



# Solid Waste Management Plan

## Executive Summary

2016-2020 and Beyond

La Crosse County Disposal System

La Crosse County, Wisconsin



La Crosse Disposal System

*A Responsible Resource*

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## LA CROSSE REGIONAL DISPOSAL SYSTEM - OUR CORE VALUES GUIDE US

### Commitment



A strong desire and commitment to regional cooperation and willingness to help coordinate regional approaches in order to provide high quality, cost effective solutions.

### Decision-Making



An emphasis on holistic, long-term decision making, by embracing new opportunities and responding to changes in the environment.

### Sustainability



A commitment to environmental protection, ecological restoration, responsible actions, and stewardship of today's resources for future generations.

### Continuous Improvement



A focus on continuous improvement through: embracing the principles of sustainability, technology advances, creativity, and institutionalizing knowledge

### Communication



Effective communication between stakeholders be they regulators, customers, elected officials, site neighbors, staff, school children, or the general public.

### Stewardship



A strong land conservation ethic, preserving a valuable asset for future generations while avoiding future cost burdens.



La Crosse County Solid Waste Office and Scale House

# Executive Summary

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

La Crosse County (County) is recognized locally, regionally and nationally as a leader in solid waste management. The County's long-term commitment to delivering environmentally sound, financially stable solid waste services is reflected in this update to its 2008 Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP).

Through planning processes such as this update to the 2008 SWMP, the County and its partners stay abreast of changing conditions and prepare for the future. The current plan was updated over a year-long period with significant stakeholder input.

The update was initiated to identify new strategic issues that could affect the County Solid Waste Department's (Department) delivery of solid waste services, and to provide recommendations for addressing these issues for the period 2016-2020 and beyond.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the fully updated SWMP. Complete details are available in the full SWMP document. In addition to this update, the County and the Department have developed related plans that provide more specific details and recommendations regarding land use, operations, and sustainability.

These include but are not limited to:

- La Crosse County's Landfill Master Land Use Plan
- La Crosse County's Landfill Natural Resource Management Plan and Trail and Recreation Master Plan
- La Crosse County's Landfill Environmental Management System (Green Tier)
- La Crosse County Strategic Plan for Sustainability

Together, this SWMP update and the related plans provide a strong foundation for informed decision-making by elected officials, Department staff and other key stakeholders.

## La Crosse Regional Disposal System - Mission Statement

### PROVIDE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTALLY AND ECONOMICALLY SOUND SOLID WASTE SERVICES THROUGH:

1. Cooperation with a regional mindset.
2. Comprehensive communication and education.
3. Fiscally responsible management.
4. Creative and integrated approaches that result in long-term value to stakeholders.
5. Promotion of competition in the market place.

**"The Department is very progressive...on the leading edge of the industry. It does an excellent job of planning for the future."**

Steve O' Malley,  
La Crosse County Administrator



## SECTION 2: HISTORY, STRUCTURE, AND RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Department manages an integrated, regional solid waste disposal system that serves municipalities and businesses in west central Wisconsin and southeast Minnesota. The term “regional disposal system” is frequently referenced because the Department’s service boundaries include areas beyond La Crosse County.

Operating as a regional system has been a part of the Department’s mission and vision since the County became involved in solid waste management in the early 1970s. The regional system approach is reflected in the current solid waste governance structure which includes:

### The Solid Waste Policy Board (SWBP)

The SWBP provides guidance and direction to the Department on strategic issues. The SWPB is comprised of nine members, three of which are La Crosse County Board supervisors. The other six members represent users of the system.

### The Public Works and Infrastructure Committee (PWI)

PWI is a standing committee of the La Crosse County Board. Comprised of seven county board members, the committee addresses operational and budgetary issues related to the Department, as well as the County Highway Department and other county facilities.

### The La Crosse County Board

The County Board is the elected body which governs La Crosse County. The Board oversees an annual budget of over \$175 million spent across more than 30 major departments, institutions, agencies, and organizations.

### Public and Private Partners

The regional system would not be viable without the active support of numerous public and private sector partners.

Key public sector partners include the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska; La Crosse, Buffalo, Trempealeau, Houston (MN), Wabasha (MN) counties; and numerous other cities, villages and towns in the region. Working together, these partners and their contracted waste haulers maintain a stable flow of waste to the system, resulting in effective, cost-efficient operations.

