



White Clay Wild and Scenic Program Strategic Planning Summary and Outcomes

The White Clay Wild and Scenic Program initiated a strategic planning process in December of 2011.

PURPOSE OF PLANNING

Much has been accomplished in the 12 years since the *White Clay Creek and its Tributaries Management Plan* (“the Plan”) was compiled by the hard work and dedication of the White Clay Creek Watershed Management Committee. The White Clay watershed added over 2,000 acres to preservation with our support. Awareness of watershed issues and community involvement in solving watershed problems in local backyards increased with our educational and outreach programs. *Creek Fest* more than doubled in attendance in three years! The need for, and interest in, what the Wild and Scenic Program offers is evident. The question the strategic planning sessions aimed to address is: how can we – the White Clay Wild and Scenic Program - improve and increase what we offer to the White Clay Watershed?

The decline in federal funding during the past few years made it prudent to consider evaluating options to sustain and continue providing the quality and degree of protection and oversight that has been provided by the White Clay Wild and Scenic Program (WCWSP) to the watershed in the past twelve years. In 2011 we saw a 28% reduction in federal funding from 2010, the largest decrease in all the years since the designation has been in place. Despite this decrease, the White Clay budget fared better than other Partnership Wild and Scenic rivers in the Northeast.

Federal funding decline was not the only reason for the strategic planning process. The WCWSP needed to revisit the Watershed Management Plan, written in 2001. After 10 years the Management Plan was still the guiding document for the WCWSP; however it was necessary to re-evaluate the priorities based on what had already been accomplished and evaluate current environmental, cultural, and economic conditions. The planning process aimed to re-evaluate what we do, how we do it, what to keep doing, and what to change. The planning aided the White Clay Wild and Scenic Program in several ways. Specifically it

- Gathered entities that have been active partner organizations together to identify the Wild and Scenic watershed niche;
- Determined programs and direction that are most important to the Wild and Scenic Program;
- Intends to guide the path of the White Clay Wild and Scenic Program in the coming years;
- And re-engaged partners that have been inactive in the program, but who can play an important future role in guiding and enhancing the Wild & Scenic Program.

SUMMARY OF PLANNING EVENTS

2011 Survey of White Clay Creek Watershed Program Members

The kick-off exercise to engage all persons listed in the White Clay Wild and Scenic Program (WCWSP) Access database as members was an online survey via Survey Monkey. In December, 2011 there were 127 persons on the Management Committee listserv (wcc_ws_management@lists.ccil.org). The White Clay Management Plan Coordinator mailed six hard copy surveys to individuals that did not have an e-mail address listed in the WCWSP Access database but were listed as Management Committee members. One hard copy survey was completed and 18 online surveys were completed, representing a 15% response. The survey consisted of nine questions and survey responses are in Attachment 1 "Survey Responses." More survey detail is provided below.

Planning Meetings February 2012 – May 2012

The White Clay Management Plan Coordinator presented the survey results at the January 10, 2012 Management Committee Meeting. The final question in the survey requested that the respondents indicated if they would like to participate in a strategic planning process. The "yes" respondents to this question were the individuals that formed the core planning team. Similarly to the survey, all members listed as being on the Management Committee were invited to participate via email. In addition, the email invitation was extended to 19 persons from the boards of supervisors in the watershed's Pennsylvania townships. All effort was made to reach and invite persons within the 28 entities that took part in the 2001 Management Plan compilation (see Attachment 2 "2001 and 2012 Management Planning Committee Entities").

The Management Plan Coordinator sent an invitation to the planning meeting on January 31, 2012 and a reminder invitation on March 13, 2012 (see Attachment 2). With 18 participants, the first planning meeting was held on February 28, 2012 at Hockessin Library Hockessin, Delaware. Subsequent meetings were held in March, April, and May 2012. Planning committee members are listed in Attachment 2. A planning manual guided the meetings and discussions included: external, internal, and market assessments; critical issues; strategic mission; strategic goal setting.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

White Clay Wild and Scenic Program Member Survey

The member survey results indicated that there were multiple past projects and initiatives that were important to the respondents. The survey also indicated that future initiatives may be narrowed according to the future activities and sub-committee interest responses.

Past Activities

The members were asked to vote on 16 broad accomplishments that they believed were important activities that the WCWSP undertook in the past. The past projects that were deemed important and successful included open space preservation (89%), with Creek Fest (33%) a distant second. Flora and fauna surveys (28%), reforestation (22%), and

educational activities (22%) also ranked as important. Furthermore, dam removal, and events and lectures were also voted as important (both received 17%).

