

**Board Retreat and Planning Session Notes**  
Northwoods and Waters of the St. Croix Heritage Area  
Heartwood Resort – Trego, WI  
October 26, 2023

**Present:**

Board members: Dallas Eggers, Marty Harding, Melanie Kleiss, Jason Laumann, Carol Lebreck, Lynne Moratzka, Bill Neuman, Julie Smendzuik-O'Brien, Gayle Prest, Dick Wolleat

Staff: Alyssa Auten, Monica Zachay

Advisors: Chris Stein, John Velin, Bill O'Brien

Guests: Tom and Debbie King

**1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

**2. MISSION REVIEW**

Current version, most used: *"NWW unites the watershed on behalf of the natural, cultural, and historic resources we share."*

Suggestions/Discussion:

- NWW vs. North Woods and Waters vs. St. Croix Heritage Area – what do people identify with most? "North Woods" is very common and sometimes can be confusing to what it is, can get in the way of branding.
- Community is united rather than watershed (a geographic area), NWW works on behalf of communities.
- Another version of the mission specifies the "people of the watershed."
- RECIPE: recreation, education, conservation, interpretation, preservation, economic development
- Include/identify St. Croix River Watershed
- Short and concise is better.

Options to consider:

- *"The St. Croix Heritage Area unites communities in appreciating the watershed's unique natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources."*
- *"The St. Croix Heritage Area unites communities in appreciating and celebrating the unique natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources of the St. Croix Watershed."*
- *Instead of appreciating or celebrating, could also consider supporting, uplifting, sustaining, or caring for.*

### 3. COVER STORY VISIONING EXERCISE (5-year horizon)

Small group breakouts (four groups), cover story visioning exercise – Create a front-page news article that will appear about NWW in the future. The target for the “publication” is the Pioneer Press in five years.

#### Group 1 results:

- *“NWW of the St. Croix Heritage Area Releases 20 Grants to Local Community Organizations.”*
  - Got designated
  - Completed management plan
  - System of tracking economic impact
  - Solidified partnerships
  - Obtained tribal support
  - Amazing RFP, overwhelming response
  - Kept ED
  - Unceasing volunteer work
- Legislator Quotes: *“I thought this was a great idea first time I heard about it.” “Me too”*
- Grant projects: Exhibits, tours, signage, speakers, car tour, cultural events, tribal demonstrations (ricing), publishing recipe book, arts and music promotion, curriculum, field trips, storytelling, St. Croix Tribal museum, preservation museum climate-controlled treasures

#### Group 2 results:

- *“St. Croix Comes ALIVE! NWWSCHA Celebrates Placing of 50 Interpretive Markers in the St. Croix Watershed”*
  - Designation in 2025 as NHA
  - Grant program, passport program to encourage engagement.
  - Partnerships with counties, universities, local communities, etc.
  - Future – Join us! Identify your site

#### Group 3 results:

- *“15 Year-old Dream Becomes a Reality”*
  - Key Steps:
    - Community support and buy-in
    - Congressional approval
    - Grass-roots partnerships
    - Locally led, local coordinating entity
  - Facts and Data:
    - No additional rules or regulation
    - Private property rights protected
    - No federal ownership of land associated with NHA designation
    - \$500k federal dollars leveraged into \$1 million (1:1 match)
    - Part of a national system of sites
    - All organizations benefit within the NHA

**Group 4 results:**

- *“International Logging Olympics Coming to NWW St. Croix Heritage Area”*
  - First Ever, support & co-host by Wisconsin County Forest Association
  - Partners: loggers, Weyerhaeuser, NW Foundation
  - Actors: Hayward, Stillwater, Hudson, Prescott, County & State historical societies, engaged community execs, cities
  - Olympic style event – logging
  - Events throughout watershed – forging, races, re-enactment, museum visits, storytelling, control teams on ice, naming the river, music and poetry of the river, museum visits, innovations – logging displays
  - Homesteads run by females while males away – Wannagons, river competitions, best cooks & pie makers
  - Overall story of exploitive past turned into sustainable model of forestry management.

**4. GOAL SETTING EXERCISE (3-5 year horizon)**

Consider the mission and vision ideas from pervious exercises to draft goals for the next 3-5 years. What are the results we need to achieve our mission? Each person drafted 2-3 goal statements to share with the group. SMART Goals were written on post-it notes and grouped by emerging themes.

