

Section B: Stakeholder Involvement

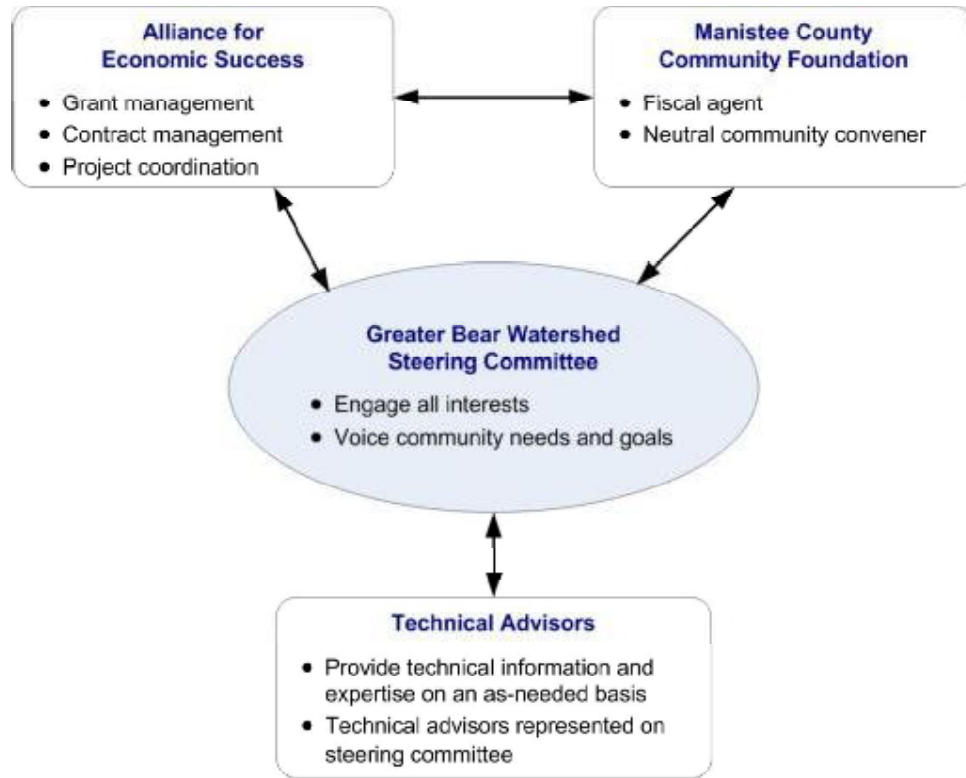
The Greater Bear Watershed Management Plan began with local groups working together to address the needs of the region's natural resources. The Manistee County Community Foundation (MCCF), in collaboration with the Manistee County Alliance for Economic Success (AES) responded to this local interest by submitting a grant application to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to update the previously developed Bear Creek Watershed Plan and expand the scope of the previous plan to include Bear Lake and its tributaries to Bear Creek. A federally funded watershed planning grant administered through the state was subsequently awarded in 2010.

The MCCF and the AES formed a steering committee comprising representatives of the community: local property owner associations; subwatershed organizations; tribal, local, state, regional, and federal government agencies; business owners; and local nonprofit groups. Each of these entities recognizes the importance of sustainable management of watershed resources and its influence on quality of life and the economic vitality of the region.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Numerous community partners provided leadership on different aspects of the plan development. The MCCF served as the fiduciary for plan development and the AES provided contract and project management. The AES engaged Draze Consulting of Kaleva to provide fiscal management and administer a public survey. The steering committee also appointed Jim Draze, Draze Consulting, as chair of the Greater Bear Watershed Plan committee. Laura Heintzleman, executive director of the MCCF, was appointed as the vice-chair. Public Sector Consultants of Lansing, Michigan, was selected as a neutral facilitator to help the community develop the plan. A technical committee of retired professionals and entities represented on the steering committee was formed to share and review relevant technical information about the watershed. The organizational structure that supported the development of the plan is depicted in Exhibit 1.

EXHIBIT 1: Organizational Structure for Plan Development



PUBLIC FORUMS–2011

A series of public forums was held in 2011 at the beginning of the plan development process. The meetings were open to all watershed residents, users, and other stakeholders. The purpose of the meetings was to provide information about the watershed, the development of the plan, and the process by which plan development would proceed; obtain information about concerns, goals, and priorities for management of watershed resources; and build community support for the development and implementation of the watershed plan. The meetings were attended by 54 people (excluding steering committee members and project consultants).

