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Local Group Begins Watershed Health Project

With the help of a \$49,450 Great Lakes Commission grant, the Wisconsin Lake Superior Basin Partner Team (Partner Team) is leading northern Wisconsin in developing a regional tool for analyzing the hydrologic condition of a watershed. In the Lake Superior Basin, snow and rain runs so fast over the land that it cuts and straightens stream channels and deposits the eroding sediment into lakes, wetlands, rivers, and streams. Using the tools developed through the project will help us understand how to “*slow the flow*” to protect water quality and habitat.

The Partner Team is a diverse group of citizens, local and tribal officials, industry representatives, environmental groups, and area water resources specialists. Kim Bro, a Partner Team member and Chair of the project’s Grant Oversight Committee (GOC), said “studies show that excessive erosion and sedimentation is the leading cause of water quality and habitat impairments in the Wisconsin portion of the Lake Superior basin”. Bro adds, “we need to develop tools that will allow us to understand watershed characteristics, how they are impacting tributary streams and coastal wetlands, and how we can work together to protect the health of these waterways.”



LCC Chairman and GOC Committee Member George Mika lends his perspective to Stakeholders in the Marengo River Watershed while Kim Bro, GOC Chair looks on. (photo by Glenn Miller)

The Marengo River Watershed, found in portions of both Ashland and Bayfield Counties, is the pilot area where the project will be demonstrated. A stakeholder meeting was held on Tuesday, January 24, 2006, at the Ashland Town Hall in Highbridge, to present information about the project and get feedback from local citizens. Once the hydrologic assessment project is completed, two training sessions about the process and results will be held in the basin in June 2006. Hard copies of the tools developed as a result of the project will be distributed to all the townships in Wisconsin's portion of the Lake Superior basin later this year. These tools will also be made available on the Partner Team's website (<http://basineducation.uwex.edu/lakesuperior/pteam/index.htm>).

The Partner Team collaborated with Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas and Iron County Land Conservation Department, UW Sea Grant Institute, UW-Madison, and the UW-Extension program to obtain funding to appoint a consultant to lead the project. For more information, contact Kim Bro, GOC Chair at 715-682-1810; George Mika, Ashland County Land Conservation Committee Chairman at 715-278-3481; or the project consultant, Stable Solutions LLC at 715-209-1006.

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