

FRIENDS OF THE WINOOSKI RIVER

STRATEGIC PLAN

January 2013

Introduction

Since 2005, the Friends of the Winooski River have grown tremendously, engaging in increasingly complex and diverse projects across the watershed. To guide and support continued growth, the Board and staff have developed a strategic plan. This document contains 1) an account of the plan development; 2) goals, actions, and tasks for the next five years; and 3) an overview of implementation.

The Friends would like to thank Paul Markowitz, who donated his time to guide us through the creation of the plan, and Laura Killian, who conducted many of the stakeholder interviews.

Development Process

The first step was to draft a mission statement to articulate the Friends' purpose and values:

The mission of the Friends of the Winooski River is to safeguard and enhance the natural resources of the Winooski River watershed in harmony with its human communities. We pursue this mission through monitoring, restoration, partnerships, education, and outreach.

We sought a wide range of input. We used a variety of techniques including interviews, conference calls, online surveys, and meetings to solicit input from our members, non-profit organizations, community organizations, educators, state and federal agency staff, as well as state and local officials and funders. Stakeholder questions and a list of respondents can be found in Attachment A.

The Friends' Board and staff completed a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis to assess both the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization and external threats and opportunities. A summary of the analysis can be found in Attachment B.

Goals, Actions, and Tasks

We have developed four goals with accompanying principles, actions and tasks.

1. Restoration and Protection: Implement restoration and protection projects to benefit the river and the watershed's natural and human communities.

Principles guiding the selection of projects include:

- setting priorities according to various conservation plans (basin, corridor, stormwater, and town plans);
- forging partnerships with state and federal agencies, municipalities, and other organizations;
- providing local information about flood resiliency and water resource protection.

Action: Riparian Restoration and Protection

- Use corridor plans to select high priority sites
- Distribute sites across major tributaries and towns
- Work on four to six sites, planting 1000-2000 stems annually
- Develop a volunteer adopt-a-site program to improve invasive management and monitoring

Action: Stormwater Management

- Participate as subcontractor to Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District on the Chittenden County Stream Team
- Provide small site stormwater education in Washington County

- Identify and implement stormwater controls on three to five sites
- Complete road erosion mapping projects in the headwaters and Stevens Branch and/or Dog River
- Use town stormwater maps/plans and road erosion maps to identify high priority projects
- Conduct and follow-up outfall monitoring in select towns

Action: Water Quality Monitoring

- Manage volunteer water quality monitoring programs in the lower Winooski (through the Chittenden County Stream Team), the Four Rivers area (Stevens-Dog-North-Winooski), and the headwaters
- Use programs to identify pollutant sources where possible
- Report data to public as a land use and educational tool
- Develop program to work with schools using loaner water quality equipment
- Pursue new and follow-up stormwater outfall monitoring programs and work with municipal public works departments to correct issues

Action: Instream Habitat and Geomorphic Improvements

- Develop and implement projects to improve passage of fish and other aquatic organisms at high priority stream crossings
- Work with municipalities to identify and replace undersized culverts
- Maintain and expand contact with dam owners and pursue removal when possible

2. Education and Participation: Provide information about the ecology and health of the Winooski watershed with a particular emphasis on human impacts on the watershed.

Action: Expand access to scientific, technical, and policy resources.

- Create a website resource page with links to watershed studies, assessments, and reports
- Maintain an inventory of landowner assistance resources for watershed protection
- Provide information via website and e-newsletters on new and pending legislative and regulatory changes
- Expand information regarding the natural history of the watershed

Action: Educate state and local officials and community leaders about policies and practices that will protect and restore the watershed.

- Provide board members and other volunteers with information to ensure a degree of comfort when speaking with local officials, community leaders, and civic organizations
- Develop and maintain contact with local officials
- Improve town level information and tools with respect to flood resiliency
- Speak at civic organizations' meetings on a regular basis
- Identify opportunities to have a presence at the Statehouse during the legislative session

Action: Increase the public's connection to the river and the Friends through participatory events

- Consistently use volunteer groups including schools, civic groups, and businesses
- Include an educational message with all volunteer and other participatory events
- Make better use of the Sojourn as an educational event
- Create more educational events to engage people with the river and the Friends
- Have a presence at community events or other organizations' events throughout the watershed
- Improve river access to facilitate paddling, fishing, and other activities
- Create a tracking and recognition program for volunteer groups and individuals

3. Publicity and Marketing: Use multiple media outlets to broaden recognition of the organization's goals and work as a means to increase membership and expand fundraising opportunities.

Action: Call media attention to our projects and programs.

- For all events, submit photos and/or press releases to local media
- Post information about all events on website and Facebook

Action: Improve use of the Friends' website, electronic communication, and social media.

- Produce e-newsletters on a regular basis with significant content
- Regularly post watershed events (not just the Friends') to Facebook and the webpage
- Keep the website fresh with new content

Action: Use a variety of community networks to promote the Friends.

- Create a network of Front Porch Forum, list serves, and e-newsletters to disseminate information
- Have a presence at community events or other organizations' events throughout watershed
- Maintain a list of watershed media outlets and specific contacts
- Created a basic Friends' brochure that tells about the group, the watershed, and how people can support the group
- Leverage small newspapers and newsletters
- Work with the creative community (artists, musicians, etc.) to promote the Friends' work

4) Strengthen Organizational Structure: Improve the structure of the group by increasing and diversifying funding, improving governance, and codifying policies and procedures.

Action: Revise by-laws.

