

MONROE COUNTY
A POLITICAL SUBDIVISION OF THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

LITTLE LA CROSSE WATERSHED INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCY INITIATIVE

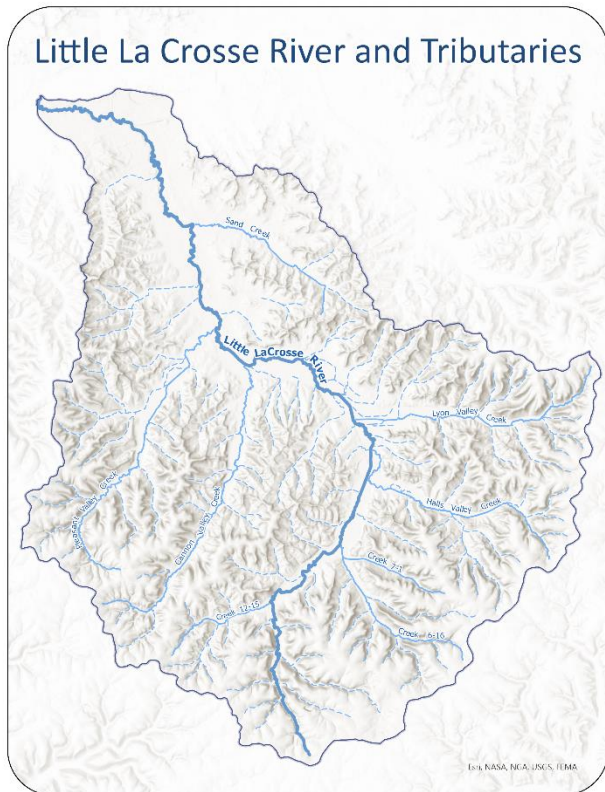
In partnership with the Monroe County Land Conservation Department and the Monroe County towns of Portland, Jefferson, Leon, Wells and Sparta, the Monroe County Highway Department respectfully requests funding through the *Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-Saving Transportation* program (FON 693JJ323NF00013) to assess and plan infrastructure improvements in the Little La Crosse Watershed in Monroe County, Wisconsin.

The project is proposed as an innovative and collaborative initiative that would address recurring storm-related damage to transportation system assets through a comprehensive watershed approach including restoration of riparian systems and natural habitats, management of land use, stabilization of streambanks and other measures designed to mitigate the velocity of stormwater upstream of critical infrastructure, along with the construction of more resilient roadways and crossing structures.

A *PROTECT* planning grant would facilitate a comprehensive analysis of all surface transportation assets in the Little La Crosse Watershed and determine the scope of future design and construction projects and stormwater management strategies, and focus on building infrastructure that will be resilient to the extreme weather and flooding events that have resulted in widespread, recurring and costly damage to highways, roads, bridges and other infrastructure within the watershed over the past several years. *PROTECT* funding would complement, advance and build upon the several initiatives that Monroe County has been pursuing to address the impacts of severe weather.

Located in the rugged Coulee Region of Southwest Wisconsin, the Little La Crosse Watershed spans 101,943 acres in southwestern Monroe County. The watershed is generally bounded by State Highway 33 and County Highway U to the south and Interstate Highway 90 to the north, with steep rocky ridges defining the western and eastern boundaries.

Rising in the Village of Cashton, the Little La Crosse River flows northwesterly 17.8 miles to its confluence with the La Crosse River southwest of the City of Sparta. The upper half of the Little La Crosse is classified as a Class I trout stream as it cascades from rocky crests before slowing to a gradual meander through the fertile valley floor. The lower half of the river is considered impaired due to warmer temperatures, sedimentation and phosphorus loading.





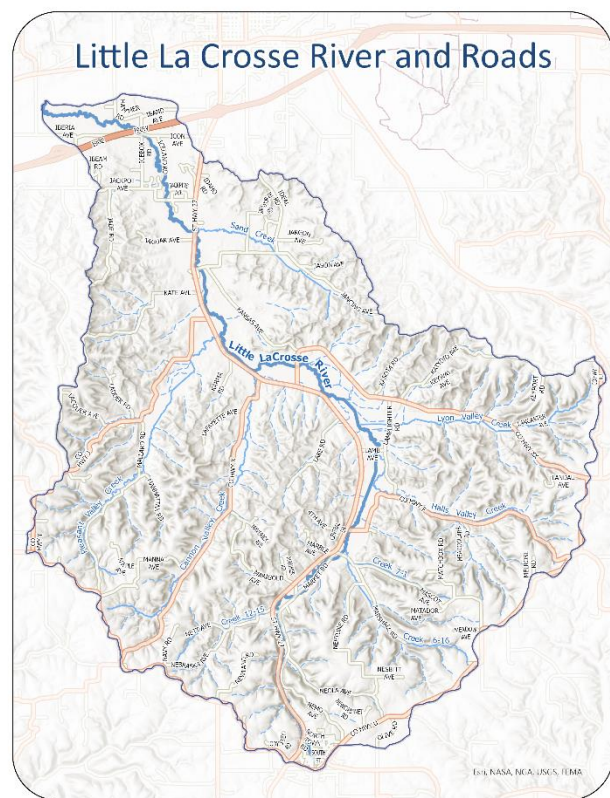
The Little La Crosse River is nurtured by numerous tributaries rising from craggy ridges dominated by hardwood forests and flowing through valley farmland below. Streams within the Little La Crosse Watershed are actively managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as a popular public fishery.

Principle tributaries include Sand Creek, Lyon Valley Creek, Halls Valley Creek, Creek 7-1, Creek 6-16, Creek 12-15 (Russell Valley), Cannon Valley Creek and Pleasant Valley Creek, along with numerous un-named streams and creeks.

