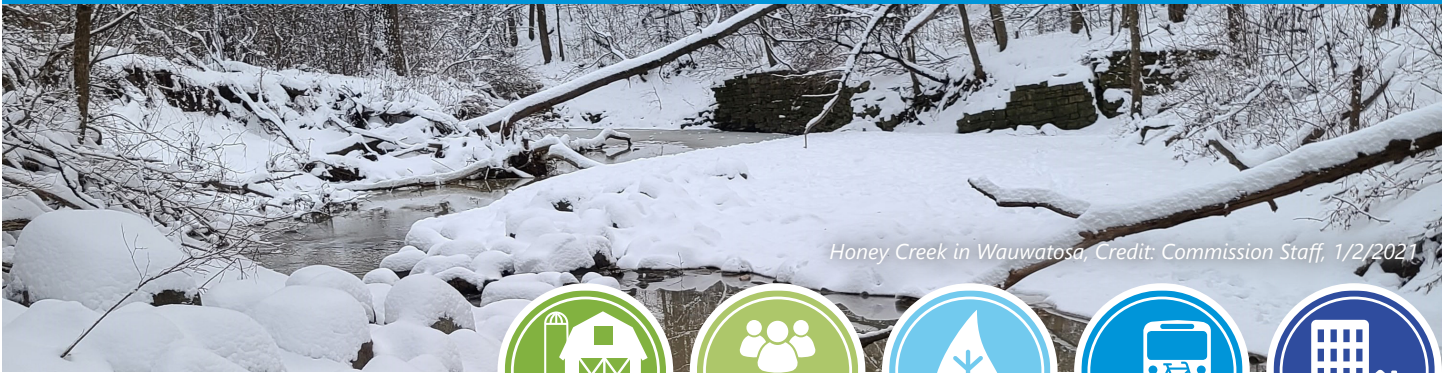


REGIONAL PLANNING NEWS

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Honey Creek in Wauwatosa, Credit: Commission Staff, 1/2/2021

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Hard at Work with the Milwaukee Metro Pollution Reduction Action Plan

Our work is underway on the Milwaukee Metropolitan Pollution Reduction Action Plan! This planning effort is funded through a non-competitive grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to support improving air quality, public health, and job opportunities in the four-county Milwaukee Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), consisting of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha Counties. Other counties in our Region are being incorporated into plans being developed for the State of Wisconsin and the Chicago MSA.

What's important to know about this planning effort? Local governments in the four-county area will be eligible for implementation funding, including \$4.3 billion in Implementation Grants (www.epa.gov/inflation-reduction-act/about-cprg-implementation-grants) to catalyze significant cumulative emission reductions by 2030 and beyond. Areas outside the four-county MSA can access funds through the State of Wisconsin's pollution reduction planning process (osce.wi.gov/Pages/ClimatePollutionReductionGrant.aspx).

Since receiving the grant in July 2023, the planning team has worked closely with the City of Milwaukee's Environmental Collaboration Office (ECO) staff to develop the scope of work, share research, coordinate with local partner organizations, and identify priority strategies. We have initiated coordination with local governments, the Environmental Justice Task Force, the Commission's Community Partners, and State and regional organizations. Staff have collected emissions data, developed air pollution inventories, participated in technical forums, and researched aligned activities in the four-county MSA.

The first phase of the project (due March 2024) will result in a priority plan, which will inventory climate pollution by county, identify priority strategies, and analyze how these strategies could benefit communities overburdened by pollution. The list of priority strategies will be refined based on input from the four counties and local governments that support the planning project. The initial strategies generally include building energy efficiency, electrifying transportation, cleaner energy generation, and regional sustainability assistance. The planning process will continue through 2027 and will result in a robust plan that includes expanded community involvement, analysis of workforce needs, and the identification of future funding sources.

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Credit: Commission Staff, 12/2023



Credit: Commission Staff, 12/2023

Turtle Creek Survey

Lake Comus, a shallow impoundment of Turtle Creek located in western Walworth County, was the focus of a 2022 comprehensive lake management plan completed by the Commission (www.sewrpc.org/CAPR-341.pdf). As described in this plan, the Lake is highly eutrophic with low water clarity, algal blooms, and a poor aquatic plant community while the Creek exceeds State standards for total phosphorus and is frequently highly turbid with a substantial buildup of flocculent sediment. Thanks to dedicated monitoring from local volunteers, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources obtained enough water quality data to list Lake Comus, Turtle Creek, and a tributary of the Creek as impaired from non-point source total phosphorus on the 2022 303(d) list of impaired waters (dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater/ConditionLists.html). Excessive soil runoff and nutrient loading from the watershed contribute to these ongoing water quality problems. To help address these water quality problems, the Lake Comus Protection and Rehabilitation District has retained the assistance of the Commission to prepare a watershed-based nine-key element (9KE) plan that builds upon the 2022 comprehensive plan.

