



# Master Land Use Plan

## La Crosse County Landfill

### Executive Summary



## INTRODUCTION

La Crosse County (County) is tasked with managing the 350-acre La Crosse County Landfill (Landfill) site to achieve a balance of economic, social, and environmental land use objectives. In 2011, the County adopted a Master Land Use Plan for the landfill (MLUP) to guide land use decisions at the site.

This 2015 five-year update to the MLUP was initiated to:

- Plan for site utilization and conservation, to provide services to the public and protect the natural resources both during operations and after closure
- Develop the foundation of appropriate recreation both during operations and after landfill closure
- Preserve a buffer from adjacent rapid development patterns and to provide much needed open space in a rapidly developing area
- Recognize the unique nature of the site and its significant transitions from prairie to forest, meadow to bluff
- Utilize the planning process to assist policy makers in supporting collaborative decision-making aligned with adjacent municipal and county-wide planning efforts
- Continue to involve the public in landfill site land use decision
- Work with stakeholders, especially adjacent landowners on collaborative land use projects
- Maximize the asset value of the landfill through pro-active planning and management
- Promote phasing of activities, to utilize the large time horizon of the operations of the site and to establish present and future activities
- Create and maintain a base map for the landfill and potentially adjacent properties that identifies:
  - Ecological resources
  - Adjacent land uses and compatibilities
  - Service delivery and future spatial needs

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### La Crosse County Solid Waste Management History

#### 1970s

Open burning dumps common in the region; first cell opened at the County landfill

#### 1980s

County contracts with Xcel Energy (formerly Northern States Power) to provide municipal solid waste (MSW) for use as fuel at Xcel's Waste to Energy facility

#### 1990s

Modern subtitle D landfill cell constructed at County landfill site

#### 2000s

1970s era County landfill remediated; new landfill capacity added; new pollution control equipment installed at Xcel facility; Solid Waste Policy Board (SWPB) established; Household Hazardous Material (HHM) facility opened; County and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) approve SWMP

#### 2010-2015

Hauler rebate program successfully implemented; landfill gas-to-energy partnership implemented; Master Land Use Plan approved; single stream recycling adopted by cities of Onalaska and La Crosse; updated Solid Waste Management Plan prepared; Department joins WI DNR Green Tier program

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**“The La Crosse County Master Land Use Plan is a unique opportunity to protect, plan, and develop the best our landscape has to offer.”**

Sue Howe, Executive Director, 7 Rivers Region  
Outdoor Recreation Alliance

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La Crosse County Solid Waste Department



View of the La Crosse County landfill site



Special Waste Manager Randy Nedrelo guides local Boy Scouts on a tour of the landfill



Shingle recycling at the materials processing pad

## PLAN CONTEXT AND KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE 2011

The Department has completed, and is continuing implementation of several items identified as priorities in the 2011 MLUP, including:

- Development of a Conceptual Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) to improve the ecological health and expand the community benefits of the site. (The NRMP document includes both the TRMP and EMP documents described below)
- Development of a Trail and Recreation Master Plan (TRMP) that includes an inventory of existing trails, a vision for future trails and a framework for other recreational opportunities at the site
- Development of an Ecological Monitoring Plan (EMP) to measure improvements and make management changes as needed
- Construction of a pedestrian bridge over our wetlands, and built additional trails on the site through the woods
- Through significant public outreach, continued to engage a variety of stakeholders in decision making processes and project implementation
- Preparation of plans for a surface water management basin, including discussions with the Ho-Chunk Nation to design an effigy mound in the shape of a bear
- Initiation of the process to relocate and redesign the Landfill entrance
- Implemented new technologies to utilize landfill resources more responsibly, including partnership with Gundersen Health System to transport methane gas from decomposing landfill waste to Gundersen's nearby Onalaska campus where the gas is used as fuel to generate heat and electricity
- Construction and expansion of a materials processing pad for beneficial use materials
- Increased disposal capacity for Municipal Solid Waste (MSW)
- Improved ecological conditions on the site
- Benchmarked ecologic conditions (i.e. bio blitz and NRMP) to identify opportunities to improve ecologic conditions that are sustainable and appropriate for current land use
- Implementation of a highly successful funding mechanism, citizen drop-off area user fees, in order to support trail and other recreational improvements
- Receipt of multiple awards recognizing high level of achievement at the landfill



## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the 2015 MLUP update are organized into three categories and include:

