

# Executive Summary

## SRCL Lakeshed Management Plan



### Introduction

This Lakeshed Management Plan is the result of a yearlong collaborative effort between the Sauk River Chain of Lakes, Inc. (SRCL) with citizens as well as representatives from local units of government and resource agencies in the region. The SRCL is a lake association representing fourteen lakes in the Cold Spring-Richmond area of central Minnesota.

The Sauk River Chain of Lakes is a beautiful area, home to over 13,000 people. The tree lined shores and many bays on the lakes mixed amongst the rolling hills and farm fields make a picturesque landscape. But, the quality of water in the Chain of Lakes is generally poor and has been for a long time.

People from this lake community have been working for decades to improve water quality, and not without success. In fact, there have been major accomplishments, many of which are identified in the Plan. The SRCL, the chain's unified lake association, has promoted or has been responsible for many of these successes.



Improvements to wastewater treatment plants upstream in the watershed including the facility in Melrose have made significant improvements to water quality in the Chain of Lakes. Since 1982, working with local governments and resource agencies, the SRCL has completed a long list of projects. Today, many of the point sources of pollution have been addressed. Yet, water quality problems persist. In the future, the focus for improving water quality will be to reduce non-point sources, which for the Chain of Lakes, comes from a very large watershed.

The watershed that drains into the Chain of Lakes is large. The ratio of the watershed (approximately 602,000 acres) to the surface area of the 14 lakes (2,456 acres) is 181:1, which is especially high in comparison to most other lakes in Minnesota. In general, the lakes are relatively shallow with numerous shallow bays. This natural hydrologic condition creates a significant management challenge for the SRCL and resource agencies.

It is clear to the leadership of the SRCL that the problems with lake water clarity and quality have occurred over a long period of time. They also realize that it will take time and a continued and ongoing commitment to achieve their water quality goals. The SRCL believes that it will take a "continual chipping away at the problems" approach on a watershed basis. The "**stick with it**" attitude has been key to the SRCL's success over the past twenty years.

## Why a Lakeshed Management Plan?

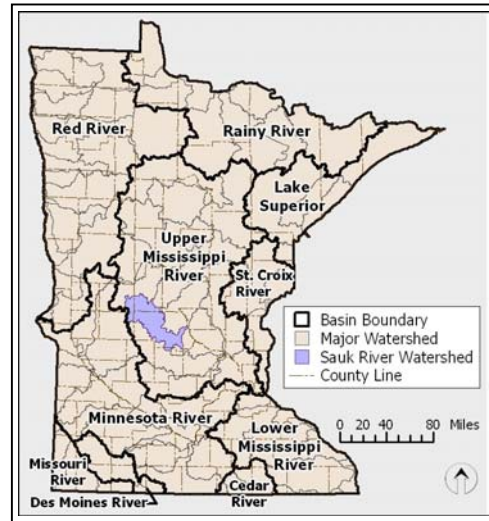
Given the **long-term, ongoing, and non-point source nature** of the water quality problems in the Chain of Lakes, the SRCL made a commitment to use its resources and talents more effectively. They decided to invest in a watershed based strategic planning process, called **lakeshed management planning**, to guide and manage their limited resources.

So what is a lakeshed? Before this term can be clearly defined, it is essential to understand some basic hydrology. A **watershed** is the area of land that drains into a surface water feature such as a stream, river, or lake and contributes to the recharge of groundwater. Watersheds come in different shapes and sizes. There are three general levels of watersheds: 1) **basins**, 2) **major watersheds**, and 3) **minor watersheds**.

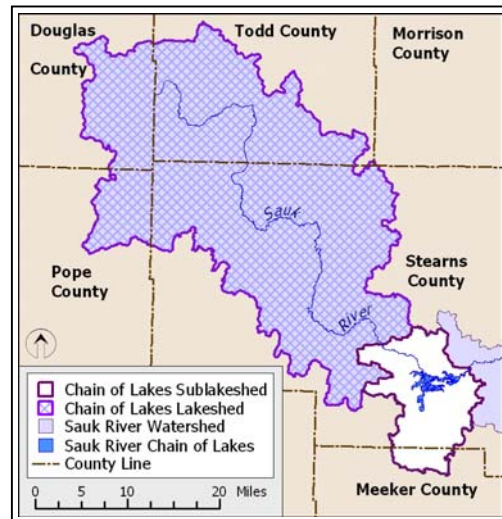
The Sauk River Chain of Lakes is located within the **Upper Mississippi River Basin**, which includes the **Sauk River major watershed** as one of its sixteen major watersheds. While the basin covers over 20,000 square miles, the Sauk River major watershed covers 1,041 square miles or approximately 670,000 acres. Within the Sauk River major watershed there are 75 **minor watersheds** that vary in size from 3,000 acres to over 28,000 acres.

