

# Land Stewardship 2150

Eau Claire County – The Next Century



Eau Claire County Land Stewardship Subcommittee  
December 2017

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Photo Credit: R. Koziel

*What is our home going to look like when it's no longer our home?*



Photo Credit: R. Koziel

*What are we going to leave for the next generation?*



Photo Credit: R. Koziel

*What would we like Eau Claire County to look like after we're gone?*

This document is intended to prompt dialogue and provide guidance on Land Stewardship concerns for Eau Claire County on a 100+year scale. It addresses likely trends in the County landscape and population, and outlines appropriate efforts to preserve important features to enhance the benefits for the population.

Many public and private agencies have sound plans for shorter time frames. The purpose of this document is to provide a longer range view to influence current policies. It addresses the “what to protect” and “methods to protect it”.

It is healthy and inevitable that there will be continued economic and population growth. It is also naïve to think we can predict the trends and pressures that will influence our citizens and our landscape 150 years from now. But we can, and should, identify areas most important to our landscape that promote the well-being of our citizens, that likely will span generations and centuries. Once identified, we should implement policies and plans to protect those areas from irreversible degradation for the benefit of future generations.

Eau Claire County contains several distinct geographic features that include forests, waterways, and agricultural areas. These are considered important zones, or “corridors”, where long term policies should provide for some level of protection. This document identifies eight such corridors based on citizen and various committee inputs.

There must be actions and policies to provide the protection within these corridors. These can and should come from both voluntary and regulatory efforts; many organizational jurisdictions are involved. But in concept such actions should be thought of as a broad range of conservation decisions. The range can include well informed property owners making voluntary conservation choices to public ownership and property management, with many variations between. This document will discuss the range and progression of suggested policies to that end.

### Eau Claire County Land Stewardship Subcommittee

<b>Kevin Stelljes</b>	<b>Chair, Parks and Forest Committee Member</b>
<b>Doug Burrows</b>	<b>Vice-Chair, Citizen Member</b>
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## Scope and Scale of the County's Future

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Eau Claire County was founded in 1856 and reached a population of 10,000 by 1870. In roughly 150 years, it reached a population of 100,000 (2010). This is a modest growth rate of between 1 and 2% per year. There is every reason to believe that modest rate will continue.

Given that continued growth rate for the next 150 years, by the year 2150+, the County population would be nearly 1,000,000. For reference, this is double the current Dane County population, and slightly less than Hennepin County, MN (Minneapolis). Project that image onto Eau Claire County. The central questions then are...