Future Activities

For the future activities question, the members were asked to vote on target areas that were the WCWSP energy focus for the future. Five of the categories--Education, Fish and Wildlife, Historical and Cultural, Open Space, and Trails and Recreation--were represented as subcommittees in the WCWSP. Water quality was added as it is an important component of the Plan, but was not represented in the existing sub-committees. Open Space (77%), Water Quality (77%), and Education (72%) were listed as the top categories to focus future efforts of the WCWSP. Fish and Wildlife, and Trails and Recreation, tied (33%) and Historical and Cultural (22%) was listed as the least important target area.

Sub-committee Interest

Prior to 2011 planning, the WCWSP had five informally listed sub-committees. The five sub-committees were listed as: Open Space (including reforestation); Fish and Wildlife, Education, Historical and Cultural, and Trails and Recreation. Sub-committee interest was gauged through asking the members about their interest in participating in sub-committees. Open space (26%) was again the top interest, with Fish and Wildlife, Trails and Recreation, and Water Quality tied (21%). Education (5%) and Historical and Cultural (0%) did not engage strong responses of interest. It should be noted, that while there was only 5% interested in participating on the Education Subcommittee, the few members we do have meet regularly and represent the leading environmental education organizations in our area with established school programs. In consideration of the survey responses and a review of the past project activities three formal sub-committees were determined to be active in 2010-2012: Education, Open Space (including Reforestation and Trails and Recreation), and Restoration (including Fish and Wildlife).

Planning Meetings

The planning meetings began with the participants brainstorming internal and external issues while considering the overall climate for non-profits. The internal and external assessments solicited many perspectives on the state of affairs that affected non-profits and conservation projects in general during the past several years. The participants expressed the fact that the economic state of the last several years limited funding and made it very competitive. It should be noted that the White Clay Watershed Association (WCWA) is a non-profit fiduciary, but the White Clay Creek Steering Committee is not a 501c3. Future consideration should be given as to whether we need to focus on fundraising by strengthening outreach through WCWA.

The “market” for watershed projects and initiatives was also discussed. The market could include Wild & Scenic partners, funders or watershed citizens. One key comment was that everyone in the watershed is our market. For structure and purpose of the “market” that WCWSP should target, it was decided that the sub-committees are the components of the WCWSP that should engage and develop the target recipients of individual programs or “markets.” For example, the Education Sub-committee should identify what schools and

programs to target that are in alignment with the Watershed Management Plan goals. In addition, the Open Space committee targets projects and landowners that serve to best maximize the funding of the WCWSP.

During the final meetings in April and May the planning committee discussed strengths and weaknesses of the WCWSP. In addition, critical issues were listed. According to the White Clay Wild and Scenic River Planning Manual 2012(Attachment 3): “Critical issues can reflect long-standing problems in the WCWSP, the community served or recent events that are anticipated to have a significant impact on the WCWSP and/or community served. Critical issues can also reflect major shifts in thinking that challenge ‘business as usual.’ The selection of issues is important because it determines the range of decisions the WCWSP will consider in the future.”

Strengths Summary

- Diverse non-competitive, cooperative, committed base of members
- Members provide a knowledgeable scientific, technical, and municipal base
- Respected history of projects and diverse membership can be used to gain additional funding
- Regular funding source through federal Wild & Scenic Rivers Program

Weaknesses Summary

- Need to increase presence with municipalities in PA
- Be more proactive in initiating projects
- Vulnerable with one funding source
- Lack of focus and identity (niche).

Critical Issue Statements Summary

- How do we create structure with simplicity in our guiding documents and operating framework?
- What can we accomplish with additional funding that we cannot accomplish with current funding?
- How do we include diverse stakeholders while narrowing our focus and finding our niche?
- How do we measure progress of projects and impacts to watershed to effectively communicate issues?
- How do we facilitate more municipal participation?

The strengths of the WCWSP lie in the people who choose to devote their time to the watershed. The members include a diverse cooperative knowledge base that has the capability to initiate and complete beneficial projects. A primary weakness is that the primary funding source only allows for small projects that are at times supportive to other larger efforts (as in open space). In addition, increasing funding would rely on the WCWSP finding a niche and targeting funds for that niche. Municipal and state participation is critical to successful projects, funding and initiatives. Developing and fostering the relationships with those entities is a critical path for the WCWSP.

Expanded Mission

The mission written in the Plan was expanded during the planning meetings of 2012 to further tailor the purpose of the WCWSP and narrow the focus of the projects that would be under taken in the future. The mission in the Plan is:

“The White Clay Creek Watershed Management Plan will foster cooperation between private landowners, business and industry, non-profit organizations, educational and research institutions, recreationists, historians and all governmental units including: the State of Delaware, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Delaware River Basin Commission, Chester County, New Castle County, City of Newark, Avondale Borough, East Marlborough Township, Franklin Township, Kennett Township, London Britain Township, Londonderry Township, London Grove Township, New Garden Township, New London Township, Penn Township, West Grove Borough and West Marlborough Township.”