- Appoint small team to draft new by-laws
- Ask board to review draft, emend if necessary, and accept
- Have attorney review and finalize new by-laws
- Review and update as necessary any legal documents associated with by-laws

Action: Establish board member requirements.

- Develop a board education program
- Develop a plan for board recruitment and diversity
- Establish participation requirements for board members including committee participation

Action: Improve and expand financial, personnel, and public affairs policies and procedures.

- Review and update procurement (services and materials) and related practices
- Review and update financial policies, processes, and reporting
- Review and update personnel policies and processes
- Establish a public affairs policy governing the Friends' advocacy role

Action: Improve fundraising through a comprehensive strategy.

- Determine the mix of funding we want to have
- Develop strategies to pursue unrestricted funding
- Pursue high probability private foundations
- Develop project-based donation campaigns
- Expand business partnerships to develop initiatives similar to the Winooski Headwaters Community Partnership
- Develop fundraising events and merchandise

Implementation Overview

As described above, the strategic plan identifies four broad goals with supporting principles and actions to guide the Friends' work over the next five years. However, many important matters such as priorities, timing, and resources are subject to changing circumstances and cannot be determined in the plan itself. The Friends, therefore, have created two committees to address these concerns and begin work on the most important items.

Initially, one committee will work on both the Education and Participation and the Publicity and Marketing goals. The other will address Strengthen Organizational Structure. Subcommittees may be formed to work on specific issues, and volunteers will be invited to join the effort.

The Restoration and Protection goal is the core of the Friends' work. While the Executive Director and other staff will have primary responsibility for achieving this goal, board members will provide direction and support for projects within their areas of expertise and interest.

Attachment A: Stakeholder Interview Questions/Survey

The phrasing, format and flow varied based on the interview/ survey setting and the stakeholder(s) participating.

1. Please tell me a little about your position/organization and how you have worked with Friends of the Winooski River.
2. How do you describe Friends? What are the two or three things first come to mind when you think about the Friends of the Winooski River?
3. What does Friends do well? What would you like to see it do better?
4. How do you stay informed about Friends' work? Are there other mechanisms that you would like to see the Friends use?
5. Who else is doing what Friends does? What isn't getting addressed and how would you like to see the Friends involved?
6. What environmental issues are you most concerned about in the watershed?
7. What project or programs would most likely engage you and your organization with the Friends?
8. What forces and trends will impact the Friends' mission over the next 3-5 years? Will these present particular opportunities and/or obstacles?
9. What is your word of advice to the Friends board as it plans for the organization's future?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Participant	Organization
Gretchen Alexander	Department of Environmental Conservation
Clark Amadon	Trout Unlimited
Janet Ancel	State Representative
Karen Bates	Department of Environmental Conservation
Dave Braun	Former Friends Board member; Stone Environmental
Town of Calais	Select Board
Ann Cummings	State Senator
Dan Currier	Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission
Chip Darmstadt	North Branch Nature Center
David Deen	State Representative
Bill Doyle	State Senator
Rebecca Ellis	State Representative
Charles Fish	Author-- <i>In the Land of the Wild Onion</i>
Evan Fitzgerald	Fitzgerald Environmental Associates
Kim Greenwood	Vermont Natural Resource Council
Mary Hooper	State Representative
Justin Kenney	Winooski Natural Resource Conservation District
Rich Kirm	Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
Tony Klein	State Representative
Mike Kline	Department of Environmental Conservation
Madeleine Lyttle	US FWS
Deb Markowitz	Agency of Natural Resources
David Mears	Department of Environmental Conservation
Julie Moore	Stone Environmental
Mary Nealon	Bear Creek Environmental
Caitrin Noel	Friends of the Mad River
Anthony Pollina	State Senator
Roy Schiff	Montpelier Conservation Commission
Brian Slopey	U32 High School
Shap Smith	State Representative
Deane Wang	UVM
Charlie Wanzer	Twinfield High School
Town of Worcester	Select Board

Attachment B: SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)

Strengths

- *Fiscally efficient because of small size. Big bang for the buck
- *Partners very well and has strong relationships with other organizations
- *Does good work. Gets stuff done
- *Diverse Board
- *Positive representation
- *Good website (even if it needs fresher content)
- *Good reputation among key stakeholders
- *Many long term volunteers
- *Executive Director

Weaknesses

- *Low public profile
- *Lack of volunteers in lower watershed
- *Lack of clear financial oversight and operational policies
- *Doesn't use members fully
- *Small group in a big watershed
- *Very dependent on executive director
- *Board heavy in upper Winooski, limited representation in lower watershed
- *Lack of financial diversity. Grant driven, which limits project flexibility

Opportunities

- *Develop series of plans and assessments to guide our work
- *Collaborate with other watershed groups
- *Take advantage of flood-related concerns, municipal and general public, while they last
- *The same with respect to precipitation patterns and water resource concerns
- *Keep in touch with possible statewide stormwater utility and funding
- *Offer to help overburdened Agency of Natural Resources
- *Take advantage of municipal readiness to take action on watershed issues

Threats

- *Duplication of work of other organizations
- *Recent flooding and prospect of more flooding
- *Restrictions on funding (number of grants to any participating organization)
- *Lack of flexibility in some governmental programs and planning documents
- *Emergency responses versus adaptation following climate catastrophes
- *Some work we do takes a long time to show results
- *Shrinking public funding at all levels of government and more competition for funding
- *Overburdened Agency of Natural Resources, lack of staff