With this hydrologic or watershed hierarchy, a **lakeshed** is simply the land area that drains to a lake. While some lakes may have only one or two minor watersheds draining into them, others lakes are connected to a large number of minor watersheds, reflecting their larger drainage area. The relationship between lakes and the number, size, and types of minor watersheds that drain into them varies considerably.

Surface water drains from over 602,000 acres through 66 minor watersheds into the Chain of Lakes. All of this drainage area is under the jurisdiction of the Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD). Given the very large geographic area of the **SRCL Lakeshed**, it was decided that a smaller area needed to be developed for inventoring and assessing resources. The minor watersheds that had a more immediate drainage connection to the 14 lakes in the Chain became the area referred to as the **SRCL Sublakeshed**.

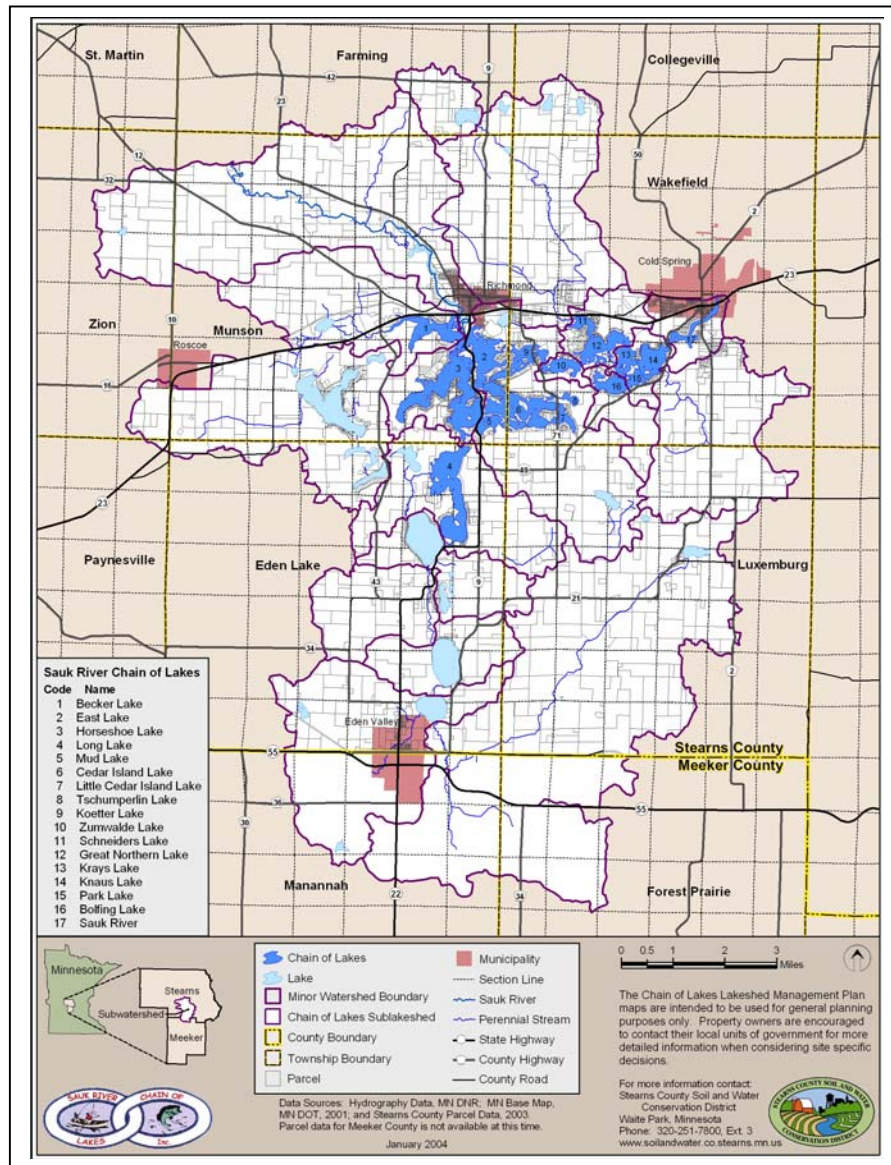


**Upper Mississippi Basin  
Sauk River Major Watershed (SRWD)**



**SRCL Lakeshed and Sublakeshed**

The figure below illustrates the SRCL Sublakeshed base map. This map includes the boundaries, names and watershed code numbers for the 20 minor watersheds that make up the SRCL Sublakeshed.



### 20 Minor Watersheds in the SRCL Sublakeshed

This Plan is called a “***lakeshed management plan***” because it assesses issues and creates a framework of goals and strategies for the Sauk River Chain of Lakes from a lakeshed perspective. The ***purpose*** of this Lakeshed Management Plan is to establish a long-range plan for guiding the management of the land, water, and human resources across the watersheds that affect the Chain of Lakes. This Plan should be used by not only the SRCL organization itself, but it should be used by resource agencies and organizations working in the SRCL Lakeshed as well as landowners. While many of the goals and strategies developed in this Plan are applicable throughout the entire lakeshed area, the SRCL intends to focus its initial efforts on the twenty minor watersheds that flow more directly into the Chain of Lakes.

## What is in this Plan?

The SRCL Lakeshed Management Plan consists of eight sections:

**Section 1 – Introduction.** The first section provides a description of the planning process, a summary of the resource inventory and assessment, and some tips on how to use this Plan.

**Section 2 – Guiding Principles and Mission Statement.** To guide the development of this Plan and its implementation in a fair and reasonable manner, the Planning Committee developed a set of guiding principles and a mission statement early in the planning process.

**Section 3 – Resource Initiative A: In-Lake Water Quality.** The Planning Committee recommended three water quality goals:

- Improve surface water quality.
