

LOWER FOX RIVER  
WATERSHED RECOVERY PLAN



# SHARED DECISION MAKING

TECHNICAL REPORT  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE KEEPERS OF THE FOX COUNCIL – A SYSTEM OF SHARED DECISION MAKING</b> .....	2
<b>BACKGROUND</b> .....	2
<b>PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT</b> .....	3
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE</b> .....	4
KEEPERS OF THE FOX PROGRAM.....	4
KEEPERS OF THE FOX COUNCIL.....	5
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE .....	6
STATE & FEDERAL AGENCIES, STATE & FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICIALS, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, PRIVATE FUNDERS, AND THE PUBLIC.....	7
TECHNICAL WORKGROUPS.....	7
ACTIVE IMPLEMENTERS .....	7
METRICS & DATA COLLECTION .....	8
TECHNICAL ANALYSIS & REPORTING.....	8
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.....	9
<b>FUTURE WORK</b> .....	9

## THE KEEPERS OF THE FOX COUNCIL – A SYSTEM OF SHARED DECISION MAKING

The Keepers of the Fox Watershed Recovery Plan reflects a long term, watershed-wide approach to water quality improvement which will transpire over the next 20 years. Coordination to achieve this vision requires a framework that supports a wide range of stakeholders working together to achieve common water quality goals.

Working within the Keepers of the Fox program, the Keepers of the Fox Council will serve as a steering committee and provide the accountability, consistency, and commitment needed to adaptively meet water quality goals throughout the 20 years of planned implementation and beyond.

### BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Alliance for the Great Lakes held a series of roundtable discussions focused on the recovery efforts underway in the Lower Fox River watershed. A leadership roundtable consisting of representatives from business and industry, local, state and federal government, academia, civic groups, non-profits, and county conservation departments met to discuss how conservation efforts could be boosted through a regional, cooperative approach. The immediate result was the formation of the Basin Leadership Council (BLC), a diverse group committed to achieving water quality in the Lower Fox River Basin through regional coordination and leadership and multi-sector participation. Together the BLC would develop a strategic approach, clear metrics for success, and serve as champions for the water quality improvement cause. The BLC set a 60% phosphorus reduction goal by 2040 and an interim target of a 30% reduction of total phosphorus loading by 2030 which align with the Lower Fox River TMDL goals and set a vision which states that *“Together by 2040, we will achieve clean water, and help to create healthy communities, and resilient economies through coordinated regional collaboration in the Lower Fox River and Green Bay.”*

Concurrently, the Alliance for the Great Lakes and the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance facilitated discussions with the county executives from Brown, Outagamie, Winnebago, and Fond du Lac counties along with leadership of the Oneida Nation and garnered their verbal support for spearheading this water quality initiative across the basin. In March 2019, the county executives and the chairman of the Oneida Nation signed the Northeast Wisconsin Water Quality Pact<sup>1</sup>, agreeing to work together and prioritize the reduction of nutrient pollution entering their waterways.

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<sup>1</sup> Schneider, D (2019, March 5). Cleaner Water: County Leaders Commit to Prioritize Health of Green Bay. *Green Bay Press Gazette* <https://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/news/2019/03/05/water-county-executives-vow-prioritize-green-bay-lake-winnepago-phosphorous-runoff-brown-outagamie/3067324002/>

A key first step following the Pact creation was to develop a Lower Fox River Management Plan to serve as the regional roadmap and measurement system for reducing nutrient pollution and achieving clean water goals in the basin over the long term. In 2020, the Alliance for the Great Lakes and the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Office of Great Waters to develop a plan that utilized the BLC as the steering committee for a watershed scale recovery effort. Together, Outagamie County, Brown County, and the Oneida Nation drafted an Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement to support regional coordination and plan development with coordination by the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance and committed financial resources to fund staff support for this effort.

## PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Planning began in earnest in late 2020, with workgroups formed and dedicated to key areas identified by the BLC - Shared Decision Making, Implementation, Shared Measurements, and Funding & Policy. The Shared Decision Making workgroup consisted of core BLC members who set forth to reimagine what a regional steering committee could look like to best leverage and guide the work being advanced by a Lower Fox River recovery plan. The consulting firm CoastWise Partners (CWP), experts in designing watershed management program structures and facilitating development of collaborative watershed governance structure approaches, was brought on to provide their expertise in forming and maintaining systems of long term decision making in impaired watersheds and to facilitate exploration and discussion on what system would be best for the Lower Fox.

