



# CRWP

Cannon River Watershed Partnership

## Strategic Plan 2009-2012

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#### ***Introduction***

The Cannon River Watershed includes an area of approximately 1460 square miles, nearly one million acres, of Southeastern Minnesota. The Cannon River drains to the Mississippi River, joining it near Red Wing, Minnesota. Geologically, it forms the transition between recently glaciated lands and the driftless area along the Mississippi River. Biologically, it is in the transition between the eastern forests and the tall grass prairies, and once hosted a patchwork of these communities. Socially, it lies between the Twin Cities metro area and rural southern Minnesota, with its northernmost county (Dakota) being one of the seven metropolitan counties and its southern boundary being one county north of the Iowa border. Major communities in the watershed include Owatonna, Northfield, Waseca, Faribault, and Red Wing.

The Cannon River watershed is a large area with diversity in landscape. The Straight River watershed in the south is relatively flat with the primary land use being row crop agriculture. The Upper Cannon watershed to the west is our “lake county”, with rolling hills, woods, and some row crops as well. The Middle Cannon is more urban with Faribault and Northfield, but also has some agriculture. The Lower Cannon, from Cannon Falls to Red Wing, has steep hillsides, woods, and the agriculture is more grazing in nature. This area is just on the edge of the Karst/Driftless area. The Cannon River is classified as a Wild and Scenic River from the north end of Faribault to Red Wing.

The Cannon River Watershed Partnership (CRWP) was formed in 1990 as a result of interest in the watershed by the Minnesota Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, several divisions of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and many local citizens. It was incorporated as a 501 c (3) non-profit organization to be led by a volunteer board of directors and paid staff. On the Board are representatives of the Board of Commissioners and Soil and Water Conservation Districts of the six counties (Dakota, Goodhue, LeSueur, Rice, Steele, and Waseca) through which the Cannon and Straight Rivers flow, as well as thirteen individuals representing the diverse citizenry of the watershed. In 2009 there are seven paid staff and several contractors that work on behalf of CRWP.

The waters of the Cannon River watershed are in poor condition. Many lakes and streams are on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s (MPCA) 303(d) Impaired Waters list. This list is generated every two years by the MPCA and identifies all the water bodies that have been tested and are not meeting state standards. Nuisance algal blooms and turbid water are common. Point source pollution (pollution that comes from a pipe) is monitored and controlled in the watershed

through various permits and diligence on behalf of permittees, the MPCA, and concerned citizens. We no longer see large cities discharging their sewage, or food processing plants dumping all of their waste to the river. A memo from the DNR in 1958 noted numerous point source problems that essentially made the Cannon unfit for most fish. Non-point source pollution is still a major challenge. This type of pollution comes from water running over land and picking up pollutants that it carries to rivers, streams, and lakes. Over the next three years, CRWP will be continuing to focus on non-point sources of water pollution.

As part of the strategic planning process, a committee of staff and Board members took a look at what is currently happening – what is our “current reality”? Topics included: economic, competitive, natural resource, social and cultural, legal and ethical, technological, and organization specific trends. After this, a group retreat took place that was attended by the staff and many of the Board of Directors. At the retreat, the group weighed in with ideas on our values, vision, mission, and goals.

This strategic plan was developed by the CRWP Board and staff to guide us from May 2009 through December 2012. We will evaluate our status on at least an annual basis and make changes as necessary.

**The values, vision, and mission of the Cannon River Watershed Partnership are:**

**Values**

Clean Water

We value clean water \* for drinking, wildlife, and for its economic and recreational uses.

*\*We define clean water to be water that meets the standards of the State of Minnesota for aquatic recreation, aquatic life and drinking water.*

Stewardship

We care for the watershed through public and private partnerships and citizen involvement.

Enjoyment

We value opportunities for all people to enjoy the water and natural areas of the watershed.

**Vision**

We envision a healthy watershed with clean water that is fishable, swimmable, and drinkable.

**Mission**

To engage people in protecting and improving the water quality and natural systems of the Cannon River watershed.

### ***Strategy 1: Provide core program services***

CRWP has worked in a variety of areas in the past including: providing education to citizens and elected officials, land conservation, lake and stream monitoring, stormwater monitoring, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Implementation Plan development, watershed studies, community facilitation, river cleanups, advocacy at the local and state level, and on a wide variety of citizen concerns. The work we have done has changed depending on the perceived needs, staff interest and abilities, and funding available. We have accomplished many things that have helped bring us close to achieving our vision. CRWP will now be working on developing a programmatic approach to our work to enable us to build on what we have done, develop what we do well, and establish where we can be the most effective. Should opportunities arise to work on projects that are outside these program areas they will be considered and evaluated based on the potential results and organizational capacity to carry them out. As it is difficult to know for sure what the needs will be in three years, we must retain an element of flexibility to our organization while still focusing on our mission and vision, as well as honing our skills and efforts. While we do not want to solely choose projects based on available funding, the potential for support within the context of our values is something that will have to be considered as we determine future activities.

