



A Vision for the Bad River Watershed Association

Our History

2002-2015

The Bad River Watershed Association (BRWA) was founded 13 years ago in 2002 by concerned citizens who wanted to have a better understanding of the water quality in our area. There was a lot of anecdotal evidence about water conditions and problem areas, but data about the water quality of the region were sorely lacking. This group decided that a citizen-based watershed organization would be a valuable addition to the area. As they began their work, they decided that the Bad River watershed, which drains over 1000 square miles of land into Lake Superior, was just the right size for a new organization to take on.

Over the past 13 years, the Bad River Watershed Association has grown from an entirely volunteer driven organization to one with motivated staff, committed volunteers and a membership that reaches throughout the state and beyond. By coordinating and training volunteers, we have monitored water quality at 105 sites and have used these data to assist the State in naming several Exceptional and Outstanding Water Resources in the area. Our culvert program partners with townships and counties and has, to date, replaced 20 culverts that were causing sedimentation and creating fish barriers. To prioritize this work, we developed a culvert assessment protocol and have inventoried over 1000 culverts throughout the Bad River watershed. That protocol has now been adopted for use by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and is being used to prioritize culvert replacements statewide. Early in 2013 our Watershed Action Plan for the Marengo River was approved by the US Environmental Protection Agency, bringing clear guidance and new funding opportunities for restoration along that river. This was a huge accomplishment that required coordination of many different parties and cooperation between state and tribal entities, each with its own federally approved water quality standards. The plan continues to be used to improve water quality of this sub-watershed of the Bad River.

During quiet times and turbulent times, the Bad River Watershed Association has held strong to our mission to involve citizens in assessing, maintaining and improving watershed integrity for future generations. We have spoken out for the rights of citizens to be involved in the decisions made about their water. The data collected by our staff and volunteers have informed the public and our representatives of the resources that might be at risk given various possible land uses. Today, we are a strong organization with state-wide name recognition, a strong set of skills and a proven track record of success.

Building on Success

2015 and Beyond

Expanding our reach- Red Cliff to Michigan

As we consider the future of the BRWA, we realize the time for growth has arrived. Lake Superior and the Chequamegon Bay region in particular are precious to many. People count on clean water and healthy natural resources for their employment, recreation and daily life. The rivers and streams that empty into the Bay and Lake have an impact on these waters and the resources within, like fish and wild rice.

Expanding our reach around the Chequamegon Bay, out to Madeline Island and east to the state line will allow us to bring our skills and expertise to a greater area, which suffers much of the same lack of data that motivated citizens to start the BRWA so many years ago. Growing the organization in this way we add another 60% of land to the area we cover while increasing the number of people living within our working area by approximately five times. Citizens in this region have always been interested in protecting the water they depend on, and awareness is growing rapidly as new risks to the resource emerge. By bringing our organization to a wider audience, the Association will engage citizens as a community and help develop the ties between individuals and the broader watershed system they depend on.

The next step in the Penokee Range - Wild and Scenic Rivers

Since its inception, the Bad River Watershed Association has worked to monitor and protect the Penokee Range and the waters that run through it. Over the last four years, as the Penokee Range received statewide, and even national attention, other organizations and the larger northern Wisconsin community began to engage wholeheartedly in learning about this area and educating others about its beauty and importance. During this time our Association coordinated efforts with many different organizations and in doing so raised our organization's profile and strengthened our statewide partnerships.

Growing knowledge of the region has made it clear that the Bad River, the Tyler Forks River and the land that they run through possess remarkable scenic value as well as providing critical habitat for fish and wildlife. Their current relatively pristine and free flowing condition makes them excellent candidates to be named by Congress as National Wild and Scenic Rivers. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, passed by Congress in 1968 is in place to protect such places "for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations." The Bad River Watershed Association will work with our partners and the community at large to continue studies of this crucial region and assess the feasibility of having these rivers designated by Congress. It will take the collaboration of all these organizations and the compilation of the knowledge we continue to gain about the region to make this designation happen. It may well be a long and perhaps difficult process, but it is clear that these rivers are worthy of the recognition and protection accorded by the Wild and Scenic Rivers designation.

Building our citizen science water quality monitoring program- Increased cooperation with schools

The strength of the BRWA comes from our method of involving citizens in monitoring and protecting the waters they care about. When citizens dip their own feet in a river and are active in gathering data about the water they depend on, they are likely to become more engaged when land use issues threaten to put those waters at risk. Expansion of the Association will require increased numbers of volunteers to help with resource assessments and water quality monitoring. As the Watershed Association grows, we will provide the support and coordination required to safely engage citizens throughout the region in assessing, maintaining and improving watershed quality for future generations.

As an organization working within the bounds of the Bad River watershed, the BRWA has found many opportunities to work with youth such as assisting with the Indigenous Arts and Sciences Program and Bad River Youth Outdoors Program and leading educational outings for school environmental clubs. With the expanding reach of the organization, many schools will be added to our working area. We will partner with these schools to provide hands-on educational opportunities to school aged youth in the region. Through this collaboration we will begin to build young stewards of the land and water while providing youth with the chance to apply the science of their classrooms to real world issues.

Building on our strong restoration work

The Bad River Watershed Association is well known for our restoration work. We have proven our ability to prioritize restoration work and partner with cooperators to successfully improve watershed quality by replacing problem culverts, educating landowners about restoration opportunities, coordinating volunteers for shoreline planting days and leading major bank stabilization projects such as one we are currently working on along the Marengo River. As we expand our working territory, we will begin by assessing and prioritizing areas in need of attention and be prepared to lead restoration projects as funding becomes available.

A Healthy Organization

In order to be successful in fulfilling our mission we must continue to maintain a healthy organization with strong finances, a satisfied and highly skilled staff and a Board of Directors with the energy, knowledge and motivation to fulfill its role. The Board of Directors and staff will work to increase and diversify funding sources and follow through with clearly defined annual budgets and fundraising plans. As we value the program work of the Association, we also value stable working conditions with living wages paid to our staff, and will work to plan our finances and staffing levels accordingly. We will strive to provide funding for employee and Board education in order to strengthen and sustain the organization. We will work to build our Board to include citizens from throughout our expanding work area who can contribute needed skills to the organization and we will establish a method of smooth transitions as Board member roles change over time.