### Short Term Goals: Current Projects (0 to 5 years)

- Update MLUP every five years
- Based on recently completed Blue Ridge Landfill Study, evaluate day to day operations to limit impacts outside of landfill areas and maximize air space consumption
- Complete landfill entrance reconfiguration
- Develop an organizational leadership structure to help guide MLUP implementation
- Work collaboratively with adjacent landowners, area municipalities, and other key stakeholders on implementation
- Continue design and construction of recreational trails and facilities
- Design and implement ecological restoration activities
- Continue to ensure compatibility of economic development adjacent to site
- Provide more interpretive opportunities at the landfill

### Medium Term Goals: Life of the Landfill (5 to 30 years)

- Increase capacity in solid waste landfill
- Continue design and construction of recreational activities
- Continue to provide more interpretive opportunities at the site
- Continue to improve wildlife habitat through ecological restoration
- Continue to ensure compatibility of economic development adjacent to site
- Continue to enhance aesthetic and natural beauty of the site
- Monitor outcome of Xcel contract renegotiation and implement relevant contract requirements related to land use

### Long Term Goals: Landfill Closed (30 to 90 years)

- Perform 40 years of mandated long-term care
- Ensure landfill long-term site care is sustainable
- Finalize design and installation of closed landfill features
- Find alternative locations and/or approaches for solid waste management and related activities
- Serve as a hub for a variety of local and regional trails
- Serve as a significant asset to the region by providing interpretive opportunities, quality wildlife habitat, natural beauty, and open space for the region.
- Continue to ensure compatibility of economic development adjacent site.



Trail building at Landfill

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**“The La Crosse Landfill should be considered a valued future public trust investment. The land is stunningly beautiful and has extraordinary character associated with its diversity..”**

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The Landfill will serve a variety of recreational interests in the future

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**“Just because it’s a landfill it doesn’t have to look like a dump”**

Henry A. Kock, PE, Director  
La Crosse County Landfill

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Photo of immature Bald Eagle flying over landfill

**The MLUP provides a blueprint for creating valuable wildlife habitat within an urban setting that embraces a variety of key site features including prairies, forest, meadows, and bluffs.**



Solid Waste Director Henry Koch provides site orientation for participants in a recent Bio-Blitz



Photo of Brown Snake at landfill

Plan objectives provide more detail regarding how the goals listed above can be achieved. The objectives are organized into the three categories (ecological restoration, trail and recreation, and landfill operations) and described below:

### Ecological Restoration Objectives

Planning for habitat restoration can begin quickly, progressively and sequentially. Related objectives include:

1. Design and implement demonstration projects with neighbors such as native plantings in idle space in adjacent business parks
2. Design and implement shared stormwater infrastructure and conservation development designs with willing adjacent landowners. Where feasible, emulate smaller, decentralized restored landscape features that can serve as wildlife habitat and park features
3. Begin and complete the cleanup and restoration of the outer perimeter lands and next inside perimeter ring
4. Continually promote the landfill ecological restoration by establishing a program or event, and/or coordinating with an existing program or event, for the purpose of communicating the restoration vision for the landfill property
5. Re-contour the landscape to create stable, natural looking grades frequently in earth-moving projects; stockpiles and berms have blocky angular looking features rather than the beauty and natural flow and form of the land found in a natural landscape. In conducting the final closure, we should work toward creating the gentle, stable landforms found in nature
6. On the re-contoured final surface of the landfill, create defined drainage-way features that add to the aesthetic charm of the landforms
7. Create secluded and quiet places with landforms and, these could be planted to augment the calm and peace one feels (and that wildlife experience) in such settings
8. Create safe overlooks, promontories and observation areas on ridge tops, linked with trails and walking paths
9. Restore bedrock features and dry prairies in sand overburden materials
10. Establish an on-site tree nursery for producing stock for plantings, restore tree cover for forest and savanna restoration by direct seeding rather than planting individual trees, and continue tree test plots program.
11. Re-grow” healthy soils on the site by constructing a soil mixing and creation staging area.
12. Develop interpretive messages/signage/style

## Trail and Recreation Objectives

The La Crosse County Solid Waste Department has invested in the conservation of natural resources and diversification of recreational opportunities while continuing its solid waste disposal and recycling activities. Working with the City of La Crosse, Outdoor Recreation Alliance, and other partners the Landfill has begun building multi-use trails and mountain biking trails.