**Goal 1:** Our *Conservation Partnership Program* will serve a facilitation, communication, and project development role in the watershed. Based on the water monitoring that has taken place over the past decade, we know that *E. coli* bacteria, sediment and nutrients are the primary pollutants of concern in our watershed. Our Conservation Partnership Program will work to reduce the input of these pollutants to our waters. We will focus on agriculture, rural water quality issues such as wastewater, shoreland land use, and urban stormwater issues.

The *Agriculture* projects will:

- Provide information and opportunities for improvements to agricultural producers so that they may have productive operations along with good water quality

The *Rural Water Quality* projects will:

- Assist small communities in improving their wastewater treatment systems and remove untreated wastewater discharge from waters of the state.

The *Shoreland Land Use* projects will:

- Provide information to elected officials, county and municipal staff, and individuals on shoreland regulations and practices that allow for good water quality.
- Assist them in finding ways to improve current practices, and
- Participate in zoning and rule changes when needed.

The *Stormwater* projects will:

- Work with municipalities to comply with their stormwater permits
- Provide information to residents on stormwater reduction on their properties.

**Tactic 1A:** We will play an active role in convening partners (such as SWCDs, municipalities, and state agencies) who are working on or are considering projects to improve water quality so that the work they do is as coordinated, efficient and effective as possible.

**Tactic 1B:** We will help partners develop and carry out projects to improve water quality building on work that has been done so far.

**Tactic 1C:** We will work with partners to provide a CRWP staff person or contractor that can assist lake associations develop lake management plans and carry out projects.

**Tactic 1D:** We partner with others to determine what training, assistance, or information they need to better do their jobs and assist them by providing or finding others who can provide these services.

**Tactic 1E:** We will continue excellent work on all existing contracts and projects.

**Timeline:** Ongoing through time period of plan for all tactics in Goal 1.

**Priority:** High – Tactics 1A, 1B, 1E. Medium – Tactics 1C and 1D.

**Capacity:** Current grants and contracts will allow us to carry out most of this work. Additional funds will be needed for Tactics 1C and 1 D. All staff will take part in this goal.

**Goal 2:** Our *Water Monitoring Program* will continue to work on the assessment and study of the water bodies in the watershed. Water monitoring should be used to determine problem areas, establish trends, and evaluate implementation project success. As the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is using the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) studies, required by the federal Clean Water Act, as their primary approach to assessment and improvement of surface water it is important that CRWP be involved in these studies.

**Tactic 2A:** We will develop a watershed monitoring plan to assess where CRWP can play the best role with respect to water sampling.

**Tactic 2B:** CRWP will seek funding for and implement activities in the water monitoring plan.

**Tactic 2C:** We will work with the Minnesota State University-Mankato Water Resources Center to develop a status and trends assessment of the watershed, as well as indicators that will be measured in the future to evaluate progress.

**Tactic 2D:** CRWP will continue to offer and expand upon our Citizen Monitoring Program as a means of increasing the amount of data that can be collected, as well as providing for education and engagement of citizens.

**Tactic 2E:** CRWP will assist the MPCA and stakeholders in development of TMDLs and Implementation Plans. Our role will focus on citizen participation, collection of field data as necessary, communicating information to the public, and working with stakeholders to develop implementation plans.

**Tactic 2F:** CRWP will participate in the development and review of county water plans, as requested, by the counties in our watershed.

**Tactic 2G:** Develop a periodic report discussing the State of the Cannon River Watershed, progress towards goals, and work that is still needed.

**Tactic 2H:** We will continue excellent work on all existing monitoring contracts and grant projects.

**Timeline:** Ongoing through period of plan with the following exceptions: Tactic 2A to be completed by May 2010 and Tactic 2 C to be completed by September 2010.

**Priority:** High – Tactics 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E. Medium – 2F, 2G, 2H.

**Capacity:** Existing grants and contracts will provide funding for Tactics 2A, 2B, 2C, 2E, 2G and 2H. Staff time is available from the Water Monitoring Program Coordinator. Other staff will assist as needed. MSU-M is willing to undertake the work in Tactic 2C. This work will be funded through the CRWP and MPCA One Waters pilot project. Unrestricted funds will need to be available to carry out Tactics 2D and 2F.

**Goal 3:** CRWP will develop an *Education and Recreation Program* in order increase the understanding of citizens about water quality issues and provide opportunities for people to enjoy the watershed. The mission of CRWP is to engage people in protecting and improving the water quality and natural systems of the Cannon River watershed. Before a person can become engaged in an activity, they should understand why they are doing something and what result their activities will bring. Enjoying the opportunities for outdoor recreation will lead increased concern for watershed health.