▪ **Communities/Partnerships**

- Large industry (e.g, national resource manufacturing) discussion – create powerful advocates within the NHA. How can these industries benefit? Within 2 years. Position statement publicized.
- Engage Tribal authorities within NHA – outline possible cultural/heritage education opportunities: demonstrations, festivals, storytelling. Within 3 years. Tribal announcements, individual/joint?
- Visit craft organization events/tours and advocate for NHA affiliation – within 2 years, create an “affiliate of the NHA” designation with social media exposure.
- Discover the interests of four Tribes & design collaborations (e.g., Museum for St. Croix Band).
- Local historical societies begin to tie local stories into the regional heritage story.
- Facilitate community interactions to identify benefits of NHA for them/their local areas.
- Contact and inform 18 county execs/boards about NWW-SCHA & opportunities.
- Identify community groups, e.g. Kiwanis, Lions, scouts, Vets, Legion
- We will have defined partnerships and (through a membership plan) have 100 organization partners on board.
- Network of local communities and assets ready today

- Increase partnerships with more:
  - Educational orgs.
  - Historical societies (state, county, independent)
  - Environmental organizations.
- **Funding**
  - We will have secured sufficient funding to maintain and expand our staff (ED, program, marketing) and offer programming.
  - By 2024, secure a reliable revenue stream to support staff and projects, and pursuit of federal designation.
  - Achieve and maintain financial stability to support staff & programs through designation, management and for our next (post-5 year) phase.
  - Achieve long-term financial health.
  - Find “angel investors” among St. Croix philanthropists & Donors – ask for ongoing financial support.
  - Watershed communities have technical and financial asst. from NWW – leverages to more than \$1,000,000 annually.
  - NWW is stable financially with supporting organizational infrastructure: board staff, volunteers, community leaders.
  - By 2025, increase financial support from households, foundations, businesses by X%.
  - Decide if NHA needs a “public facing” home once designated? If so, plan for this home (where might it be located?). Conduct a cost/benefit analysis.
  - Secure 500K of non-federal funding match.
  - The NWW in-kind donation levels outpace actual cash funding.
  - Grant management tracking system – money in, money out, audited.
- **Organizational Development**
  - Mission, name, and branding are well developed and watershed-wide recognition is improved.
  - Create “models” for working groups to identify ways to move ideas forward – outreach to existing organizations with areas – historic, cultural, recreation, natural.
  - Increase membership volunteers and workers.
  - Full board and fully functioning committees and advisors
  - NWW will have full component of active board members (17) plus tribal representatives (4).
  - Grow organizational infrastructure to a fully seated board, clear and relevant policies/procedures, and strong volunteer base.
  - Identify individuals who can provide local leadership for key goals. Create local committees to engage broader community.
  - Build organization structure for maintaining partnerships, recruiting board and committee members, ongoing storytelling in and about the watershed communities.

- Economic committee is well-established: leadership defined, work areas underway, with 50-100% representation throughout the watershed.
- Refine advisory role and list.
  
- **Programs & Services**
  - LYNX becomes used through watershed.
  - By December 2024, Program Committee fully functional and multiple events – including three successfully completed events like the Heritage Highlight event held in November 2023.
  - Create a Passport Committee within 1 year, outline features, eligibility of groups/sites create and publicize a marketing plan within 2 years.
  - Host fun events for younger crowds – cooperate with Birkebeiner for non-snow events (e.g., paddle on St. Croix, marathon along trails)
  - We will have increased our participation in our programs by 50%.
  - In 2024, host 5-6 targeted community engagement events/activities in strategic locations in the watershed.
  
- **Federal Designation**
  - Work with SCVs State and Local Governments to obtain on-going support for NHA Designation. Might these governments financially support the NHA – match funds.
  - Complete a management plan with meaningful partner involvement.
  - By 2027, management plan approved by NPS.
  