- Manage lake levels.
- Protect groundwater quality and quantity.

**Section 4 – Resource Initiative B: Fisheries and Aquatic Vegetation.** Two goals adopted for fisheries and aquatic vegetation management efforts include:

- Encourage habitat protection.
- Promote active fisheries management.

**Section 5 – Resource Initiative C: Land Use.** What happens on the land can greatly impact the lakes. The five land use goals established in the Plan are as follows:

- Encourage safe and economical sewage treatment.
- Promote livestock management balanced with protecting the environment.
- Reduce erosion.
- Manage growth and development.
- Support other good water quality practices.

**Section 6 – Resource Initiative D: Administrative and Finance.** To be more effective the SRCL will work to increase and expand coordination between resource agencies, local units of government, and landowners. Three goals were crafted to guide the coordination effort including:

- Increase organizational effectiveness.
- Increase agency coordination.
- Manage fiscal resources responsibly.

**Section 7 – Plan Implementation and Evaluation.** One of the most critical components of any plan is the part that describes how it will be implemented, evaluated and maintained. Section 7 provides an in-depth description of the organizational, coordinative, and financial aspects that need to be considered to support successful implementation.

**Section 8 – Recommendations to Agencies.** The last section describes the SRCL's three major recommendations to resource agencies regarding the implementation of this Plan. They include: 1) maintain the Technical Committee throughout the implementation stage, 2) convene annual implementation review meetings to evaluate progress and share ideas that work, and 3) implement and monitor water quality projects on a minor watershed basis.

## Putting the SRCL Lakeshed Management Plan into Action

**Wow! The Plan is done. Now that was hard work!** To develop this Plan, the 18 members of the Planning Committee contributed an estimated 520 hours of their own personal time to help prepare this Plan. In addition, Technical Committee members provided an estimated 350 hours of technical assistance at the various meetings held throughout the process. This time estimate does not include the administrative time or GIS services provided by the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). Plus, over 60 citizens gave up their time on a summer Saturday morning to help set the overall direction set forth in this Plan. Only through this joint effort could this planning effort been accomplished.

