



2025 Year-End Report

2025 was the third year of the Watertown Waterways Improvement Program (WWIP) since the initial public meeting was held August 30, 2023. Jefferson County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) continued to work with landowners from the volunteer list within Reachshed 28 to install one of four of the provided conservation practices: harvestable buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways, and roof runoff structures. Though much work was performed communicating to landowners and modeling practices, it was determined that the potential trades were not beneficial to the City of Watertown. This was both due to the high price per pound of phosphorus and the farmer unwilling to change their operations due to field conditions, Snap+ deficiencies, and present farming operations. Therefore, there were no credits generated by a new conservation practice in 2025 and no trade was completed.

The modelling completed on one landowner's land in 2025 found that no-till fields already have minimal runoff since there's no tillage happening throughout the fields. Fields that have no tillage generally have much less erosion and associated pollutant loading of phosphorus and total suspended solids. This was proven when modelling various scenarios using Snap+ in a no-till system to add a filter strip or harvestable buffer to the downslope side of the field. A thirty foot wide, 2.9 acre filter strip would have been the least expensive option and would cost roughly \$1,500 per pound of phosphorus reduction.

The other landowner and their proposed field would have worked well within program requirements but didn't work out due to DNR guidelines and Snap+ deficiencies. The proposed field was an 80 acre field with multiple aspects (slopes facing multiple directions) and complied with all NR151 standards. However, DNR and Snap+ technical team said the whole field must be broken down into separate fields that splits the different drainage aspects which created 3-4 different fields. Due to the predominant soils and predefined attributes in Snap+, the fields could not meet the "tolerable soil loss," which is defined as the amount of tolerable soil losses as determined by the soil type. After splitting the 80-acre field into smaller fields, the only way to achieve the tolerable soil loss would be to change the farming operation's tillage practice and introduce contour farming. These changes to the farmer's operations were unfortunately too drastic for them to consider moving forward with a trade. Also, to make this trade financially viable for Watertown, the



harvestable buffer size would have to be less acreage (lower width) which made it less appealing for the farmer to move forward with a trade.

2025 Highlights:

- Continued collaborative efforts between City of Watertown, Jefferson County LWCD, and Rock River Coalition to discuss program features and work through challenges. Several meetings throughout 2025 were held.
- An article was written by Garrett Hopkins of the Rock River Coalition and was printed in their newsletter along with DNR's MS4 newsletter. The article was written to showcase the 2024 trade and discuss program features.
- Continued discussions with DNR to help consider various trades, Snap+ issues, and various WQT Guidance questions that arise.
- Watertown and LWCD worked with DNR on various WQT Guidance components and offered comments to the proposed new guidance draft.
- Discussed program future of using volunteers versus using a targeted approach. LWCD will continue to work with volunteers, but they have developed a plan to locate good projects (by looking at variables such as fields adjacent to waterways, field slope, tillage) and initiate conversations with the landowners.
- LWCD wrote a letter to all interested participants to give program updates and let potential participants know the process is moving slower than anticipated and to reach out with any questions.
- Presentations on the program were given at the following: Northcentral Wisconsin Stormwater Coalition meeting, Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc conference, and Waukesha County Stormwater Workshop.
- Several inspections were conducted for the practice installed in 2024 to confirm the harvestable buffer is functioning and the landowner is approved for annual payment.
- Watertown paid LWCD a total of \$10,941.48 to implement the program, which was less than budgeted for 2025. This is due to no trade being completed hence no updates needed to the existing WQT Plan.