Private sector partners such as Xcel Energy, St. Joseph Construction and Gundersen Health System allow the Department to operate facilities and deliver a wide range of integrated services to fulfill its mission and vision, and to meet the needs of its customers.

## 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

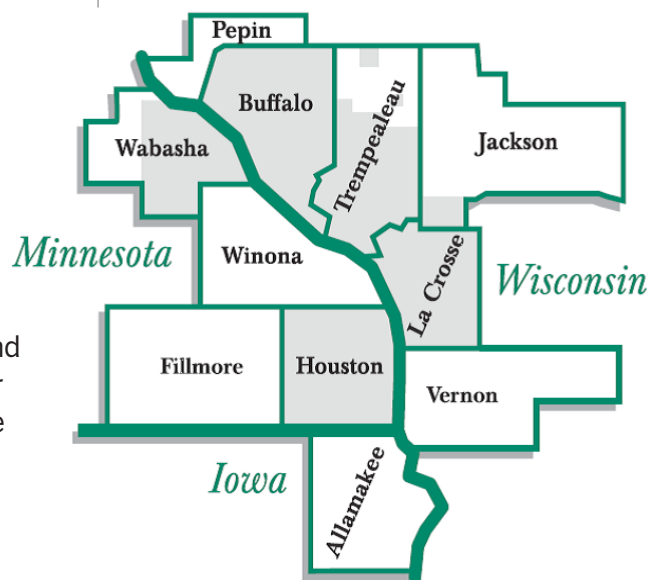
Modern subtitle D landfill cell constructed at County landfill site

### 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

### 2010s

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



La Crosse Disposal System Service Area



Landfill Gas to Energy Facility



HHM Facility



Randy Nedrelo celebrates the HHM facility's 10,000th customer during 2014

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**92% of users are “Very Satisfied” with services provided at the HHM facility, according to a 2014 survey.**

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**Over the past five years, the Department has received multiple awards at the national, regional, and local level.**

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Key services and facilities include:

- Waste to Energy at Xcel’s WTE facility
- A 350-acre site on Highway 16, which hosts a broad range of disposal and handling services for municipal solid waste (MSW), recycling/reuse, land use management
- A landfill gas-to-energy system that delivers landfill gas to Gundersen Health System for use in generating electricity
- A permanent Household Hazardous Materials (HHM) facility

### Recent Accomplishments

The Department has completed several significant projects and initiatives identified as priorities in the 2008 SWMP:

- Tipping fee increases have been avoided or minimized.
- Long-term care and closure accounts for the landfill have been adjusted to remove excess funding.
- A 2010 Solid Waste and Recycling Collection Evaluation initiated by the County led to establishment of single stream recycling in the cities of Onalaska and La Crosse.
- A Landfill Master Land Use Plan and related Conceptual Natural Resource Management Plan and Trail and Recreation Master Plan were completed.
- The County and Gundersen Health System partnered to implement an award-winning landfill gas-to-energy system.
- A hauler rebate program to enhance waste stream security was implemented.
- A popular citizen drop-off area was established.
- Two new municipal solid waste (MSW) landfill cells were constructed, while a construction and demolition (C&D) landfill and filled portions of the MSW landfill were closed.
- The County Solid Waste Department was accepted into the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources’ (WDNR) Green Tier sustainability program and an Environmental Management System was adopted.
- Partnerships with organizations including the Outdoor Recreational Alliance, Civil Air Patrol (CAP), Habitat for Humanity, Boy Scouts and others were established or expanded.
- The Department’s relationship with Xcel was strengthened.
- Over the past five years the Department has been recognized at the national, regional, and local level through the receipt of numerous awards acknowledging the Department’s commitment and leadership in environmental performance, sustainability, and landfill operations.

## SECTION 3: SWMP UPDATE: THE PLANNING PROCESS

Reflecting its commitment to long-range planning, and seeking to build on the accomplishments described above, the Department initiated this update to the 2008 SWMP.