CWP conducted fact finding interviews with 21 Shared Decision Making workgroup members to garner feedback on where progress had been made and where work was still needed to ensure a robust watershed management plan would become reality. Results of the interviews were compiled and shared anonymously with the workgroup, including key takeaways:

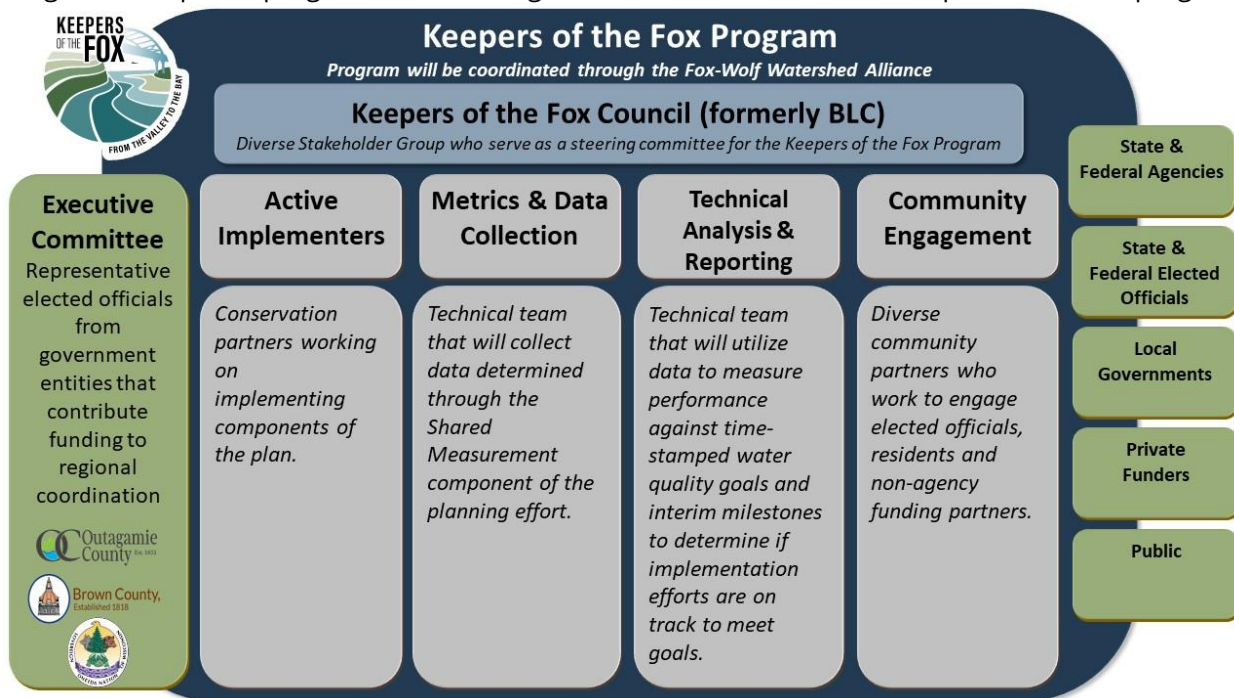
- Group recognized the need to take a more organized approach toward shared decision making
- Group felt well-positioned to move forward with finalizing a regional, collaborative watershed approach to recovery efforts
- Group provided strong support for bringing more partners to the table to ensure efforts are representative of all engaged and impacted organizations, agencies, and businesses

Sourcing from successful models used in other watershed recovery efforts (Chesapeake Bay, Peconic Estuary, Tampa Bay Estuary and more), a structure that

consisted of a steering committee (Keepers of the Fox Council), underlying technical workgroups, and an executive committee consisting of county executives and Oneida Nation leadership were proposed with oversight and overall coordination provided by the Keepers of the Fox program housed within the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance. The BLC was united in their support for this proposed structure (Figure 1). To maintain continuity with the overall recovery effort, the Basin Leadership Council was renamed the Keepers of the Fox Council and the roles and responsibilities of each program component were further delineated as described below.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Figure 1. Proposed programmatic and organizational structure for the Keepers of the Fox program



## KEEPERS OF THE FOX PROGRAM

The Keepers of the Fox Program, coordinated through the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance and led by the Lower Fox Watershed Program Director, will utilize the Lower Fox River Watershed Recovery Plan as a guide for long term recovery efforts across the basin. With support from the Keepers of the Fox Council and Executive Committee, the program will:

