

## 5 AGRICULTURAL, NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES PLAN

The Town of Onalaska has developed goals, policies and actions to manage and protect its important agricultural, natural and cultural resources. Many recommended actions may require that the Town work with La Crosse County, neighboring municipalities, the WI DNR, U.S. FWS, and/or others to implement management and protection policies.

**Goal 1: Preserve the Town of Onalaska’s natural and agricultural resources - including productive agricultural land, the bluffs, prairies, scenic views, waterways, wetlands, woodlands and wildlife habitat – for this and future generations.**

### Objectives, Policies & Actions

**1-1:** Protect environmentally sensitive areas to preserve natural resources, support and grow the local economy, maintain a high quality of life, and promote the Town’s identity as a wonderful place to live and visit.

**Action 1-1a:** Create a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program to compensate willing property owners for not developing their land; the land may be environmentally sensitive, productive farmland, important woodlands or bluffs, provide special scenic qualities or be otherwise culturally significant.

**Action 1-1b:** Require the protection of existing vegetation on new development sites to the greatest extent possible to minimize soil erosion during and after construction. This includes protecting existing stands of mature trees.

**Action 1-1c:** Work with La Crosse County and relevant agencies to continue to update the Environmental Features Map to show environmentally sensitive areas such as threatened and endangered species habitats, wetlands, lakes, rivers, streams, floodplains, woodlands, remnant prairies/grasslands, steep slopes and bluffs. Require these features to be accurately depicted on all site plans, certified survey maps, preliminary plats and final plats.

**Action 1-1d:** Promote conservation, compact development, especially in the coulee areas and on Brice Prairie. This means clustering new buildings and protecting environmentally sensitive or scenic areas.

- Action 1-1e:** Support other levels of government and private entities in preserving and acquiring natural features for appropriate public use and protection.
- Action 1-1f:** Discourage disruptive development on ridge tops, which is visible for many miles and damages the scenic character of the Coulee Region. Where development does occur near ridgelines, the development should take place on the lowest portion of the parcel and in the area with the least slope.
- Action 1-1g:** Work with the DNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conservation groups to identify the locations where sensitive species and/or habitat occur within the Town of Onalaska and cooperate with these agencies to create maintenance plans and development guidelines to protect these species.
- Action 1-1h:** Preserve special landscape features, including Lake Onalaska, Sand Lake Creek, Halfway Creek, Brice Prairie, the coulees and bluffs.
- Action 1-1i:** Encourage the preservation and enhancement of areas needed to support local wildlife.
- Action 1-1j:** Support local conservation club and organization efforts to preserve, protect, or restore natural areas in the Town.
- Action 1-1k:** Recommend La Crosse County change relevant ordinances to reduce development on slopes to a maximum of a 20 percent slope – down from 30 percent.
- Action 1-1l:** Develop strategies to protect areas of high concentration of turtles, including but not limited to the areas of CTH Z, CTH ZN and CTH S.
- Action 1-1m:** Establish an “environmental impact assessment checklist” for all new land divisions, re-zones, special exception/conditional-use permits, variances and structures to be constructed.
- Action 1-1n:** Create an environmentally sensitive areas overlay zoning district to require all new development to avoid such areas to the greatest extent possible.
- Action 1-1o:** Work with the County to amend its zoning and subdivision regulations as necessary to incorporate low-impact development and conservation design techniques that:
- Limit total impervious area;

- Minimize site disturbance and soil compaction to preserve natural topography and minimize erosion;
- Ensure sound water quality and run-off controls while minimizing the use of storm drain pipes (this includes allowing, where applicable, the use of rain gardens, permeable pavements, etc.);
- Require adequate buffer areas and setbacks to minimize encroachment and preserve the natural character and scenic quality of sensitive resources, including the bluffs and coulee slopes; and
- Utilize native vegetation in new plantings.

**Action 1-1p:** Work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others to implement relevant proposed elements and projects from the Environmental Pool 7 Plan. This plan was endorsed by the River Resources Forum, St. Paul District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; developed by the Forum's Fish and Wildlife Group; and included the FWS's draft Upper Miss Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, 2005-2025.

**1-2:** Ensure high quality and sufficient quantity of water in the Town; protect groundwater, aquifers, and surface water in the Town.

**Action 1-2a:** Encourage land use patterns and practices that are environmentally sensitive and that do not disrupt the natural hydrologic system, including the balance between ground and surface waters.

**Action 1-2b:** Develop an ordinance to ensure proper stormwater management practices, such as rain gardens, detention, infiltration and wetland restoration, to maintain or increase groundwater recharge and reduce excess runoff.

**Action 1-2c:** Encourage Best Management Practices to control erosion and sedimentation during construction.

**Action 1-2d:** Discourage the regrading of large areas that alters natural topography and drainage patterns.

**Action 1-2e:** Work with La Crosse County and relevant agencies to protect floodplain areas and natural drainageways from being filled or altered in any way that reduces their function.