Specific objectives related to future trail and recreational development are listed below:

1. Design the site for public access in the near future and sequentially open newly restored areas.
2. Expand trail system to serve walkers and hikers, bicyclists, mountain-bikers, and cross-country skiers
3. Create scenic overlooks from tops of closed landfill caps and in natural settings to view the Mississippi River Valley
4. Establish an interpretive center at the current Landfill office
5. Provide interpretive signs, displays, materials and programs to explain the ecology of the restored prairie, savanna, and woodland
6. Create a BMX Park
7. Establish a sledding hill on a portion of a closed landfill cap
8. Provide increased trail connectivity to off-site areas, such as north of Highway 16 and an underpass or overpass to reach areas south of I-90
9. Continue to develop partnerships for trail construction and maintenance

## Landfill Operations Objectives

The remaining permitted site life for Phase 1- Phase 8 is 27 years, however with continued use of the Xcel facility or some similar solid waste processing facility, the landfill life may last well over 50 years. Therefore, landfill operations will continue to be a primary focus of land use planning over the next several decades.

Key objectives over this time period include:

1. Finalize design and construct new entrance to landfill
2. Continue to enhance the citizens drop off area
3. Continuously identify new ways to maximize air space (alternative waste processing, improve waste compaction, waste diversion/re-use opportunities, etc)
4. Attract compatible land uses adjacent the landfill and promote economic development opportunities

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**Creating off site “green fingers” will link the landfill to adjacent open space, neighborhoods, and businesses, providing both ecological and recreational benefits.**

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Photo of Boardwalk construction at landfill



Redesigning the landfill entrance will help reduce traffic congestion

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**“The Outdoor Recreation Alliance will be contributing to the dialogue to ensure these lands remain accessible and become part of the fabric of the community..”**

7 Rivers Region Outdoor Recreation Alliance

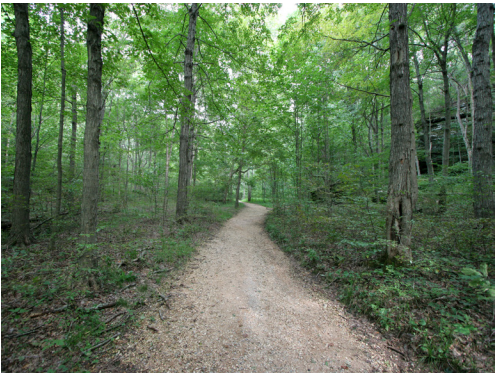
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Events at the landfill, such as Take Your Supervisor to Work Day, provide opportunities for decision-makers and other stakeholders to learn more about the operations and amenities at the site

**The La Crosse County Landfill Land Use Advisory Committee will engage the public and build support for recommendations contained in the 2015 MLUP.**



Looking Ahead: The landfill will provide multiple ecological, recreational, and cultural benefits

**“People support that which they help create”.**

Unknown Author

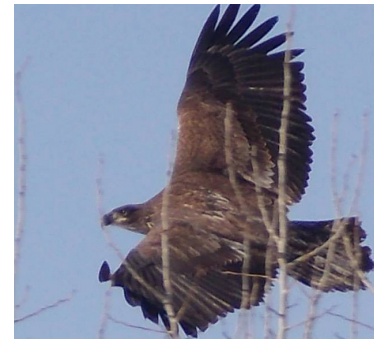
## IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing the MLUP will require a long-term sustained effort on behalf of many individuals, system partners, organizations, businesses, elected officials, and other landfill stakeholders.

It is recommended that the County create a La Crosse County Landfill Land Use Advisory Committee. The committee would oversee implementation of the MLUP, engage the public and build support for the Plan’s recommendations related to land use at the landfill. The committee should be comprised of representatives from the La Crosse County Board supervisors, the parks departments of the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska, and several members from communities neighboring the facility.

### Key Recommendations for 2016-2020:

- Recommend and adopt 2015 MLUP (2015)
- Construct landfill entrance improvements (2016)
- Begin to develop physical buffer area separating landfill operations from recreational improvements (2016-2017)
- Establish a formal Land Use advisory committee (2016)
- Develop a strategic plan for fundraising (2017)
- Develop a more detailed restoration and management plan for individual projects (2015-2016)
- Develop a research plan with partner educational institutions (2016-2017)
- Prepare for 2020 NRMP and TRMP updates (2018-2019)
- Update Master Land Use Plan (2018-2019)



For a full copy of the Master Land Use Plan, including detailed recommendations visit the Department's website:

<http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/solidwaste>

To arrange for a tour of the landfill contact the Department at:

608.785.9572