During the 2011 public forums attendees broke into small discussion groups facilitated by steering committee members and were asked three questions to obtain their input on the watershed priorities. A summary of those responses is given below. Detailed responses, as provided by participants, can be found in Appendix 1.

What are some of the things that you do in the watershed?

Participants gave many examples of activities in which they partake in the watershed including those that relate to recreation, residential uses, and economic activity. Recreational activities included both water- and land-based activities such as fishing, swimming, boating, hiking, biking, and snowmobiling, for example.

Many participants indicated that they reside in the watershed and that the natural resources enhance a way of life for them, their family, and their friends. Attendees also indicated that they engage in commerce in the watershed, which is enhanced by the natural resources. Some of the commercial activities are tied directly to natural resources through farming, forestry, and sport fishing; others indicated that natural-resource-based tourism supports other commercial interests in the region such as restaurants and shops.

What concerns do you have about the watershed?

Many participants expressed concern regarding degradation of environmental quality, specifically about nutrients and chemicals entering waterbodies from multiple sources including households, businesses, farms, and other sources.

Other concerns identified by participants included stream bank erosion, sedimentation, invasive species, and the health of the fishery. Participants also discussed concerns related to public access to waterbodies and waterways, in conjunction with private property rights.

The group also expressed concern about the lack of financial resources to implement and achieve goals, as well as the long-term economic vitality of communities within the watershed. Members of the group expressed the opinion that strengthening the coordination and collaboration between and among local, state, and federal government, businesses, and the nonprofit community could help address these concerns.

What do you want the watershed to look like in 50 years?

Participants expressed a multigenerational vision for the Greater Bear Watershed in terms of how they would like it to look in 50 years. Attendees said that they want to see planned growth and management that maintains and enhances the natural resources of the watershed and the sense of place of the communities within the Greater Bear Watershed. Attendees said that this could be achieved through active partnerships among government, business, and nonprofit organizations to realize shared goals, to enhance natural resource assets of the watershed, to help the community retain and attract residents and visitors of all ages, and to support a vibrant economy.

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

A survey was developed in the spring of 2011 and administered by Drazo Consulting between August and December 2011. The survey was constructed using the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) survey tool and item bank, and was approved by the MDEQ in July 2011.

The survey asked residents and others who use watershed resources a number of questions that were intended to provide the steering committee with information about how people use watershed resources, their knowledge of various natural resource management practices, their priorities for and concerns about the watershed, as well as other information. The survey was available online and hard copies were made available to individuals without online access. The survey was announced at multiple meetings including:

- Bear Lake Property Owners Association
- Bear Lake Watershed Alliance annual meeting
- Bear Creek Watershed Council meetings
- Big Bear Sportsman Club
- Greater Bear Watershed public forums
- Lion's Club
- Manistee County Planning Commission
- Local municipal government
- Spirit of the Woods Conservation Club meetings

Public announcements of the watershed planning effort and the survey were made in the *Manistee News Advocate*, Bear Lake Watershed Alliance newsletter, Bear Lake Property Owners Association newsletter, Bear Creek Watershed Council newsletter, and the AES electronic newsletter. Hard copies were available at the public libraries; the Bear Lake and Maple Grove Township Halls; and distributed through the Bear Lake and Kaleva Norman Dickson schools. Since respondents were self-selected (not a random sample), survey results are not statistically significant. In other words, the results of the survey provide information about respondents' preferences and the way they use the watershed, but survey results cannot be extrapolated to provide information about all users in the watershed. It is also likely that people who are generally more aware of watershed issues and engaged in the plan process responded to the survey in greater numbers, which likely affected the results.

The results of the survey are still informative because they provide information about how respondents use the watershed, their knowledge of watershed management practices, and their priorities and concerns for natural resources in the region. This information was used to inform the development of the Greater Bear Watershed Management Plan.

When the survey concluded, 165 responses were received online or from paper copies. A complete report containing the survey instrument and results, prepared by Draze Consulting, is included in Appendix 2. In addition to informing the development of the plan as a whole, the survey results were particularly useful in informing the desired uses, priorities, goals, and information and education sections of the report.

PUBLIC FORUMS–2012

A second series of public forums was held in the summer of 2012 during which sections of the draft plan were available for review and input from watershed residents, users, and stakeholders. More than 70 people attended these meetings (including many of the same people who attended the 2011 forums). The majority of responses indicated that the plan appropriately encapsulated goals and priorities of the community. The plan was revised in some areas based on the input and feedback from these forums.