The update was completed over the course of one year. A detailed analysis of solid waste generation, disposal, diversion and recycling in the service area was conducted. In addition, significant stakeholder input and feedback was gathered via focus groups, interviews, surveys, presentations, and informal meetings. Information was organized into a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

Key takeaways from the analysis included:

- A consistent amount of waste continues to be directed to Xcel's WTE facility to meet contract obligations.
- Waste deliveries to the La Crosse County landfill increased 60% over the period 2010 through 2014, the result of an uptick in the regional economy, implementation of the hauler rebate agreement, and scheduled maintenance at the Xcel's WTE facility.
- The hauler rebate program initiated in 2012 successfully captured a significant amount of additional waste from communities and businesses that had not previously been served by the system.
- Recycling volumes have increased dramatically with the deployment of single stream recycling.
- The HHM program continues to grow each year, serving over 10,000 users and collecting nearly 1 million pounds of material annually.
- There is a high level of stakeholder satisfaction with the current disposal system, and strong interest in continuing to strengthen it by working together regionally.

The data analysis and stakeholder feedback provided insight on new strategic issues that should be addressed in order to secure the future of the regional disposal system.

A few of the key opportunities identified included:

- Continuing to build partnerships and pro-actively communicating with stakeholders in order to strengthen the system.
- Strengthening the financial sustainability of the HHM program and expanding the program.
- Continuing the existing partnership with Xcel Energy as well as identifying new opportunities to work together.



Photo from 2015 Annual Meeting

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**Broad changes in society's attitudes toward waste reduction, increased rates of recycling, and growing interest in tackling climate change are among the local, State, and Federal trends likely to directly impact the regional system over the next five year period and beyond.**

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National Expert, Neal Bolton, Discusses Landfill Operations Report at 2015 Annual Meeting

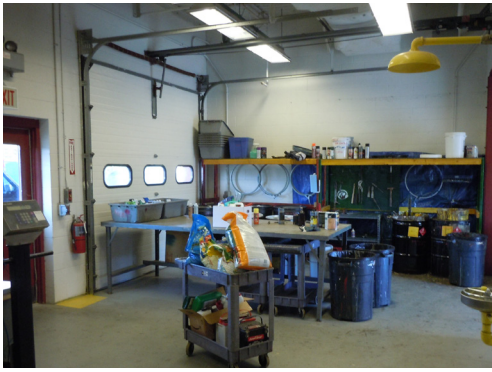
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**“The landfill presents a very positive first impression and it is obvious that considerable thought and effort has gone into creating a facility that is clean and customer oriented...”**

National Expert, Neal Bolton,  
Blue Ridge Services Inc., August 28, 2015

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Inside the HHM Facility

The HHM program provides a critically important environmental service for the region and is highly valued by citizens and system partners. Looking beyond 2017 a new funding model must be developed to maintain the current level of service.

“The Department is in very good financial health. It has funded balances, and diverse revenues including long-term contracts with Xcel Energy and several municipalities. Debt re-financing in 2015 and 2016 will further strengthen the Department’s financial position.”

Sharon Davidson,  
La Crosse County Finance Director



Xcel's WTE facility - French Island

Xcel's WTE facility is a cornerstone of the system, and provides an alternative to constructing more landfills.

## SECTION 4: STRATEGIC ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Input from the data analysis and stakeholder feedback was consolidated into a list of eight strategic issues that should be addressed by the Department. These issues are noted below, followed by key recommendations for implementation. A full description of the issues and list of recommendations is provided in the SWMP document.

**Issue No. 1: Financial Stability** – how can the Department maintain financial stability while remaining competitive?

**Importance:** The Department is run as an enterprise fund, so financial stability is critically important in order to maintain operations and continue providing a high level of service. If the Department is not managed well it will go out of business, and stakeholders will not enjoy the benefits of a locally managed, environmentally sound waste disposal and resource recovery option. Equity considerations are important - maintaining a system that is “fair” to all.

### Key Recommendations:

- Develop a Tipping Fee Management Plan
- Develop predictive financial management tools consistent with the Department’s Enterprise Fund structure
- Bring in more waste from outside the region

**Issue No. 2: Xcel WTE** – how can the Department strengthen its current partnership with Xcel to the benefit of both parties and the regional disposal system as a whole?

**Importance:** Extending the Xcel WTE contract provides system stability, allowing for investments in other parts of the system which may not be feasible without a long term agreement in place. If the Xcel contract is not extended, significantly more solid waste would be directed to the landfill, depleting air space at a much faster rate and reducing the effective lifespan of the landfill.

### Key Recommendations:

- Pursue an extension of the WTE contract
- Secure waste from businesses that have “zero waste” policies
- Continue to develop trust and transparency between Xcel, the County, and the general public

**Issue No. 3: Waste Stream Security** – how can the Department maintain an adequate waste stream now and in the future to achieve its financial objectives?