**Tactic 3A:** Inventory existing education work being done in the watershed. Determine where there are gaps and where we could best fit in. Write a plan for what education activities we will carry out for the next two years.

**Tactic 3B:** Identify and acquire funding and personnel resources needed to carry out the educational plan.

**Tactic 3C:** Implement education plan. This section will be added to after the plan has been developed.

**Tactic 3D:** Publish the CRWP newsletter, *The Watershed Watcher*, five times per year, as well as one annual report, and work to increase its circulation throughout the watershed.

**Tactic 3E:** Maintain an engaging, up to date, website to provide updates on our activities, events, and information to the public. Post as many opportunities as possible of what others are doing on the CRWP website and in our newsletter.

**Tactic 3F** Work with partners such as the Cannon Valley Trail, Friends of the Cannon and Straight Rivers, and others to offer at least four opportunities per year for people to get out into the watershed of enjoyment.

**Timeline:** Ongoing through period of plan with the following exceptions: Tactic 3A to be completed by December 2009, Tactic 3B to be completed by May 2010, and Tactic 3C to begin in June 2010 if Tactic 3B has been successful. Tactic 3 F will be completed every 3 years after the report generated by MSU-M in Goal 2 has been finished.

**Priority:** High – 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E Medium – 3F

**Capacity:** During the development of this strategic plan there was clear interest in CRWP doing more education work. At present, we have no financial capacity to carry out any education work unless it is part of an existing grant project. Funds will need to be sought to achieve this goal. CRWP had been, and will continue, to dedicate funds to the publication of our newsletter and website. These tools are necessary to communicate with our members and the public about the work that is going on in the watershed. A state of the watershed report will be a useful tool in assessing progress and communicating what has been and is still to be accomplished. Funding will need to be secured for this work as well.

Staff capacity exists for Tactics 3D and 3 E. All other tactics may require the addition of staff, contractors, or the discontinuation of other work by existing staff.

### ***Strategy 2: Financial stability***

In order for CRWP to carry out the work we must do to achieve our vision, the organization must have funding to pay staff, contractors, purchase equipment, pay the rent and provide resources that are needed. The current economy poses challenges to securing financial support; however they are not impossible ones to overcome. The citizens of Minnesota approved an increase to the state sales tax that will provide funding for the next 25 years for activities that will improve water quality and preserve land. These funds will most likely be a major revenue source in the future. CRWP currently receives general operating support from the McKnight Foundation, as well as from members and donors. We will look to diversify and increase our foundation and membership support so that we are better able to weather storms that may come.

**Goal 1:** Develop a business plan to allow CRWP to acquire funds necessary to carry out the goals we seek to accomplish.

**Tactic 1A:** Work with members and Board of Directors Work Group that have experience with business plans to develop a plan for CRWP. The plan will include marketing, financial management, and fundraising. As part of this plan we will establish goals for diversifying and increasing support from individuals, business and major donors. Grants from governments, nonprofits and foundations that allow us to carry out program work as well as unrestricted operating costs will also be included.

**Goal 2:** Carry out activities in business plan. This section will be expanded after the business plan is created.

**Goal 3:** CRWP will increase the public's understanding of who we are and what we do in order to gain their support for our work. Marketing will be an area of the business plan. This section will be expanded after the business plan is created.

**Timeline:** Goal 1 will be accomplished by December 2009. Goals 2 and 3 are dependent on Goal 1 completion. Goal 3 will be worked on as time and resources permit prior to December 2009.

**Priority:** High. CRWP will only be able to continue the work we do if we have a solid, realistic plan about how we will fund that work.

**Capacity:** At present, there is no funding in the 2009 budget for these items. However, as noted in Goal 1 there are members and Directors who may be able to assist. Foundation support will also be sought. Staff time will be required of the Executive Director, Finance Director, Community Membership and Outreach Coordinator, and Office Manager.

### ***Strategy 3: Organizational Development***

The volunteers, partners, Board of Directors, staff and physical space where CRWP is located are all critical to our future success. If we are to continue to be a strong organization we must provide training and development opportunities for the people involved. Additionally the

physical space where we are located needs to adequately provide for our needs and meet future demands.

**Goal 1:** Build the CRWP volunteer base as a means of engaging people and increasing what CRWP can accomplish.

**Tactic 1A:** Maintain a current list of volunteer opportunities.

**Tactic 1B:** Provide training and resources to volunteers to carry out the various opportunities.

**Tactic 1C:** Establish a group of citizen volunteers who observes and reports on local governance issues that could affect water quality.

**Tactic 1D:** Host an annual volunteer recognition event.

**Tactic 1E:** Accurately track volunteer hours and activities for annual report, to provide to funders and other interested parties as needed.

