

For Immediate Release: Please Print by Friday, January 26, 2007

Date: January 23, 2007

Contact: Sandy Schultz (715) 209-1006

by S.D. Schultz, Stable Solutions llc

Marengo River Watershed Assessment Completed

Most know the Marengo River in central Ashland and Bayfield Counties as a river of change. Where your favorite log to fish from was last month, there may be sand deposits and new woody debris this month. Stream banks appear unstable as water passes through carrying trees and brush, cutting new paths of travel and sometimes even new river channels. Unlocking the hydrologic secrets of the Marengo was the focus of a project sponsored by the Lake Superior Basin Partner Team. An informational meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 12, 2007, from 6:30 – 8:30 PM at the Ashland Town Hall in Highbridge, for all interested in learning more about the hydrologic condition of the Marengo River watershed and the upcoming watershed planning meetings. For more information, contact Nancy Larson at (715)685-2674 or Sandy Schultz, Stable Solutions llc at (715)209-1006.

The Wisconsin Lake Superior Basin Partner Team (the Partner Team) was originally formed in 1998 by the Department of Natural Resources, to help implement the Lake Superior Bi-national Program and Area Lakewide Management Plan in Wisconsin. The Partner Team has since evolved into a unique blend of public, private and nonprofit organizations and individuals, whose mission today is to implement a watershed health initiative known as *“slow the flow.”* Members of the Partner Team hired Stable Solutions llc to help assess the hydrologic condition of the Marengo River watershed and concurrently develop an assessment guide for other watersheds in the Lake Superior basin to do the same. The results of the assessment were discussed Monday, January 22, 2007, during the Partner Team’s regular meeting at the Iron River Community Center in Iron River, Wisconsin.

The Partner Team selected the Marengo River watershed as the pilot area to demonstrate the hydrologic condition assessment process for Lake Superior watersheds. The six step process is based on a framework developed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. It takes a watershed or land use planning group through the steps of finding resource information, figuring out who can help interpret information, and developing recommendations for a watershed plan based on past, present and future desired hydrologic conditions.

The assessment identified specific areas of concern in the watershed – including areas with more than 50 or 60% open land; sand deposition in the lower reaches of the watershed and at the confluence with the Bad River channelizing flow and restricting access to floodplains; cropland tillage, rotation and

surface drainage; and the road and ditch system. In addition, the “clay plain” area (areas within elevations 750 – 1,150 feet above sea level) is considered an erodible area (common across the entire Wisconsin portion of the Lake Superior Basin including the Nemadji River in Douglas County); a stretch of the Marengo River has been identified, through a cooperative study by the US Geological Survey and the Bad River Natural Resources Department, as a high risk area for suspended sediment contributions; and drained wetlands contribute to the overall volume of water added to the river system during major runoff events.



Some of the sedimentation problems are brought about or accelerated by human activity and some are a result of natural geologic processes. The big question the Partner Team needed answers to was – *What, if anything, can we do about it?* Stable Solutions llc tried to address the question by providing land management and policy recommendations for the next phase of the project. Kirsten Cahow-Scholtes, Water Resources Specialist with the Bad River Natural Resources Department (BRNRD), and Nancy Larson, UW Extension Service Lake Superior Basin Educator, are coordinating the committee working on the next phase for the Marengo River – planning and writing a watershed management strategy. Knowledge gained from this assessment will be used to develop specific recommendations along with an implementation strategy addressing the major land use activities in the watershed: Forestry, Agriculture, Rural Development, and Transportation. The information session scheduled for February 12, is an opportunity to learn about the project results and offer your thoughts about future projects in the Marengo River watershed.

“The Marengo River watershed was a great setting for the pilot hydrologic assessment in the Lake Superior Basin,” said Larson, “because USGS and the BRNRD have already collected a lot of information that was useful in the assessment.” Groups wanting to undergo a similar assessment may find that other watersheds in the basin might not have as much information. The assessment process, however, is the same. *A Guide to Understanding the Hydrologic Condition of Wisconsin’s Lake Superior Watersheds* (Guide) will take users through the same 6-step assessment process the Marengo River went through, to provide watershed and land use planning groups with a sound, science-based evaluation of their watershed. The Guide developed for Lake Superior watersheds is being printed by UWEX and will be available after May 2007. The Partner Team will sponsor two training sessions on using the Guide shortly after.

Meeting notices are available online at <http://basineducation.uwex.edu/lakesuperior/pteam/index.htm>. Copies of the **Report on the Hydrologic Condition of the Marengo River Watershed** are available on the Lake Superior Basin Partner Team’s website (<http://basineducation.uwex.edu/lakesuperior/watershedmgmt.htm>). This project is funded by the Great Lakes Commission, ABDI-Land Conservation Committees, Wisconsin DNR, UW Extension, UW Sea Grant, Wisconsin Community Action Program, Bad River Natural Resources Department, and the U.S. Forest Service.

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