With the diligent assistance of a volunteer from the Lake Comus District, Commission staff conducted a survey of Turtle Creek focused on measuring water quality and identifying potential pollutant sources to inform the 9KE plan. Commission staff surveyed an approximately seven-mile reach of Turtle Creek from near its headwaters at Turtle Lake to its outlet at Lake Comus. The southernmost reach of the Creek meanders through an extensive cattail wetland while the middle and northern reaches are highly channelized, incised, and drain crop fields and sod farms. Throughout the survey, staff measured water depth; sediment depth and characteristics; and water turbidity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, and specific conductance. Staff recorded potential pollutant loading sources such as drain tiles and streambank erosion as well as habitat features such as groundwater springs, aquatic plant beds, and overhanging woody habitat. With this summer's drought, the Creek water levels were low and water temperatures were high enough to likely stress fish, which were only observed in particularly deep and colder areas of the Creek. Much of the Creek bottom consisted of deep, soft sediment that are likely nutrient-rich and contribute to ongoing water quality problems, such as the abundant algal scums that formed in stagnant areas of the Creek. Multiple pollutant sources and waterway impediments were documented by Commission staff.

Despite these challenges, the Creek has the potential to provide excellent fish and wildlife habitat as it is surrounded by undeveloped wetland, is fed by multiple springs contributing cool and clean water, and it forms the backbone of an extensive environmental corridor that links with the Turtle Valley Wildlife Area. Walworth County staff are working with watershed farmers to implement conservation practices that enhance soil health and improve water quality. The 9KE plan will incorporate pollutant load reduction goals from the Rock River Total Maximum Daily Load Plan (dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/TMDLs/RockRiver/index.html) and will provide recommendations on how to mitigate pollutant sources and help restore water quality and aquatic habitat within the Creek. Once approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, this 9KE plan will also open eligibility and opportunities to implement recommended projects using the assistance of certain funding programs. Implementing the 9KE plan will require community coordination, partnership among stakeholders, farmer-led soil health practices, and innovative watershed projects to make progress towards restoring the water resources of the Turtle Creek watershed.



Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates in Progress

Along with transportation, environmental, land use, and economic development planning, the Commission assists in hazard mitigation planning efforts. This year staff have worked on updates to the countywide hazard plans for Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, and Washington Counties. These plans fulfill requirements set forth by Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), assuring their communities are eligible to apply for federal funding for hazard mitigation measures.

Hazard mitigation planning reduces the loss of life and property by minimizing the impact of disasters. Work begins with state and local governments identifying natural disaster risks and vulnerabilities that are common in their area, such as flooding, coastal bluff failure, tornadoes, extreme temperature events, and winter storms. After identifying these risks, the plans include long-term and equitable strategies for protecting people and property from similar events. Mitigation strategies include floodplain protection, structural acquisition or buyouts, dam inspections, installation of community safe rooms, critical infrastructure protection, green infrastructure (or nature-based solutions) to mitigate stormwater flooding and extreme temperature events, and accessible community outreach and education for all residents and communities throughout the county.

Hazard mitigation plans are key to breaking the cycle of disaster damage and reconstruction. With climate change predicted to cause warmer and wetter conditions in Wisconsin, planning for increased frequency and intensity of storms and temperature extremes is a high priority to keep communities safe, especially our most vulnerable communities. Hazard mitigation planning helps prevent future damages, promotes disaster-resilient communities, and reduces response and recovery resource requirements.

To learn more about these hazard mitigation planning efforts, visit www.sewrpc.org/hazardmitigationplanning.



Credit: Unsplash, 12/2023



Credit: Unsplash, 12/2023



Credit: Unsplash, 12/2023



Credit: Commission Staff, 12/2023

Commission Staff Directing High Schoolers to Careers in STEM

As your regional planning commission, we recognize the importance of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers in our agency and throughout our Region.

At the SEE Your Future Expo on November 7, 2023, Commission staff provided information about careers in urban planning, transportation engineering, and public involvement and outreach to approximately 1,500 high school freshmen from the Racine Unified School District.

Learn more about the District's SEE Your Future Expo at rusd.org/academics/academies-racine/see-your-future-expo.



Help Us Update the Vision for Our Region!

Earlier this year, we initiated the 2024 Review and Update of VISION 2050, our Region's long-range vision for land use and transportation. What do you think we need to include in the vision for our Region's future? Let us know on the VISION 2050 website: www.vision2050sewis.org.

2024 REVIEW & UPDATE OF VISION 2050

Did You Know?

Halfway between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, about 30 miles from our Region's westernmost border, lives a bur oak tree that marks a frequented campsite for indigenous populations as they traveled along the Sugar River. The Half-Way Tree, as it is known, was paced off and confirmed in 1832 as the true mid-point between the two waterbody borders of Wisconsin. The Half-Way Tree remains standing today, noted by a road-side marker on Halfway Tree Road in Brodhead, Wisconsin.

Have a look at the Half-Way Tree at maps.app.goo.gl/Atss1GU8vvPWoj4C9

Source: Half-Way Tree, Wisconsin Historical Society, www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM127471

What natural features serve as landmarks in our Region that we should identify or acknowledge in our regional planning work? Let us know at sewrpc@sewrpc.org!