It was recognized that this mission was written specifically for the Plan and not the committee or program that was given responsibility to administer the implementation of the Plan. In the planning process of 2012 a mission was developed for the WCWSP and was an expansion of the Plan mission. The expanded mission includes the idea that the Plan is the guiding document for the WCWSP and Steering Committee that will implement projects in the watershed in alignment with the goals of the Plan. The strategic planning committee developed the following mission for the WCWSP and Steering Committee:

“The mission of the White Clay Creek Wild and Scenic Program (WCWSP) is to promote and support the preservation, protection, restoration, and enhancement of natural and cultural resources, and in addition to encourage a balance of recreational enjoyment of the White Clay Creek watershed in Pennsylvania and Delaware. The Program and its members are responsible for implementation of the White Clay Creek and Its Tributaries Watershed Management Plan dated May 1998.”

Development of Goals and Implementation Strategies

The final steps in the planning process included development of strategic goal statements and plans for achieving those goals. Strategic goals are broad statements of what the WCWSP hopes to achieve in the next 3 years. Goals focus on outcomes or results and are qualitative in nature. Often goal statements flow from some of the critical issue statements developed earlier in the planning process. The strategic goals that followed from the critical issue statements developed by the planning committee are:

- Create structure with simplicity in our guiding documents and operating framework
- Identify projects that sub-committees or the Steering Committee (formerly named the White Clay Creek Watershed Management Executive Committee) would like to undertake which would require additional funding

- Continue to engage diverse stakeholders while narrowing our focus and finding our niche
- Develop a way to measure progress of projects (or outcomes) and effectively communicate successes and issues
- Foster the relationship with state/local/municipal entities for increased participation

Goals from the White Clay Creek Wild and Scenic Management Plan

- Improve and conserve water quality and water quantity
- Conserve open space, woodlands, wetlands and geologic features
- Protect native plant and animal species
- Encourage environmental education and watershed awareness
- Preserve cultural, historical and archaeological sites
- Enhance outdoor recreation opportunities

Development of Strategies for each Goal Statement

Ideas for strategy emerge from the earlier internal, external and market assessments -- especially the strengths and weaknesses identified in the internal assessment as well as the implications derived from the market and external assessments. A strategy is judged potentially effective if it does one or more of the following:

- Takes advantage of environmental opportunities
- Defends against environmental threats
- Leverages organizational competencies
- Corrects organizational shortcomings
- Offers some basis for future competitive advantage
- Counteracts forces eroding current competitive position

The strategic planning goals are different from the Management Plan goals in that the strategic planning goals are procedural in nature. While supporting the Management Plan goals, the strategic goals are more about “how” we are doing and “who” to target and less about “what” we are doing. The Management Plan goals on the other hand are “what” we do. The intersection of these two sets of goal statements is the direction that the WCWSP should consider in the next 3 years (2013-2016).

Draft Strategies for Strategic Plan Goal Statements

- Create structure with simplicity in our guiding documents and operating framework.
 - Formalize the operating plan, goals and procedures, and maintain a strong steering committee
 - Solidify 3 sub-committees with chairs that are committed to finding and funding projects (Open Space, Education, and Restoration)
 - Inform public and members publicizing the projects the sub-committees select

- Identify projects that sub-committees or the steering committee would like to undertake which would require additional funding.
 - Consider creating a project/grant application for interested entities to use for project submissions
 - Develop project goals for the two sub-committees Education and Restoration (Open space committee goals are within the Natural Lands Trust and National Park Service Cooperative Agreement document)

- Continue to engage diverse stakeholders while narrowing our focus and finding our niche.
 - Keep an active list of stakeholders and partners to engage (see Operations Manual)
 - Encourage the sub-committees to refine the niches of WCWSP restoration and education

- Develop a way to measure progress of projects (or outcomes) and effectively communicate successes and issues.
 - Engage the steering committee to help sub-committees education and restoration to set early targets
 - e.g. education # students served, # of programs supported, holes filled in Watershed Education curriculum in PA, DE
 - e.g. restoration # of acres or trees planted, water quality projects completed

- Foster the relationship with state/local/municipal entities for increased participation.
 - Regularly make contact with state/local/municipal officials
 - Develop and present WCWSP assistance capabilities to municipalities regarding TMDL and MS4 regulation