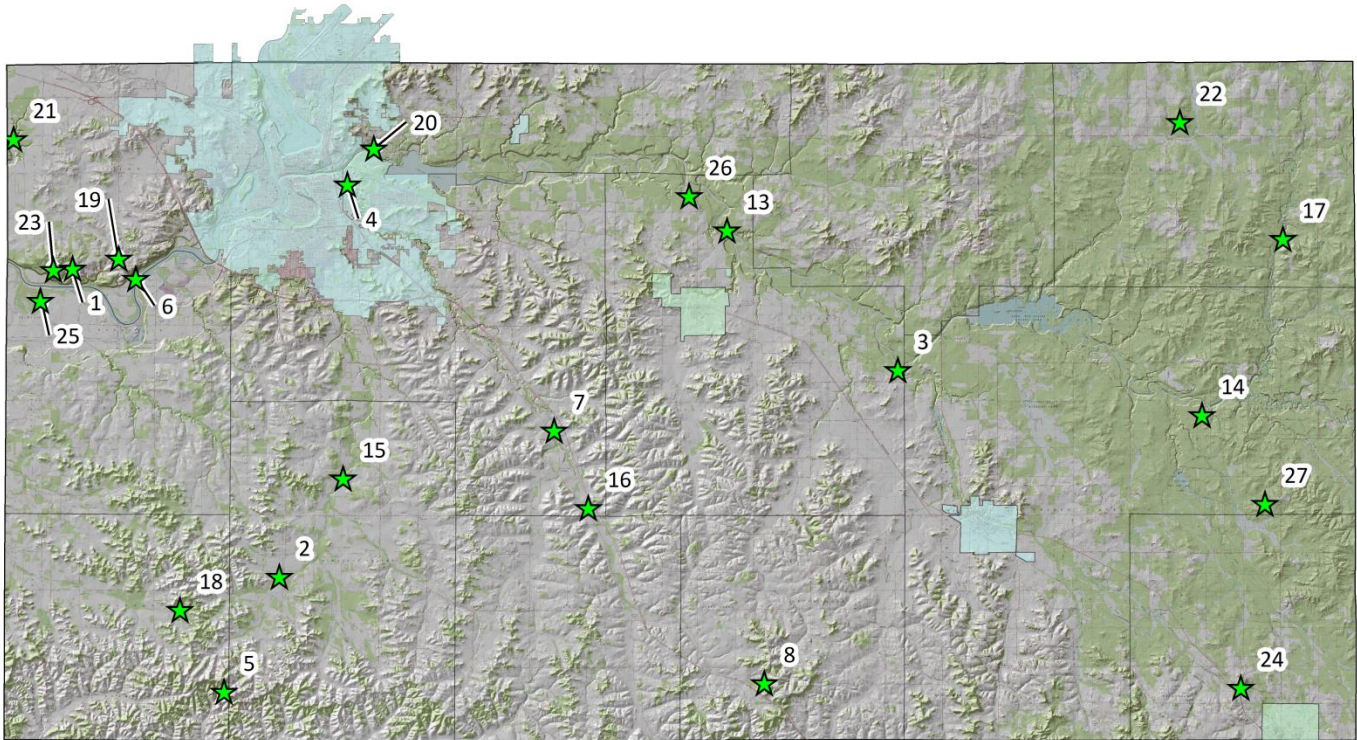


Photo Credit: K. Jacobs

*"What do we want Eau Claire County to look like then?"*

*"How do we keep options open for the future citizens?"*

Eau Claire County: A Few of Our Special Places....



In listening sessions with citizens expressing concern about the future of the county's natural resources assets, over two dozen points of interest and environmental issues were identified.

1	Chippewa River Bluffs
2	Lowes Creek Headwaters
3	Harstad Park Upgrade
4	Biking Trail Loop between Eau Claire and Altoona
5	Eleva Ridge
6	Silver Mine & Land
7	Otter Creek
8	Otter Creek Hardwoods
13	Blocking w/ Existing - Public Ownership (along Eau Claire River Corridor)
14	Blocking within Existing County Forest Land
15	Lowes Creek DNR

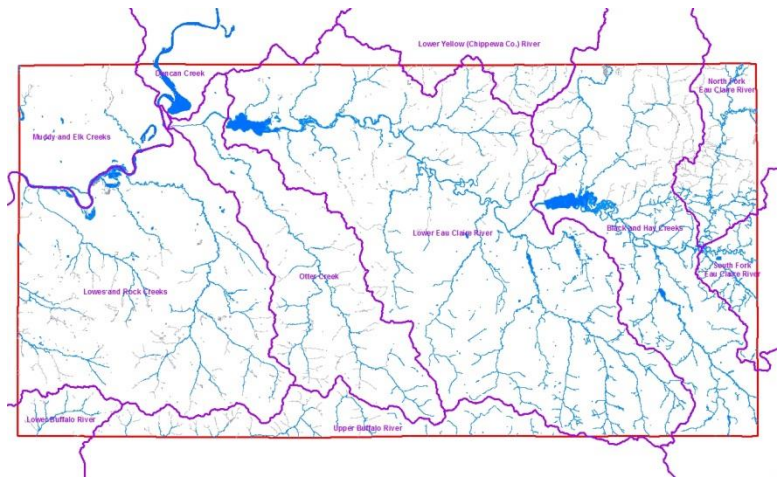
16	Provide added incentive for landowners to provide watershed protection (i.e. buffer strips, etc.)
17	Hamilton Falls
18	Town of Drammen
19	Crescent / Town Hall
20	Eau Claire River - Urban
21	Town of Union Wetlands
22	Town of Wilson Wetlands
23	River Bank – Town of Union
24	Area along Hwy 12 in Town of Fairchild
25	Lower Chippewa River
26	Eau Claire River Corridor
27	Inholdings & Access – Eau Claire County Forest

## Conservation Corridors

When surveyed about their favorite places in the County, most responded by naming public recreational sites. When asked about other noteworthy areas, most responded by naming an area near a waterway. The citizens of Eau Claire County value our rivers and streams. They are a central part of our landscape, recreation, transportation routes, and health.