**Importance:** The County is obligated by contract to provide 73,000 tons/year of MSW to the Xcel facility. The County’s ability to meet this obligation becomes more challenging as more waste is removed from the waste stream. The County must balance efforts to increase diversion with the need to secure waste in order to remain financially viable.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Continue to support participation in the regional system by current partners
- Remove barriers to participation by other partners
- Continue to investigate organics diversion
- Market system benefits more effectively and pro-actively to secure more business waste customers from outside the system.

**Issue No. 4: Regional Cooperation** – how can the Department strengthen regional partnerships to better serve the region?

**Importance:** To tackle big challenges, partners need to work together to achieve critical mass. Enhanced regional cooperation is critical for the County to grow the system, contribute to the sustainability of the region and maintain financial stability. Without increased regional cooperation waste stream security becomes a bigger challenge.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Initiate formal discussions with surrounding counties to gauge interest in expanded collaboration
- Identify a future organizational framework to support the regional system
- Offer to provide a greater level of waste management service to individual municipalities in the county.
- Continue to identify partnerships with the private sector, WDNR, and municipalities to improve and expand existing services and develop new ones.

Increased recycling has led to lower BTU values of the RDF. To offset the BTU decrease, either more RDF must be incinerated, the efficiency of processing MSW into RDF needs to increase, or higher BTU quality waste must be delivered to Xcel’s WTE facility to generate equivalent revenues from energy production.



The 10,000th citizen customer of 2014 crossed the Landfill scale



Citizen drop off area provides mattress recycling

**“Our vision for the future would be to continue and strengthen this relationship through active involvement at the table as partners in planning and decision making...”**

Steve Hogden, Southern Tremepealeau County  
Solid Waste Commission





County supervisors and staff working at HHM facility during take your Supervisor to Work Day.

The Department will continue to engage the broader community in ecological restoration, recreational, and educational initiatives and projects. It will also identify and pursue applied research projects that leverage faculty expertise and student labor from area universities.



Phase VIII waste placement and compaction

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

Henry A Kock, PE, Director  
La Crosse County Landfill

**Issue No. 5: Moving from Public Relations to Community Outreach** – how can the Department pro-actively engage its stakeholders and partners to encourage productive dialogue, while building understanding of and support for the system?

**Importance:** Maintaining and expanding positive relationships are the key to business success. Neighbors, businesses, media, regulators, system stakeholders, and the public must be engaged in order to ensure long term support for the system.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Continue to provide diverse and frequent opportunities for engagement
- Continue to collaborate with not-for-profit organizations on educational and service initiatives
- Develop a scorecard to more effectively communicate the economic, environmental, and social (triple bottom line) benefits of the system.

**Issue No. 6: Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency** – how can the Department improve its operational effectiveness, and gain efficiencies while continuing to meet the needs of its users?

**Importance:** The Department is the one and only landfill member of the WDNR Green Tier program and has taken steps to achieve superior environmental performance. There is a growing demand for specialty services such as HHM and zero waste at Xcel’s WTE facility A continued focus on operational effectiveness and efficiency can provide opportunities to reduce expenditures or increase revenues.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Improve convenience of citizen drop off area
- Improve safety at landfill site entrance/egress
- Develop a mechanism to regularly review, monitor, and implement priority recommendations.
- Identify and implement a sustainable HHM funding model
- Identify additional HHM service opportunities and collaboration opportunities with other similar facilities

**Issue No. 7: Succession Planning and Institutional Knowledge** – how can the Department retain and attract talented, innovative staff with visionary leadership?

**Importance:** The loss of experienced Department staff could affect the ability to maintain quality public waste management services. There is a small pool of experienced solid waste and recycling managers in the state. As these managers retire there will be increased competition for talent in the industry, therefore making it more challenging to attract and retain the talent. Keeping and developing institutional knowledge is another challenge facing the Department.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Invigorate the SWPB
- Solicit participation in events and activities by young solid waste professionals and college/technical college students
- Develop a succession plan
- Prepare a written historical narrative describing the system

**Issue 8: Land Use** – how can the Department implement the long range vision for the landfill site as identified in the La Crosse County Landfill Master Land Use Plan and related documents?

