Abstract: This water quality improvement project’s goal is to provide education planning with watershed landowners for overall reduction of sediment and related pollutants that could reach the surface waters and thus be transported to water entering the Horicon Marsh from Fond du Lac and Dodge County land ownership.

This project began receiving funding from the 2007-2008 Citizen-Based Monitoring Partner Program.

Geographic Description: Upper Rock River Watershed, Fond du Lac County

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The Fond du Lac County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) began the Upper Rock River Watershed Water Quality Improvement Project in southwest Fond du Lac County in July 2006. This project is a result of an agreement between the Fond du Lac County LWCD and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Horicon Marsh. Prior to July 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had completed their Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Horicon Marsh. Goal #4 of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan is to “provide increased conservation projects with landowners in the Upper Rock River Watershed to encourage understanding and action with these landowners on the critical issue of soil erosion and contaminants impacting the Horicon Marsh.” This water quality improvement project was expanded in late 2008 to include the Plum Creek and Mill Creek Watersheds on the west side of the Horicon NWR. The project recently was further expanded to include the Kummel Creek Watershed that flows into the East Branch of the Rock River, eventually reaching Horicon Marsh.

From initial discussions in mid-2006 to the present, the Fond du Lac County LWCD and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service looked to begin and maintain a water quality monitoring program to complement the efforts made by landowners in the overall watershed to improve water quality.

The Citizen Based Monitoring Program fit hand in glove to what was being searched for. Discussions in early 2007 with Central Wisconsin Trout Unlimited and Park Watch (Fond du Lac) provided the access and availability to trained water quality citizen volunteer monitors to complete the in-field sampling of the quality parameters desired. The Fond du Lac County LWCD began a Level 3 “Citizen Based Stream Monitoring” program in September 2007. Three sites were selected to start. The sites selected provide evaluation of sites where water quality improvement practices have been installed.

Laura DeGolier, Park Watch (Fond du Lac) volunteer completes monthly sampling at Site #2.

In 2009, Site #3 of the CBM volunteer monitoring sites became a daily monitoring site by USGS. USGS added two more daily sites in Dodge County to complement the CBM sites in Fond du Lac County. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff further added two sites on the west side of the Horicon Marsh NWR to complement the CBM and USGS sites. Water quality analysis at the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point and the Fond du Lac City Wastewater Treatment Facility provide the availability to detailed final results of the sampling/monitoring process.

The water quality improvement project’s goal is to provide the education, planning, and application of sediment and nutrient reduction practices with watersheds landowners. These practices reduce the pollutants that reach the surface waters in the Upper Rock River Watershed, thus preventing them from further being transported to waters entering the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge and Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area.

The agreement between the Fond du Lac County LWCD and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provide monies for staff time and practice incentives to carry out this goal. The main surface water areas targeted are the West and South Branches of the Rock River in Fond du Lac County, Oak Center Creek in Fond du Lac County, Kummel Creek in Fond du Lac and Dodge Counties, and Plum Creek and Mill Creek in Dodge County.

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Landowners/operators have developed new/revised existing conservation plans on 43,800 acres. Landowners/operators have developed and installed 36,900 acres of new nutrient management plans. Landowners have installed 560 acres of new upland wildlife habitat.