Each of these corridors plays a major role in County health and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future. Each has characteristics that people believe merit long term conservation:

- Eau Claire River / County Forest Corridor
- Eau Claire and Altoona City River and Park Corridor
- Chippewa River corridor south of Eau Claire City
- Golden Triangle Agricultural Enterprise Area
- Otter Creek Corridor
- Lowes Creek Corridor
- West Creek Corridor
- Eleva Ridge Corridor connecting Otter Creek, Lowes Creek, and West Creek headwaters with the Buffalo River



The definition of a "corridor" is yet to be determined. In general it should be thought of as an area of geographic similarity and dependency rather than a physical dimension. However, it is easy to conceptualize these corridors as largely bordering waterways and the adjacent landscape. These lands typically represent areas high in diversity of vegetation and wildlife, environmental sensitivity, and recreational and esthetic value.

## Corridor Connection

It is also valuable to envision these corridors as being connected for citizen benefit. Just as wildlife require un-fragmented spaces for survival, our citizens have a similar need. In a future Eau Claire County with double or five times its current population, reliance on today's transportation methods will become more challenging. The ability to "get there" without congestion, interruption, and consumption, will remove barriers to use. This will also increase the value of the public use areas, as well as the property value of private parcels within the corridors.



Photo Credit: R. Koziel

Efforts should be made to retain corridors of connected, un-fragmented landscape. One could also envision a completely connected recreational trail or corridor system with public and recreational access which would span and connect most areas of the County. Such a system would have "nodes" or "sites" at various places where parks and public land or facilities would exist. The areas in between the nodes could contain areas of active stewardship, such as easements, leases, or cooperative agreements.

A more detailed description of these areas is listed in appendix A.

## Stewardship Policies, Practices, Progressions

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This document does not suggest that the lands in the corridors be acquired as public property, nor does it advocate the imposition of burdensome restrictions on private landowners. Rather, it attempts to set long term policy to allow a progression of stewardship to fulfill the long term County landscape vision.

### Progression of Stewardship

While most think of direct land acquisition as the role of conservation and stewardship efforts, it might better be viewed as a progression of steps of increasing levels of effort and protection.

Direct government ownership of public land may be the highest level in this progression. But at the lowest end, it may simply be a private land owner voluntarily choosing not to sell, develop, or fragment a parcel of land. The progression might be as follows:

- Voluntary private non-development
- Private participation on conservation programs (CRP, WHIP, Stream Buffer)
- Private conservation easements or deed restrictions
- Private leasing to public entities
- Limited public access easements
- Permanent access agreements or easements (WWLT, Deed restrictions)
- Transfer on death of easement on title
- Sale of property to public entity or Non- Government Organization (NGO)
- Donation of property to a public entity or NGO

### Tools for implementation

Stakeholders are encouraged to support this progression of stewardship through a wide array of organizations, both public and private. A goal of this document is to provide a common long term vision so efforts by these organizations are complimentary. These include:

- Township and County Comprehensive and Recreational plans
- Township and County Zoning
- County Reclamation Code: often lands “nobody wanted”, become of interest. e.g. County Forest
- City and Village plans and ordinances
- West Central Regional Planning projects
- Lake Districts and Associations
- Wisconsin DNR projects
- Economic development plans
- Federal programs (CRP, CREP, WHIP etc.)
- Non- Government Organizations (NGO) projects (DU, TU, PF, etc.)
- County Land Conservation Plans (Farm Land Preservation Plan, etc.)
- County Stewardship Program
- Land Trusts (WWLT, etc.)
- Friends groups

These entities each provide some level of encouragement, or in some cases, control, over land use, protection of natural resources, and recreation. Coordinated efforts should give priority to the identified areas.