**Timeline:** Ongoing through period of the plan.

**Priority:** High – Tactics 1A, 1B, 1D, 1E. Medium – Tactic 1C.

**Capacity:** Funding for this work will come from unrestricted funds and some existing grants. Grant funding will also be sought that would specifically support this work. Volunteers will allow more to be accomplished than the staff and Board can do alone. People also feel more ownership if they participate. It is very important we foster this volunteer corps. The Office Manager will be the primary staff person to coordinate the volunteers, assisted by the Water Monitoring Program Coordinator and Community Membership and Outreach Coordinator.

**Goal 2:** The Board of Directors of CRWP will have the capacity they need to provide leadership, assist with fundraising, and direct the policy of the organization.

**Tactic 2A:** Maintain a full board of 25 members from across the watershed as stated in the bylaws.

**Tactic 2B:** Establish an Executive Committee, and work groups for activities such as Fundraising, Strategic Plan Review, Personnel and others as needed. Work groups will be made up of board members and volunteers from the general membership.

**Tactic 2C:** Ensure that all new board members are provided with training at the beginning of their term.

**Tactic 2D:** Provide additional opportunities for up to 6 board members each year to participate in training, skill building, or other board development activities.

**Tactic 2E:** Create and implement a list of activities for the board to work on each year.

**Timeline:** Ongoing through period of the plan. Board recruitment should be thought of as ongoing as we look to members and volunteers who could be mentored for Board services. Committees will be established annually at the first Board meeting after the Annual meeting. Board training will be provided annually to all new Directors and offered to existing members if they are interested. The Board work plan will be created annually by the second board meeting after the annual meeting.

**Priority:** High – Tactics 2A, 2B (required in bylaws). Medium – 2C, 2D, 2E.

**Capacity:** The Executive Director is responsible for working on this goal along with the Board of Directors. Funding is taken from our unrestricted funds budget. Annual budgets will need to include funding to cover the costs of board training. All time contributed by the Directors is voluntary.

**Goal 3:** CRWP will maintain a high quality staff to carry out the mission of the organization.

**Tactic 3A:** Maintain adequate staff/contractors to carry out all projects we have agreed to work on.

**Tactic 3B:** Create and implement an annual staff work plan and evaluation process.

**Tactic 3C:** CRWP will provide \$500 per year in support for all full-time employees to attend conferences, trainings, or other development opportunities.

**Tactic 3D:** CRWP will review staff performance and salaries on an annual basis and adjust compensation to the best of our ability to be competitive with peer organizations.

**Timeline:** Tactic 3 A is ongoing. Tactic 3B and 3D will take place annually in June of each year. Tactic 3 C will be in the operating budget on an annual basis from January – December of each year.

**Priority:** High – 3A, 3B, 3D. Medium – 3C. Maintaining a well trained and adequately compensated staff is critical to the success of CRWP and to achieving our goals.

**Capacity:** The Executive Director, with input from all staff, will be responsible for carrying out these items. Funding comes from grants and contracts in the form of administration/project management dollars as well as from unrestricted funds. CRWP's capacity to increase salaries and benefits will be dependent of our overall fundraising each year. Staff training will be included in the annual budget.

### ***Strategy 4: Operations***

Along with having people to carry out the work of CRWP, there is also a need to track and manage the work we do as well as having the necessary tools and physical space with which to work.

**Goal 1:** Create a systematic approach to project and process management (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluating, and Adapting). This will allow us to manage internal operations as well as project elements.

**Tactic 1A:** Identify management system that is appropriate for our organization.

**Tactic 1B:** Implement project and process management system.

**Timeline:** To be completed by May 2010.

**Priority:** Medium. A project management system will allow CRWP staff to keep better track of the work we, allow us to be more efficient, and spend less unrestricted dollars on grant project completion.

**Capacity:** No funding exists in the 2009 budget for this work; therefore additional funds will be needed.

**Goal 2:** Ensure that the physical space and equipment at CRWP are adequate to meet the needs of the organization.

**Tactic 2A:** Assess possible future project staff needs through December 2012 to determine if current facility will be provide sufficient space. If this is not the case, seek out a new location prior to the end of current lease in March 2010.

**Tactic 2B:** Conduct annual technological needs assessments.

**Tactic 2C:** Including funding requests in future budgets as best possible so that equipment provides the level of functionality that is necessary to carry out our work.

**Timeline:** Tactic 2A – to be completed by August 2009. Tactics 2B and 2C will be done in October of each year prior to annual budget development.

**Priority:** High – 2A. Medium – 2B and 2C.

**Capacity:** The Executive Director with assistance from the Board of Directors will carry out Tactic 2A. Tactics 2 B and 2 C will be carried out by the staff. Funds will come from unrestricted dollars.