**Action 1-2f:** Promote business and industry in the Town that will not adversely affect water quality or quantity.

**Action 1-2g:** Preserve wetlands as essential components of the hydrologic system and as valuable wildlife habitat.

- Action 1-2h:** To protect groundwater quality, avoid the over concentration of on-site waste disposal systems and consider requiring the submittal and implementation of nutrient and/or manure management plans for high-density agricultural operations expected to have large numbers of animals in any part of the Town.
- Action 1-2i:** Avoid intensive development within designated groundwater recharge areas and steep slope areas to protect groundwater and surface water quality.
- Action 1-2j:** Support the Village of Holmen's creation and implementation of wellhead protection ordinances and districts.
- Action 1-2k:** Create an ordinance to protect private wellheads.
- Action 1-2l:** Amend the Land Division Ordinance to require a minimum well depth.
- Action 1-2m:** Create a groundwater overlay protection district.
- Action 1-2n:** The Zoning Ordinance currently requires a Condition Use Permit in Agricultural Districts for feedlots when more than 200 animal units are involved, or when the feedlot is within 500 feet of the residence of someone other than the feedlot owner, his agent, or employee. Determine if this number of animals is sufficient to evaluate the impact of high density feedlots on groundwater quality, and determine if animal type and lot size should also be criteria.
- Action 1-2o:** Determine the threshold for development density on Brice Prairie. If a certain density limit is exceeded, there will be problems related to the economy; environment; public utilities, facilities and services; agricultural sustainability; quality of life; and archeological resources.
- 1-3:** Agriculture on productive and potentially productive farmland in the Town of Onalaska should be preserved and protected from, depending on the location, any development or premature development.
- Action 1-3a:** Work to achieve a balance between the Town's desire to protect rural character and agriculture lands, and private property owners' interests. For example, encourage the use of conservation subdivisions for residential developments in agriculturally important areas within the Town of Onalaska.
- Action 1-3b:** Support private landowners who wish to protect their land by using conservation easements and other land protection tools.

- Action 1-3c:** Work with La Crosse County and neighboring jurisdictions to encourage an orderly, efficient development pattern that protects productive agricultural land and minimizes conflicts between urban and rural uses.
- Action 1-3d:** Implement a PDR program, to permanently protect large tracts of agricultural land in the Town while compensating the farmers for these protections.
- Action 1-3e:** To preserve agricultural land and avoid potential conflicts between agricultural and residential uses, the Town should discourage placement of a residence in the middle of a productive agricultural field.
- Action 1-3f:** Continue to educate new homeowners in the Town about living in agricultural areas, such as creating a pamphlet, and posting information on the Town's website.
- Action 1-3g:** Support agricultural-related businesses in the Town to ensure the long-term financial stability of farmers.
- Action 1-3h:** Promote quiet activities and businesses in the Town to maintain the rural lifestyle. Consider creating a noise ordinance; evaluate development proposals based on anticipated noise generated; and promote quiet sports and recreational activities. Farming operations should be exempted from the noise ordinance.

**Goal 2: Enhance public access, use and enjoyment of the community's natural and recreational resources.**

### Objectives, Policies & Actions

- 2-1:** Work with La Crosse County, the Village of Holmen, the City of Onalaska, agencies, private land owners, developers, and others to establish and maintain an efficient system of parks, trails, pedestrian pathways, bicycle routes and greenways to provide access and linkage to natural and recreational resources.
  - Action 2-1a:** Ensure that public recreational use of natural resources is enhanced in a manner that is compatible with the resource.
  - Action 2-1b:** Support the provision of new parks within and near areas where significant residential development is occurring.
  - Action 2-1c:** Promote public access for recreational use of Lake Onalaska. Identify specific locations for new boat landings, lakeshore fishing access, and viewing areas.

**Action 2-1d:** Emphasize the value of the Town's natural resource areas as focal points of natural beauty and recreation that contribute to the community's identity, and as economic benefits to the Town, region, and State of Wisconsin.

**Goal 3: Identify, conserve and protect the Town's cultural, historical and archaeological resources.**

### Objectives, Policies & Actions

**3-1:** Encourage the preservation of the Town's rural historic character.

**Action 3-1a:** Preserve and protect existing buildings and structures of historic significance as identified in the State of Wisconsin's AHI.

**Action 3-1b:** Work with the County to enforce property maintenance codes to maintain rural residential quality.

**Action 3-1c:** Enhance the Midway area as the Town's center of activities and community gatherings.

**Action 3-1d:** Encourage local festivals, fairs, farm tours, farm breakfasts and markets that celebrate the Town's farming, hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, and biking heritage and rural way of life.

**3-2:** Identify and protect cultural, historic and archaeological resources, sites, and buildings in the Town.

**Action 3-2a:** Encourage the preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures/districts and archeological resources in the Town, such as the Midway Archaeological District, the Midway Village Site, the Sand Lake Archaeological District and the Sand Lake Site. Continue to work with the MVAC, the county and the state to update records and mapping to fully document these resources.