## Role of County Stewardship Program

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The Eau Claire County Land Stewardship Program, created by the County Board in 2010, was formed to protect and preserve key lands that offer recreational opportunities for the public and have significant ecological value for future preservation. The program is managed by a Stewardship subcommittee comprised of one member of the Land Conservation Commission, one member of the Parks & Forest Committee, and five citizen members representing a cross section of County interests. The Eau Claire County Land Stewardship Program is a framework to facilitate the protection and preservation of land tracts within Eau Claire County that meet the following priorities established by the Land Conservation Commission:

- Significant ecological value
- Public access for recreation
- Strong community support
- High value to county residents
- Sustains resource base and quality of life
- Proximity to water
- Wildlife habitat
- Ability to leverage funding
- Development threat
- Full acquisitions



As the Stewardship Program has matured, it has become clear that there are two major roles not clearly stated in the above formal listing:

- Respond to opportunities for direct involvement on land of interest
  - The criteria listed above would continue to be applied
  - Examples include Pinter Pines acquisition and the Fitz property agreement
- Proactively identify areas of importance and encourage others to respond
  - This document is part of that effort
  - Other actions not presently in process could include:
    - Promote the corridor concept, value, and opportunities
    - Create voluntary corridor groups and identification if desired
    - Recognize private leaders in the area
    - Create sequential step programs for interested land owners who are not yet ready to take action
    - Conduct workshops for landowners to educate them on stewardship concepts and options
    - Provide multi-generation education to families interested in long term succession

## Conclusion

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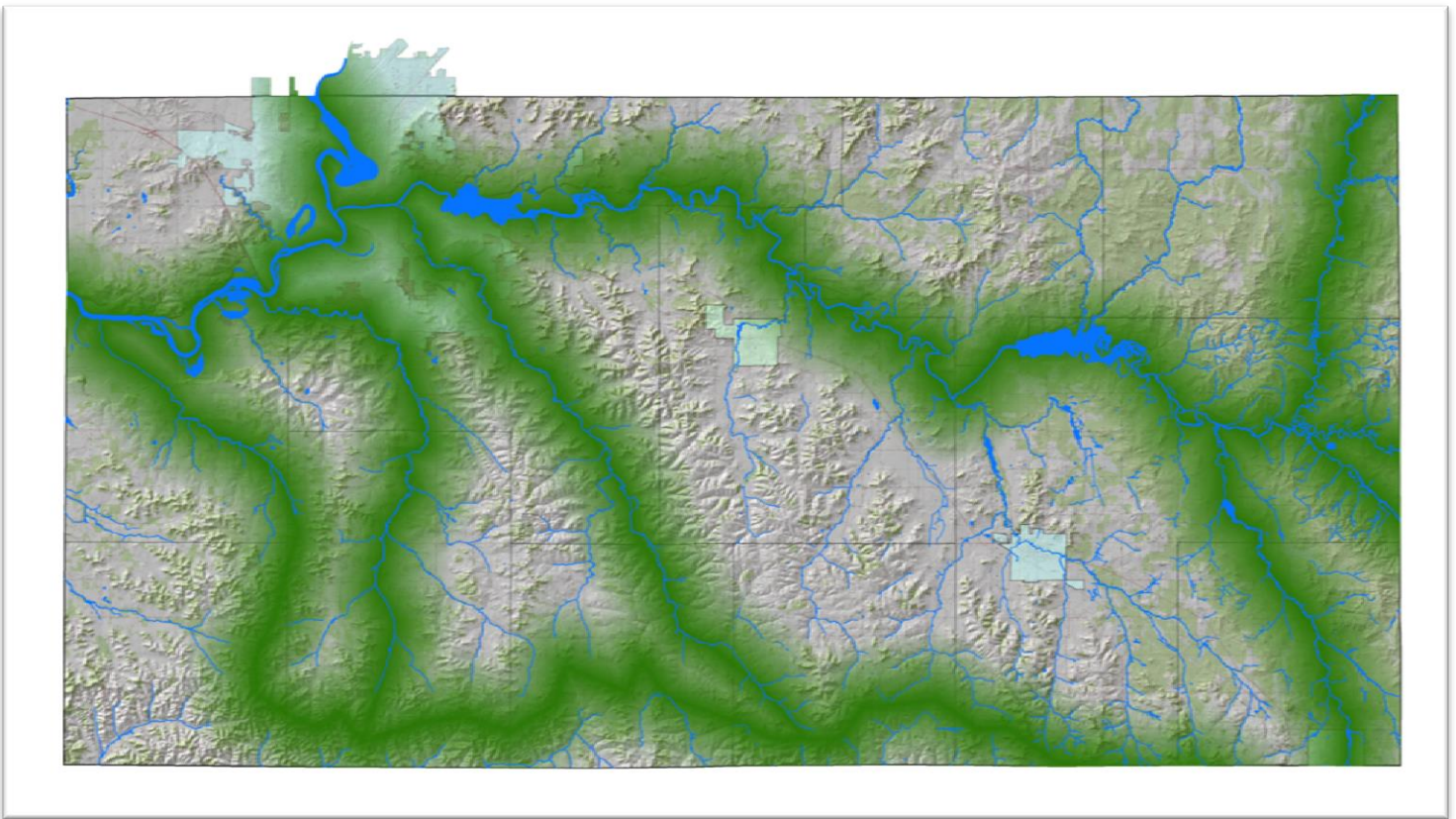
As stewards of our natural resources, citizens need to consider the value of our natural world and find a way to give back in appreciation of the use of those resources. Think of the many opportunities to enjoy these resources and how this has positively influenced your life. Sharing in a hunting trip with one of your children, long days on the beach with that special person, a bird singing through the cold winter air, the prairie grasses blowing in the breeze ... These are the special moments that we want to ensure others after us also have a chance to experience as part of their everyday life. Will they have access to these places? Will they want to protect them as much as we do?

