about specific issues, skills, or topics.

Create an informational brochure, to be distributed throughout the state that describes the Local Group Support Program and informs individuals and groups of the various types of support offered by the River Alliance. This brochure could be distributed via civic organizations, county fairs, conferences, existing environmental groups such as Sierra Club and Audubon Society, professional organizations and associations, recreational suppliers, and other similar methods.

Outcomes: A program that provides direct assistance to new and long-time river and watershed activists and groups.

Creation of a database of educational materials that would be available to groups and individuals, including LGA brochure

Direct assistance to 3-5 existing groups per year

Production of a Needs Assessment Form and process

Follow-up monitoring to assist groups with implementation

Timeline: January, 2001 – December, 2003

GRASSROOTS WORKSHOPS

- Goal:** Effective grassroots groups with better trained and more informed boards, staff and members.
- Objective:** To provide direct assistance to activists throughout the state by holding two workshops a year. The goal of the individual workshops will be to provide a diverse, but strategically designed, offering of seminars and workshops to enhance grassroots skills in the basics of issue work, organizational development and management, and group dynamics.
- Tasks:** Conduct a survey of local groups to assess priority needs and match those needs to training efforts
- Identify sites, develop budgets and plan agendas for workshops
- Hold two workshops each year. Topics will depend on input from local river group leaders.
- Outcomes:** River activists that are better trained in ways to build the capacity of their organizations and in carrying out program work.
- A training program that becomes a model of local group training nationally.
- A well-developed process of evaluation and post event feedback to ensure that lessons of earlier workshops are incorporated into later events.
- Timeline:** January, 2001 – December, 2003

WATERSHED-BASED EDUCATION INITIATIVE INTRODUCTION

A recent poll found that only 41% of Americans have a working knowledge of what is meant by the term watershed. The watershed initiative is a suite of educational projects designed to increase that knowledge base. This program area includes several public education projects and research efforts that focus on the importance of riverine ecosystems and their relationship to watershed health.

Each of these projects is designed to provide important educational information to both the general public and local river and watershed groups. In some cases, a project fulfills a public education role. In other instances important educational research information will be developed and used in individual watersheds. In every instance the program is being developed to give local river and watershed advocates more tools as they work to protect and restore their “home waters.”

RIVER ECOLOGY EDUCATION/RESEARCH PROJECT

Goal: A well-established program within the River Alliance that uses research to educate the public on the importance of river ecology and the watershed-based approach.

Objective: To develop river ecology educational tools and research results that increases the awareness of the role and function of rivers in our landscape.

Tasks: Conduct research on the role of rivers in land use decisions and how land use decisions impact the sustainability of rivers and watersheds.

Conduct research on the importance of buffers and other best management practices as methods to control polluted runoff.

Establish an advisory team process to help identify key research and educational topics for each year.

Develop a series of educational fact sheets on the importance of rivers and watersheds.

Develop educational campaign on how rivers and watersheds work, employing materials produced above.

Outcomes: One tangible research report produced each year on key river topics.

Five to ten news stories/interviews each year on the importance of rivers

and watersheds.

A menu of educational fact sheets on river/watershed topics.

Timeline: January, 2003 – December, 2003

ETC. ETC. ETC.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In order to build the board of directors in a strategic and purposeful way the RAW proposes the following Board Development Plan. This plan includes two important components – board recruitment and board training. Both of these components should be implemented to keep this, or any, organization strong and functional.

BOARD RECRUITMENT

Step 1 – Conduct a Needs Assessment

Using forms developed by the Institute for Conservation Leadership, a Board Needs Assessment process will be undertaken. The forms will be distributed to existing board members and staff, as well as selected allies of the organization. The results of the initial assessment will be collated and presented at a Board meeting.

Based on the results of the assessment and the discussion at the board meeting a preliminary set of selection criteria will be developed. The criteria will look at a variety of elements including:

- ❖ Geographic representation,
- ❖ Representation of diverse stakeholders (such as agriculture, health, and industry),
Access to individual and corporate financial resources,
- ❖ Program expertise,
- ❖ Management skills (i.e. public relations, fundraising, law, etc.) and other similar attributes,
- ❖ Personal attributes (i.e. gender, age, and ethnic background)

Step 2 – Develop Specific Recruitment Criteria

Based on the results of the Board meeting a small committee will meet to refine and revise the selection/nominating criteria and to develop a suggested strategy for recruiting the individuals with the desired skills and capabilities.

The criteria and recruitment strategy will be reviewed and approved at the next board meeting.

Step 3 – Implement the Overall Strategy

Using the criteria and the multiple contacts and connections of existing Board member and organizational allies, a formal recruitment campaign will be undertaken

Step 4 - Orient New Members

Create an orientation manual for new board members. The manual should provide new board members with a sufficient foundation of knowledge about the organization so that new directors are able to begin functioning effectively as soon as they join the board and finish the orientation process. The loose-leaf style manual will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary. This manual would include, at a minimum: mission statement and annual plan, by-laws and articles of incorporation, policies and procedures, job description, budget, board and staff responsibilities chart/table, committee structure, meeting and board minutes, and a copy of the current strategic plan.

Step 5 – Annual Update of the Needs Assessment

As the organization grows and evolves so will the needed skills and capabilities of board members. Additionally, as board members serve out their terms, new members will need to be recruited. The on-going need to replenish and expand the board means that an annual review of the needs assessment tool is required. Skills, which were essential at one stage of growth, may be less significant as the group changes and grows. Similarly, new skills that expand the overall capacity of the board may also be required. Whatever the case, the need to review the skill sets that are represented on the board should be a purposeful and regular part of an annual review exercise.

ONGOING BOARD TRAINING

As the needs of the organization change and the strategic plan is updated it will also be necessary to refresh the Board periodically with focused training exercises and, occasionally, retreats. The evolution of the organization and the personal development and skill building of the individual board members are directly related. The ability of board members to expand their capacities and competencies to respond to the needs of the organization can be greatly assisted by providing a structured training program. Whether the program consists of min-trainings at each meeting or a more intensive session twice annually, The Alliance is committed to the continual support and growth of its board members in fulfilling their key responsibilities. The critical responsibilities of a Board include:

- ❖ Determining Program and Budget
- ❖ Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Organization
- ❖ Give and Get Money for the Organization (Fundraising_)
- ❖ Choose, Support and Evaluate Lead Staff
- ❖ Conduct Public Relations
- ❖ Replace Itself