**Importance:** The landfill site offers tremendous potential to provide a wide range of social and environmental benefits. Developing and beginning to implement the land use plan today will help minimize future closure costs, and can offer tremendous potential to provide recreational and environmental benefits.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Create a Landfill Land Use Advisory Committee
- Continue to expand and refine funding strategies for recreational asset development
- Engage with educational institutions to use the landfill as a “living lab”
- Identify stormwater and other environmental service opportunities that enhance surrounding economic development

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Without a knowledge of where you've come from, it is very difficult to make good decisions about how to move forward.

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Trail Building at Landfill by Wiscorp

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“People support that which they help create”.

Unkown Author

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Pedestrian Bridge over wetlands completed by Eagle Scout Brant Attleson



The annual meeting provides a venue to present and share information with regional disposal system decision-makers

The Department follows a holistic decision-making process, which lends itself nicely to the implementation of the strategic recommendations identified in this plan.

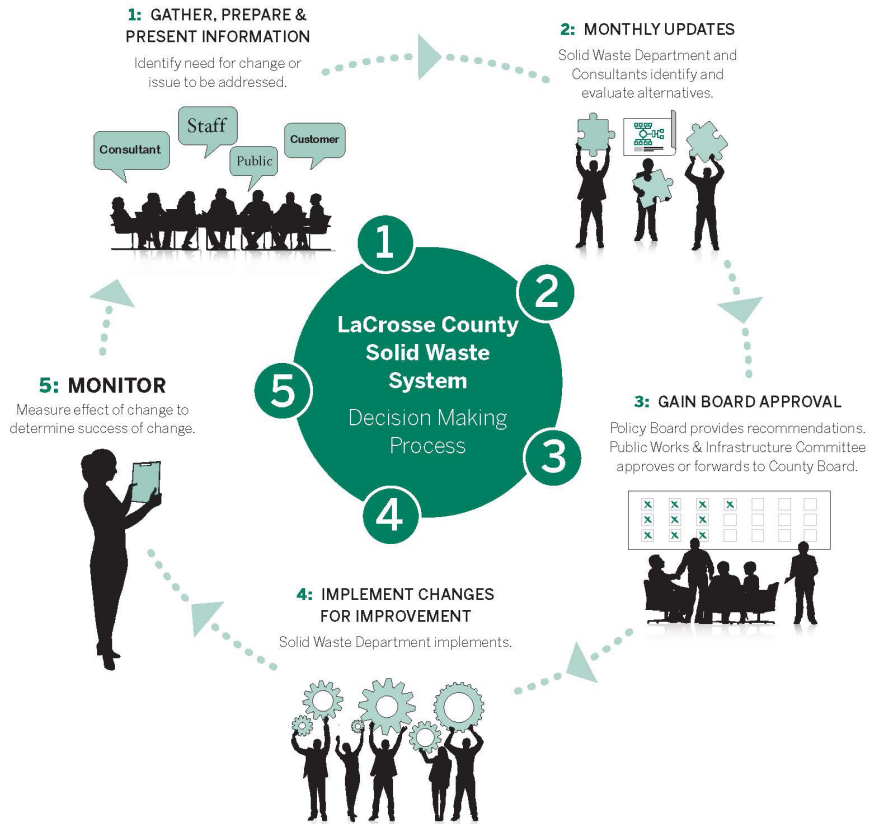


An emphasis on holistic, long-term decision making, by embracing new opportunities and responding to changes in the environment.

The La Crosse disposal system's core values provide a strong foundation for embracing new opportunities as the Department and its partners look to the future.

## SECTION 5: NEXT STEPS – IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The diagram below represents the La Crosse County solid waste decision making process. Steps 1 and 2 represent the information gathering and strategy development phases of decision-making which occurred during Plan development. Step 3 represents the Policy Board, PWI, and County Board's endorsement of the Plan. Step 4 is Plan Implementation or "next steps," the focus of this section of the Executive Summary.



Some of the recommendations provided in the report fall under the purview of the SWPB, while others are staff level responsibilities which can be executed directly by the Solid Waste Department. Some actions will require the approval of the PW&I and/or the County Board.

Ultimately, the Solid Waste Department Director is accountable for ensuring the Plan's recommendations are implemented through appropriate staffing, work planning, employee evaluations, and development of the annual budget. The Department will develop specific initiatives to satisfy the requirements of this Plan on an annual basis. Progress toward completion of the initiatives will be reviewed during the annual meeting.





For a full copy of the Solid Waste Management 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