**Action 3-2b:** During public development projects that have federal, state or local government involvement, continue to be aware of applicable laws to protect archaeological and cultural resources, including:

- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for federal projects
- Wisconsin Statute § 44.40 for state projects
- Wisconsin Statute § 66.1111 for local projects
- Wisconsin Statute § 120.12 (21) for projects involving schools

**Action 3-2c:** Aggressively protect areas that may have important artifacts.

**Action 3-2d:** Work with the Mississippi Valley Archeology Center (MVAC) to identify archeological sites and seek National Registry for such sites for their permanent protection.

**3-3:** Reduce light pollution into neighboring properties and degradation of night sky (i.e. strongly encourage “downlighting” fixtures or retrofits on all outside lighting).

**Action 3-3a:** Enact a light pollution ordinance, and include specifications for lighted billboards/signs.

**Action 3-3b:** Work with adjacent communities to address lighting issues.

**3-4:** Recognize the importance of mining activities to the local economy and current development. It is important, however, that mining operations do not detract from the town’s rural and scenic landscape or degrade its natural resources. The town shall consider the following information and criteria when reviewing an application for a quarry or gravel pit.

**Action 3-4a:** Discourage further defacement of the areas where mining, extracting metallic and non-metallic mineral resources operations occur.  
Note: Defacement does not include tillage that meets soil erosion control standards of a SCS (SCS recently renamed Natural Resource Conservation Service) conservation farm plan. Defacement also does not include logging conducted in compliance with Forest Practice Guidelines For Wisconsin (see publication #064-89 from county forester, attached as Appendix D.)

**Action 3-4b:** The Town should provide for full public review of the proposal.

**Action 3-4c:** The petitioner should submit directly to the town copies of all the documents required by La Crosse County and the State of Wisconsin, including but limited to:

- All project descriptions
- Site plan
- Typical cross sections showing the extent of overburden, extent of sand and gravel deposits, and the water table
- A map showing access routes between property and the nearest public road.
- Erosion control plan prepared by a state-licensed civil engineer
- Operation plan, including the date operations are expected to cease, and hours of operation.
- Reclamation plan according to State requirements.

**Action 3-4d:** The proposal will have assurances that the site will be developed and operated according to the site and operational plans.

**Action 3-4e:** Criteria to evaluate a proposed mining operation shall include, but not be limited to:

- i. Expanding or establishing a new excavation will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety and general welfare.
- ii. Establishing, maintaining or operating a mining extraction site shall in no way impair or diminish the other permitted uses, values and enjoyment of property in the vicinity.
- iii. The excavation site will not negatively impact the future development or use of neighboring property.
- iv. Adequate access roads, drainage and other necessary site improvements are provided in the site.
- v. The excavation site will not have an adverse impact on traffic on public roads or on the roads themselves.
- vi. To prevent tracking mud onto public roadways, driveways shall be paved within a certain distance of the public roadway.
- vii. To control dust, spraying the site and driveways, when appropriate, shall be considered.
- viii. The excavation site will not negatively impact environmentally sensitive areas identified in the township.
- ix. The excavation will not result in mining conducted below the seasonal high-water table.
- x. The excavation site will be reclaimed to appropriate conditions as required under state and local regulations.
- xi. All associated processing operations shall be terminated with the final phase of mining, and the mining operation will not be prolonged to serve as an industrial site.
- xii. The size and operation of the proposed mining activity is of appropriate scale to the landscape of the township. It is not the intent of the plan to establish another substantial mining area within the Town of Onalaska. Proposed establishment of these uses may require an additional public review of their associated environmental, social, and economic factors.
- xiii. If the extraction site is close to residences, limit the hours of operation.
- xiv. Expectations for any blasting, drilling and screening should be clearly understood, and, if allowed, specify separate hours for these activities.
- xv. If blasting or drilling is requested and allowed, additional sets of standards shall be applied with relation to frequency, noise and vibration levels, notice to neighbors, pre-inspection of neighboring basements and wells, and claim procedures.



- xvi. Commercial and industrial uses on site should be limited to those directly related to mineral extraction, such as concrete or asphalt plants. Such ancillary uses should be used to process minerals extracted on site. Careful review of air and water quality impacts from such uses should be included. Proposed establishment of these uses may require an additional public review of their associated environmental, social, and economic factors.
- xvii. Unless the extraction site is very inaccessible, it should be completely enclosed by a safety fence or maintained at a gentle slope.
- xviii. The town shall be listed as an “additional named insured” on the liability insurance policy, which should remain in effect until reclamation is complete. The petitioner shall furnish a certificate of insurance before operations commence.
- xix. There shall be specified provisions to upgrade, repair and maintain town roads, depending on the intensity of the operation and the existing condition and capacity of such roads. Posting bond for such work may be required.
- xx. Address depths to groundwater.