**What are the next steps?** With the approval of the Plan by the SRCL Board of Directors at their meeting on March 19, 2005, a new and different challenge begins. The coordination and implementation stage represents the other half of lakeshed management process. The **Strategic Policy Framework** listed in Sections 3 – 6 of this Plan describes a total of 13 goals, 62 objectives and 263 action items.

So how is all of this work going to get done? The following summarizes a six-part outline of the major organizational steps that the SRCL will be working through in the initial period of the plan implementation stage:

- *Review the SRCL organizational structure.*
- *Build volunteerism.*
- *Prioritize the goals and objectives, refine the necessary actions.*
- *Secure financing.*
- *Work together and get the work done.*
- *Evaluate progress and communicate the results.*

1. **Review the SRCL Organizational Structure.** While the current organizational structure of the SRCL has supported the completion of many projects, the SRCL Board of Directors needs to examine its current organizational structure and assess what changes are needed to effectively implement the goals, objectives and action items listed in this Plan.
2. **Build Volunteerism.** Currently, only one-third of the shoreland landowners around the Sauk River Chain of Lakes are members of the SRCL. Other lake associations in the state have much higher levels of membership. The SRCL will actively work to increase and sustain its membership throughout the life of this Plan.
3. **Develop, Refine and Prioritize.** This Plan purposefully outlines a comprehensive series of actions and tasks to address water quality, fisheries and aquatic vegetation, land use and administration/coordination issues. The SRCL will annually determine its high priority objectives and action items and coordinate resources needed to complete these tasks.
4. **Secure Financing.** The SRCL will identify, pursue, and secure the appropriate funding needed for plan implementation, both within and outside the Chain of Lakes area.
5. **Work Together.** To be more effective, the SRCL will partner with resource agencies and local governments to develop and implement projects outlined in this Plan.
6. **Communicate Results.** Through the newsletters, website and annual meetings, the SRCL will inform the citizens of Sauk River Chain of Lakes area about accomplishments on a regular basis.

*"This Plan allows us to take an incredibly complicated biological, social and economic system and develop priorities for the lake association's management of that system, with the assistance of project partners, both existing and future."*

*Julie Klocker, SRWD Administrator*

## Getting Involved

### Implementation Teams

The Planning Committee recommended the creation of **Implementation Teams** to get more people involved in the implementation process. They specifically that suggested four teams be established by the Board including:

- Water Quality Implementation Team.
- Fisheries & Aquatic Vegetation Implementation Team.
- Land Use Implementation Team.
- Administration/Finance Implementation Team.

### Lake Leaders

Given the fact that the SRCL represents not just one lake but fourteen (14) lakes, it faces more extensive communication challenges than most other lake associations which typically have only one lake neighborhood to serve. The ongoing nature of maintaining the lines of communication and cohesiveness of members from multiple lake neighborhoods is a significant challenge.

In response to this situation, the Planning Committee recommended the creation of "**Lake Leaders**". A lake leader would be an individual from each of the 14 lakes represented in the SRCL. These lake leaders could take on many of the communication and membership building challenges that the SRCL faces. The lake leaders could also help organize and mobilize the volunteer force of SRCL members and landowners in the SRCL Sublakeshed.

### Volunteers Opportunities

Developing a good plan is always a beneficial step to mobilizing volunteers. Good plans help organizational leaders clarify the wide range of activities that need to be completed to achieve the organization's goals. The uncomfortable and difficult task of delegating tasks to volunteers becomes that much easier when leaders refer back to their plans. The outline of goals, objectives and action items provide the SRCL leadership with small manageable "chunks" of activity that need to be pursued in order to achieve the goals. The in-depth outline of is meant to be a starting point for the SRCL Board, Implementation Team members and Lake Leaders.

And perhaps most importantly, good plans provide volunteers with greater opportunities to pick and choose the tasks and activities that they feel comfortable working on. With ever increasing pressures and competing demands for personal and family time, organizations like the SRCL need to find creative and flexible ways to get more people involved. The organizational structures suggested by the Planning Committee in this Plan provide a good start to increasing the number of volunteer opportunities. We invite all of you to join in and make a real difference in our lakes!

## Contact Information

If you or your organization would like to get involved, please contact any of the leadership members listed on our website at [www.srcl.org](http://www.srcl.org).