

A PROSPECTUS FOR A REGIONAL WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Regional Water Quality Management Plan (RWQMP) for Southeastern Wisconsin serves as the cornerstone of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's (Commission or SEWRPC) efforts in environmental protection, water quality improvement, sewage treatment, and sanitary sewer planning. In alignment with Section 208 of the Federal Clean Water Act, the Commission undertook a region-wide water quality management planning program on July 1, 1975. The program's primary goals were to assess existing surface water quality conditions across the seven-county region (Region), compare conditions against established water use objectives and water quality standards, and explore alternative means of meeting those objectives and standards through the reduction of both point and nonpoint sources of water pollution. It also aimed to recommend the most cost-effective solutions for meeting long-term water quality improvement objectives. Beyond pollution reduction, the program considered optimal strategies for managing residual sludge from wastewater treatment facilities and integrated land use planning with water quality efforts, ensuring a holistic and area-wide approach to achieving the national goal of "fishable and swimmable" waters.

The Commission published its first RWQMP as Planning Report No. 30 (PR-30) in July 1979.¹ SEWRPC Planning Report No. 50 (PR-50),² served as an update to the original plan for the Greater Milwaukee area watersheds only—including the Milwaukee River, Menomonee River, Kinnickinnic River, Oak Creek, and Root River watersheds as well as portions of the Region that drain directly into Lake Michigan. The RWQMP update for the Greater Milwaukee area watersheds was carried out in coordination with the development of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) 2020 Facility Plan. The RWQMP inventories, assessments, and recommendations for the watersheds in the Region that were not addressed in PR-50 date back to the original 1979 plan. The watersheds addressed in PR-30 include the Fox River, Des Plaines River, Kinnickinnic River, Menomonee River, Milwaukee River, Oak Creek, Pike River, Rock River, Root River, Sauk Creek, Sheboygan River, and the direct drainage area to Lake Michigan.³

Nearly 50 years after the RWQMP was adopted and 20 years since the update for the greater Milwaukee area watersheds, a new plan update is needed for the Commission to continue advancing the goal of achieving fishable and swimmable waters throughout the seven-county Region. This RWQMP update (RWQMPPU) will be prepared in accordance with Wisconsin Administrative Code NR-121, which outlines policies, procedures, and requirements for areawide water quality management planning under the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). This Prospectus documents the efforts that will be included in a RWQMPPU, as well as the cost to complete the agreed upon scope and the related work timeline.

1.2 ABOUT THE COMMISSION

Authority

The Commission was established in 1960 under Section 66.945 (now Section 66.0309) of the *Wisconsin Statutes* as the official areawide planning agency for the urbanizing Southeastern region of the State. The

¹ *SEWRPC Planning Report No. 30, A Regional Water Quality Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin-2000, July 1979.*

² *SEWRPC Planning Report No. 50, A Regional Water Quality Management Plan Update for The Greater Milwaukee Watersheds, December 2007.*

³ *Only portions of the Fox River, Des Plaines River, Milwaukee River, Rock River, Sauk Creek, and Sheboygan River watersheds were included in this analysis.*

Commission was created to provide the basic information and planning services necessary to address problems that transcend the corporate boundaries and fiscal capabilities of the local units of government comprising the Region. Those problems include traffic congestion, flooding, air and water pollution, and changing land use, among other issues.

The Commission was designated by the Governor in 1974 as the official areawide water quality management planning agency for Southeastern Wisconsin under Section 208 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972. This designation is also federally recognized, and as defined in *Wisconsin Administrative Code* NR 121, gives the Commission authority to oversee water quality planning efforts for the Region.