- **Executive Director & Staff**
  - Clarify the role of new executive director with board and with committees. Clarify expectations and responsibilities for board and executive director relative to financial stability and designation.
  - By March 2024, Executive Director position funded for additional 12 months.
  - By 2025, increase staff with:
    - Fundraiser
    - Quadrant financial liaisons
    - Marketing and PR staff
  
- **Public Awareness**
  - By the end of 2024, increase community awareness of NWW and the NHA program.
  - NWW of the St. Croix becomes known throughout the watershed.
  - Raise public awareness of the NWW.
  - Posters
  - YouTube video

Once all goals were grouped by theme, each person received 3 dot stickers to vote on their top priority. Top three priorities are:

- Organization Development
- Funding
- Communities and Partnerships

Note: Federal designation was a top priority as well. The group decided not to select federal designation for further discussion at the retreat because the Legislative Team is already moving forward with a strategy – focused on gaining support in northwestern Wisconsin from the county forestry association.

## 5. **CORE STRATEGIES (1-2 year horizon)**

Small group breakouts by top three priority areas: Organizational Development, Funding, Community/Partnerships. Each group brainstormed and prioritized strategies – How do we achieve set goals in the next 1-2 years?

### **Funding Goal Group Work:**

- Financial Result/Goal:
  - Financial stability and viability
  - Adequate funding for the next two years
  - Donor relations system – Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
    - Donor appreciation
    - Time & Thank you
- Strategies:
  - Grants (seasonal)
    - Foundations
    - Government
  - Individual donor cultivation
    - Angel investors
    - Coffee/wine and cheese – house party
    - Gala/Fundraiser – spring/summertime
    - Targeted campaigns/mailings – new/cold
    - Repeat asks
  - Business sponsorship –
    - Breweries, Jack links, Xcel, banks, real estate groups
  - Fun events/fundraisers
    - 5k, paddle boards, ski race, breweries - \$1 pint night
  - Overall need for more branding and how we talk about national approval/heritage – change designation language to a story.
  - Promotion – marketing & visitor guide
  - Earned income.
    - Socks
    - Notecards

- Stock options – check through the St. Croix Valley Foundation (they take 5% for administration = well worth it!)
- Board giving/pledges – Need to have 100% participation.

### **Communities & Partners Goal Group Work:**

Five (Six?) strategies (underlined) within three categories; other details are ideas for tasks.

- Outreach
  - Outreach to new organizations/partners
    - Inform about NWW and potential benefits.
    - Ask for ideas about how they see NWW could benefit them.
    - Ask for ideas about how they want to participate to support the heritage area.
  - Outreach to previous (feasibility signers) and existing partners
    - Update
    - Ask for input on potential benefits to them, other connections we should make, etc.
  - Outreach to local, state, and federal government
    - Educate
    - Get/maintain support.
- Presentations
  - Presentations by staff (Monica)
    - Should be done regularly or frequently, no less than once per month on average.
    - Larger-profile, designation-focused meetings & presentations
  - Presentations by Board & other advocates
    - Coordinate with staff – must check in with Monica before doing a presentation.
- Materials for outreach and presentations
  - One-pager
    - Consider creating specific addenda tailored to particular types of groups/orgs.
  - Presentations
    - Create scripts/outlines and slides for board members and advocates.
    - Perhaps a couple different lengths to choose from e.g. 4-5 slides, 9-10 slides, etc.
  - Poster
    - Use eye-catching photo from somewhere in the watershed.
    - Post at schools, post office, social hubs
    - Best with a specific call to action
    - If successful, could create collectible editions.
    - Best suited for a board member to take the lead (Dallas?), not staff.

**Organizational Development Goal Group Work:**

- Evaluate organization structure and revitalize volunteers.
  - Assess committee and what is needed.
  - Recruit diverse volunteers – skills, backgrounds, geography.
  - Revise our advisor list and rules for roles of the advisers.
  - Follow up with org committee to draft recruitment strategy – create recruiting plan for full Board in December.
  - URGENT need to recruit, only have 12 board members, 5 spots available + 4 more reserved for tribes.
  - Need time at a board meeting to review expectations of the board/advisors.
  - Review and gather policies.
- Board (5 + 4 tribal)
  - Development, republicans, elected, northwestern quadrant of the watershed.
- Advisors
- Committees
  - Communications, Education & Outreach (legislative, tribal outreach)
  - Finance, Development & Fundraising
  - Board & Organization Development
  - Economic Impact – Need to define - Is this a working group? Or an actual committee?
- Volunteers:
  - Engage youth
  - Use every opportunity to publicize
  - MN Corps
  - Interns
  - Catchafire

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Monica draft a couple page document (mission, goals, & strategies) – for December BOD meeting.
- Committee work to flesh out some work plans for each core goal areas.