- Financially support a full-time Keepers of the Fox Program Director to coordinate the ongoing recovery effort
- Advocate for recovery efforts by building community support for plan implementation



- Support plan implementation by coordinating technical workgroups, engagement with active partners, and overall implementation efforts as needed
- Ensure annual tracking and reporting of activities and efforts by all partners are completed to increase accountability, transparency, and public awareness of recovery efforts
- Expand outreach regarding recovery effort progress and challenges through media channels and public events to maintain and build support for ongoing efforts
- Seek and secure technical and financial resources to advance and accelerate watershed recovery
- Coordinate an annual basin event in partnership with other regional recovery initiatives including the Winnebago Waterways program

### KEEPERS OF THE FOX COUNCIL

The Keepers of the Fox Council (Council) brings together representatives from a diverse group of entities vested in water quality improvement goals through a variety of means, in addition to individuals who are involved in the active implementation of conservation efforts. Operating under the Keepers of the Fox Mission statement - *Build and sustain support for collaborative water quality initiatives that provide environmental, economic, and quality of life benefits to the individuals and communities of the Lower Fox River watershed* – the Council will mobilize efforts that benefit the watershed beyond clean water. Guided by updates from technical workgroups and the Keepers of the Fox Program Director, the Council will:

- Build support within own stakeholder group and promote plan adoption among local governments, NGOs, businesses and state agencies
- Monitor plan implementation through regular reports from technical workgroups
- Support recovery efforts where needed
- Make recommendations to Executive Committee, local governments, state and federal agencies
- Promote annual community event
- Review and recommend approval of annual Keepers of the Fox program budget and workplan
- Provide minimum of 3 Council Members to serve on Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance Board of Directors to provide basin wide connection back to Council

Anticipated Keepers of the Fox Council members include:

*Voting Members*

- Outagamie County
- Brown County
- Oneida Nation
- City of Green Bay
- City of Appleton
- 2 Non-permitted Townships
- 2 Additional MS4 Reps
- 2-3 Municipal Wastewater Reps
- 3-4 Industrial Wastewater Reps
- 3-5 Farmers
- 2-3 NGOs
- 1-3 Recreational User Group Reps
- 1-2 Business Rep
- 2-4 Community Leaders

*Advisory Members*

- UW-Green Bay
- State Agencies
  - WDNR
  - DATCP
- State Elected Officials or Their Representatives
- Federal Agencies
  - NRCS
  - U.S. Fish & Wildlife
- Federal Elected Officials or Their Representatives

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee is comprised of representative elected officials from government entities that contribute funding to regional coordination. The Executive Committee will:

- Provide input on the Program Director's annual workplan as set by the Keepers of the Fox Council
- Receive regular updates from the Program Director and recommendations from the Keepers of the Fox Council & report back to their respective governing body
- Support conservation efforts
- Work through the NE WI Water Quality Pact to promote conservation work upstream of the Fox River.
- Provide annual financial support to the Keepers of the Fox program

The Executive Committee supports, yet is independent of the Keepers of the Fox program and Council. While funding from Outagamie County, Brown County and the Oneida Nation provide the base funding for the Program Director, the program work is guided by the Council.

This separation will ensure that the Recovery effort is guided by science and diverse stakeholders, not solely by funders, eliminating the concern that efforts could end due to changing leadership within a single stakeholder group.

Should Outagamie County, Brown County or the Oneida Nation no longer find value in the work conducted by the Keepers of the Fox program, the Executive Committee or an individual entity within the committee can determine to no longer contribute to the effort but the program and the work being advanced by the Council remains intact.

Anticipated Executive Committee members include representation from each entity including:

- County Executive / Tribal Chairman
- County Board President or Designee
- County Land Conservation Committee Chair or Designee
- County / Tribal Representation on the Keepers of the Fox Council

### STATE & FEDERAL AGENCIES, STATE & FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICIALS, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, PRIVATE FUNDERS, AND THE PUBLIC

The Keepers of the Fox Council will engage with agencies, elected officials, governments, funders, and the general public through a variety of targeted communications and will look to engage these groups whenever feasible. The Council will provide program updates and recommendations to individual audiences and technical workgroups will create materials, host events, and communicate through newsletters, social media, and other channels to provide program updates. Opportunities exist for representation for these groups as part of the Keepers of the Fox Council structure and participation across all groups will be solicited.