Area Served

The Commission is the designated areawide water quality planning agency for the Southeastern Wisconsin Region, which includes Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha Counties (Map 1.1). These seven counties have an area of about 2,689 square miles, or about 5 percent of the total area of the State. However, according to Wisconsin Department of Administration 2025 population estimates, these counties had a resident population of over two million people, or about 34 percent of the total population of the State. The counties also contain about 1.34 million jobs, or 35 percent of the total employment of the State,⁴ and the Region contains about \$336.8 billion in equalized valuation, or about 34 percent of all the tangible wealth of the State.⁵ There are 29 cities, 67 villages and 50 towns in the Region, all of which participate in the work of the Commission.⁶

Basic Concepts

Regional, or areawide, planning has become recognized as a necessary governmental function in the large metropolitan areas of the United States. This recognition stems from an awareness that problems of physical and economic development and of environmental deterioration transcend the geographic limits and fiscal capabilities of the local units of government comprising such large areas, and that sound resolution of these problems requires the cooperation of all units and agencies of government and of private interests as well.

⁴ Figure based on United States Bureau of Economic Analysis 2023 Employment Data.

⁵ Figure based on the Wisconsin Department of Revenue Tax Year 2025 Equalized Value.

⁶ Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Annual Report 2025, December 2025.

As used by the Commission, the term “region” means a multi-county area united by economic interests, geography, and common developmental and environmental problems. A regional basis is necessary to provide a meaningful technical approach to the proper planning and design of such systems of public works as highway and transit, sewerage and water supply, and parks. A regional basis is also essential to provide a sound approach to the resolution of such environmental problems as flooding, air and water pollution, natural resource base deterioration, and changing land use.

Private as well as public interests are vitally affected by these kinds of areawide problems and by proposed solutions to these problems, and it appears neither desirable nor possible for any one level or agency of government to impose the decisions required to resolve these kinds of problems. Such decisions can better come from consensus among the public and private interests concerned, based on a common interest in the welfare of the entire Region. Regional planning is necessary to promote this consensus and the necessary cooperation among urban and rural; local, State, and Federal; and public and private interests. In this light, regional planning is not a substitute for Federal, State, county, or local public planning, or for private planning. Rather, regional planning is a vital supplement to such planning.

The work of the Commission is advisory in nature. Consequently, the regional planning program in Southeastern Wisconsin has emphasized the promotion of close cooperation among the various governmental agencies.

Basic Functions

The Commission performs three basic functions to address issues facing the Region’s counties, cities, villages, and town:

- The collection, analysis, and dissemination of basic planning and engineering data on a uniform, areawide basis. The creation and use of such data can in and of itself contribute to better development decision-making in both the public and private sectors that operate in the Region.
- The preparation of a framework of long-range areawide plans for the physical development of the Region. Mandated by the State planning enabling legislation, the Commission places emphasis on the preparation of plans for land use and supporting transportation, utility, and community facilities.

- The provision of a center for coordinating day-to-day planning and plan implementation activities of all of the governments operating within the Region. Through this function, the Commission seeks to integrate regional and local plans and planning efforts and thereby to promote regional plan implementation.

Organization

The Commission consists of three representative members from each county within the regional planning commission. One Commissioner from each county is appointed or, in those counties where a County Executive appoints, confirmed by the County Board and by custom is an elected County Board Supervisor. The remaining two from each county are appointed by the Governor, one from a list prepared by the county. All appointments are for six-year terms.

The Commission is assisted greatly in its work by Advisory Committees. These Committees include both elected and appointed public officials, technical experts, and interested citizens with knowledge in the Commission work program areas. The Committees perform a significant function in both the formulation and the execution of Commission work programs. An Advisory Committee has been formed to provide direction in the development of this Prospectus (see inside cover of this document for list of Committee members) and a separate Advisory Committee will be formed to oversee the update to the RWQMP.

Staffing

The Commission prepares an annual work program that is reviewed and approved by Federal and State funding agencies. This work program is then carried out by a core staff of full-time professional, technical, and clerical personnel, supplemented by additional temporary staff and consultants as required by the various work programs under way.

Funding

The Commission prepares an annual budget along with an overall work program, which are reviewed and approved by State and Federal funding agencies. A portion of revenues for the annual budget and overall work program comes from regional support, apportioned to counties based on equalized valuation.

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MAPS

Map 1.1

Civil Divisions in the Southeastern Wisconsin Region: 2020

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TYPE

CITY: WAUWATOSA

VILLAGE: UNION GROVE

TOWN: Addison

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