State Highway 27 bisects the watershed, generally following the alignment of the river from Cashton to Sparta. County Highways XX, F, X and J extend from the ridgelines and intersect Highway on the valley floor. County Highway XX extends the length of Lyons Valley, Highway F the Halls Valley, Highway X the Cannon Valley and Highway J the Pleasant Valley.

Dozens of town roads intersect Highway 27 and the county highways across the length and width of the watershed, with many following the alignment of, or crossing, smaller streams that discharge to the creeks.

Due to their extreme gradient and close proximity to creeks and streams, the county highways and town roads are susceptible to erosion, damage and failure during heavy or extended rainfall and spring snowmelt.



Like much of the Coulee Region, Monroe County has experienced recurring extreme weather and high-water events over the past decade, resulting in over 33 million dollars in flood damage expenses between 2010 and 2019. The Little La Crosse Watershed suffered most notably in 2017 and 2018 when torrential rainfalls struck the area causing well in excess of one million dollars in damage to highways and roads alone, with many structures damaged in those successive years.



County Highway F, Halls Valley



Market Street, Town of Portland



Mariposa Avenue, Town of Portland



County Highway F, Halls Valley

Following those devastating events, Monroe County recovered, repaired and rebuilt, and then got busy researching, debating and planning strategies to mitigate the effects of extreme events in the future. In 2019, the *Monroe County Climate Change Task Force* was established which has spawned numerous collaborative efforts focused on community preparedness including installation of real-time stream monitoring stations in flood-prone locations. Also, in 2021, the Land Conservation Department began an ambitious effort to inventory and assess all road-stream crossings. The Monroe County Highway Department also continued its Infrastructure Asset Inventory program, which collects primary data on all assets including crossing structures.



Beginning in 2021 and continuing in 2023, the Monroe County Land Conservation Department is conducting a Road Stream Crossing Inventory and Assessment with the assistance of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and funding from Trout Unlimited and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The Inventory & Assessment project has evaluated nearly 550 road-stream crossings throughout Monroe County, including the Little La Crosse Watershed, for fish passage and flood resiliency using criteria from the Great Lakes Stream Crossing Inventory.

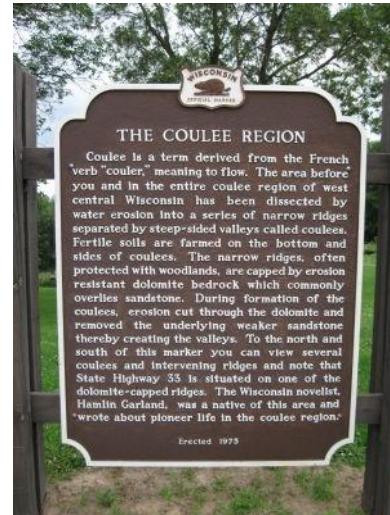
Many of the crossing structures, in addition to inadequate hydraulic capacity and structural integrity, do not permit natural stream behaviors, resulting in upstream stagnation and downstream erosion, bank instability and debris storage, and also restrict the passage of fish and other aquatic organisms.

The project would identify stream crossings and other structures within the watershed that are deficient in either design or construction and cannot be sustained during the type of extreme weather and high-water events recently experienced. Subsequent design and construction projects will apply current structural and hydraulic standards and will result in superior performance and resiliency.

Another objective of the project would be to restore stream connectivity and natural habitats and encourage natural stream behaviors, which will also benefit efforts to reduce the volume and velocity of stormwater carried by the stream. Outfall treatments will be installed as necessary to ensure that water is discharged through the structures in a manner that complements downstream efforts to manage the effect of large rainfall events. Appropriate design and placement of outfall treatments will also support efforts to improve soil stability and water quality of the watershed.

As noted above, the Little La Crosse Watershed is bounded to the south by State Highway 33. State Highway 33 also serves as the northerly boundary of the famed Coon Creek Watershed.

In 1935, following years of recurring catastrophic floods, residents of this area established the Coon Creek Watershed with the ideal of an “over-all” program of erosion control. It was later determined that a more expansive and comprehensive effort would be necessary to realize their objectives, and they sought the federal government’s assistance.



Legendary forester, conservationist, author, teacher and Wisconsin native Aldo Leopold was influential in the early efforts to preserve and restore the Coon Creek Watershed.



Its origin dating to the late 1950's, the U.S. Soil Conservation Service's Coon Creek Watershed Work Plan was the first of its kind in the nation. The project was a cooperative effort by the La Crosse, Monroe and Vernon County Conservation Districts, several towns, property owners and area residents.

Just as pioneer residents and county and local governments of the Coulee Region organized to restore the Coon Creek Watershed, a new generation of leaders are striving for similar success in the Little La Crosse Watershed. The proposed *PROTECT* project is being pursued to provide integrity and resiliency to the public roadways within the watershed and to also enhance the natural environments that, in addition to their benefit to the structural stability of infrastructure will also serve the objectives of watershed management, habitat restoration and water quality enhancement.

Securing the fiscal resources and support necessary to implement the Little La Crosse Watershed Infrastructure Resiliency Initiative is a high priority for the local governments with jurisdiction over the infrastructure within the watershed, for the area residents who depend upon those roads and highways, and for recreationists who fish in the creeks and streams and hike the area trails.

With the many community-based collaborative efforts already in progress, and with solid and enduring partnerships established with the towns of Portland, Jefferson, Leon, Wells and Sparta and other stakeholders, Monroe County is uniquely qualified and prepared to expand our efforts with the Little La Crosse Watershed Infrastructure Resiliency Initiative. We welcome your support.

Thank you.