### TECHNICAL WORKGROUPS

#### ACTIVE IMPLEMENTERS

The Active Implementers Workgroups are comprised of conservation partners working on implementing components of the plan. These workgroups provide updates on practice adoption and project work that allow the Keepers of the Fox Program to track and report progress toward goals and milestones. They receive updates from other sectors that correlates implementation on the landscape with environmental, ecological, and economic impacts. Four sub-workgroups make up the Active Implementers: Nutrient Reduction – Agriculture, Nutrient Reduction – Urban MS4, Nutrient Reduction – Wastewater, and Habitat. Each sub-workgroup will focus on securing funding to advance their portion of the nutrient reduction or habitat implementation efforts, work with property owners, and research and pilot innovative solutions. These sub-workgroups will work independently but receive updates from partner sub-workgroups to leverage cooperative efforts toward common goals.



Anticipated Members of Each Workgroup Include:

*Nutrient Reduction - Agriculture*

- Outagamie County
- Brown County
- Oneida Nation
- DATCP
- NRCS
- Farmers
- Co-ops
- Processors

*Habitat*

- Outagamie County
- Brown County
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife
- Ducks Unlimited
- WDNR

*Nutrient Reduction - Wastewater*

- Lower Fox Wastewater Operators
- WDNR Wastewater Program

*Nutrient Reduction - Wastewater*

- Lower Fox Members of Northeast Wisconsin Stormwater Consortium (NEWSC)
- WDNR Stormwater Program

**METRICS & DATA COLLECTION**

The Metrics & Data Collection workgroup is the technical team that will collect, gather, analyze, and report data that will be used to generate annual and five year reports. This group will also work to secure sustained funding needed to collect data across the watershed that is sufficient to tell the story of watershed recovery.

Anticipated members include representation from:

- UW-Green Bay
- UW-Milwaukee
- NEW Water
- USGS
- WDNR

**TECHNICAL ANALYSIS & REPORTING**

The Technical Analysis & Reporting workgroup will utilize data collected by the Metrics & Data workgroup and measure performance against time-stamped water quality goals and interim milestones to determine if implementation efforts are on track to meet goals or if a recommendation needs to be made for adaptation. These recommendations will be presented to the Keepers of the Fox Council at large for discussion and action. The workgroup will review annual and five year reports and provide the necessary translation and storytelling to be used for non-scientific communication. This group has technical knowledge across a broad range of implementation efforts and will consist of representatives who are already involved in the work of the Keepers of the Fox Council. Care will be taken to select individuals

who have a technical understanding but are able to correlate implementation to the metrics and communication styles that resonate with non-conservation audiences.

Anticipated members include representation from:

- Science/research organizations
- Implementer workgroups
- Agency partners
- Policy advocates
- Additional stakeholders as needed

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Community Engagement Workgroup, comprised of a diverse group of community partners, will work to engage residents, businesses, and nontraditional funding partners. Members will promote Keepers of the Fox in the community, aid in development or review of outreach materials, aid in translation of data to non-scientific audiences, and assist in event coordination.

Anticipated members include representation from:

- Green Bay Area of Concern Community Action Committee
- Lower Fox and Green Bay Focused Non-Profits
- Community Development Partners
- Community Leaders

### **FUTURE WORK**

The new Keepers of the Fox structure will be fully formalized in 2023. This next phase of the process is anticipated to include:

- Identification, selection, and commitment of workgroup members to participate in the advancement of workgroup recovery. Each member will be asked to show their commitment by signing a workgroup charter<sup>2</sup> that specifically lays out key goals, specific responsibilities, and member expectations for their workgroup.
- Formalization of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement between Outagamie County, Brown County, and the Oneida Nation. The Keepers of the Fox Council structure was presented to the County Executives and Tribal Chairman with verbal approval and further discussion with County and Tribal boards is anticipated to lead to a finalized formal commitment to participation in the next phase.

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<sup>2</sup> [Keepers of the Fox Council Charter](#)

- Continued refinement of the process for decision on for watershed-scale matters. While a standardized decision-making process is included in each workgroup charter, we acknowledge that there may be bumps in the road as we explore this new way of making decisions to benefit the watershed as a whole. We are particularly sensitive to the need for decision making procedures regarding finances, especially as more collective funding resources become available.