

White River Watershed Collaborative for Newaygo, Oceana, and Muskegon Counties



Purpose

In the first-ever meeting of the White River Watershed Collaborative, we evaluated what we know about the watershed, identified opportunities to work together for improvement, and were able to better understand the priorities and efforts of local organizations.

This virtual event was planned by Trout Unlimited, Fremont Area Community Foundation, and White River Watershed Partners with the goal to create a local stakeholder group dedicated to increasing collaboration on restoration efforts in the White River Watershed.

Summary

Jake Lemon welcomed attendees and provided a brief overview of the White River Watershed. He explained the watershed size, amount of public land and access sites, impaired stream portions, and temperature ranges. He also provided a summary of aquatic species and their habitat needs along with economic benefits of improving habitat.

Mark Tonello took over to discuss seven specific sections of the river and explain features, benefits, and challenges. He explained how the White Cloud dam impacts water temperature and the ability for fish to move upstream. Presentations were followed by a consensus workshop facilitated by Mark Petz. Participants generated ideas for improving the watershed. The shared ideas are summarized in this document.

Presenting

Jake Lemon, *Monitoring and Community Science Manager; Trout Unlimited*
Jake has over 10 years' experience in conservation in the private and non-profit sector and holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Indiana in Environmental Science. He has experience facilitating stakeholder groups, designing and implementing monitoring efforts and communicating technical information to the public. He came to TU in 2011 and concentrates his work on designing and supporting monitoring and assessment designed to aid in project prioritization and evaluation and facilitation of collaborative projects. Jake is based in Rockford, MI.

Mark Tonello, *Fisheries Biologist; Michigan Department of Natural Resources*
Mark is a Fisheries Management Biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, based out of Cadillac, MI. He has been with the Department since 1997. He currently covers a large portion of the northwestern lower peninsula, including such watersheds as the Muskegon, White, Pentwater, Pere Marquette, Little Manistee, and Manistee. He is originally from southeast Michigan but has lived in Cadillac for the past 21 years. He received his BS degree from Michigan State in Fisheries Biology, and his MS degree from Ball State University in Aquatic Biology and Fisheries. In his spare time, he loves to fish, hike, camp, and enjoy the wonderful natural resources of northern Michigan.

Mark Petz, *Director of Community Investment, Fremont Area Community Foundation*

Mark leads the grant making team for the foundation's community grant rounds, while coordinating capacity building for local nonprofit organizations and facilitating community conversations and planning sessions.

WORKSHOP QUESTION: Participants brainstormed individually, in break-out groups, and as a whole group around the following question.

What priorities involving the White River watershed should our group explore for collaborative action over the next 3-5 years?

Research & Monitoring	Outdoor Recreation	Watershed Restoration	Watershed Protection	Community Collaboration & Leadership	Education & Outreach	Potential Dam Removal	Economic Impact	Sustainable Funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill in data gaps - increase research and monitoring efforts • Watershed level assessment including improvement & protection new & existing data • Lake Sturgeon investigation • Review of current data & identification of new data needs • Large woody debris index • Data driven decisions • Climate change resilience • Water Temperature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of watershed for tourism (x2) • Identify and improve public access and access points (x3) • Create subgroup for public outreach • Float launch development & evaluation • Assessment of sustainable river access • Riverside enhanced trail development • Non-native/invasive species/barrier protections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectivity • Fish passage • Protect/Enhance Riparian Habitat for Wildlife (CEWA) • Water quality • Erosion control (x2) • Prioritizing Habitat Restoration (fish passage, habitat enhancement, dam removal) • Dam removal • Introduction of resilient species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land protection • Zoning, ordinances, and regulation collaboration and reform • Maintaining natural character • Water quality/address quality issues (x2) • Monitor regulation enforcement • Natural river zoning protections • Headwater protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a community of stakeholders (x2) • Assess the river's value to stakeholders • Develop community stewardship of watershed • Identify ALL community uses & priorities, Think long term • Enhance inclusive 'community' around White River, include all viewpoints • Collaboration (x2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased education (K-12 & public) • Community education and engagement (clear process, pros/cons, prioritization) • Public awareness • Repairing landowner education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate opportunity for White Cloud dam removal • Future of dams • Risk management of dam problems • Barrier protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic benefits and opportunities • Economic impact study (x2) • Cost/benefit study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained funding • Funding for priorities
To move forward, who else needs to be involved?					Next steps for the Group:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trout Unlimited • DNR • White River Watershed Partnership • Landowners on the watershed 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning administrators • City officials • Business owners • Other funders 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct action planning and prioritize opportunities • Coordinate ongoing meetings • Create sub-committees to address specific action items 			

Note: Ideas that were shared by more than one breakout group are noted with (x2) or (x3)