Let's begin now to work toward a shared, long term vision for the care and protection of our special places. Please utilize the thoughts and ideas in this document as a means to help frame your own visions and plans here in Eau Claire County. Thank you for all of your efforts to help realize a rich and thriving natural resource base for our citizens and visitors.



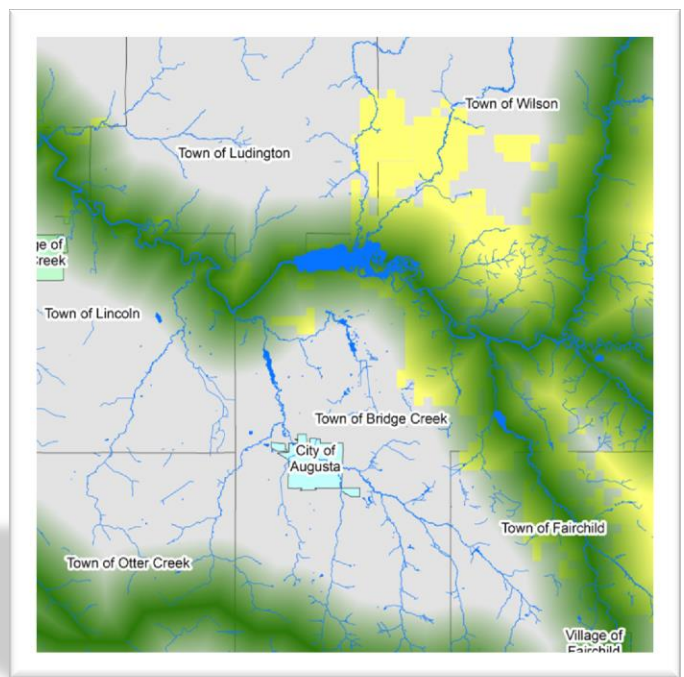
Photo Credit: R. Tews

*There are risks and costs to action.  
But they are far less than the  
long range risks of comfortable inaction.  
-John F. Kennedy*



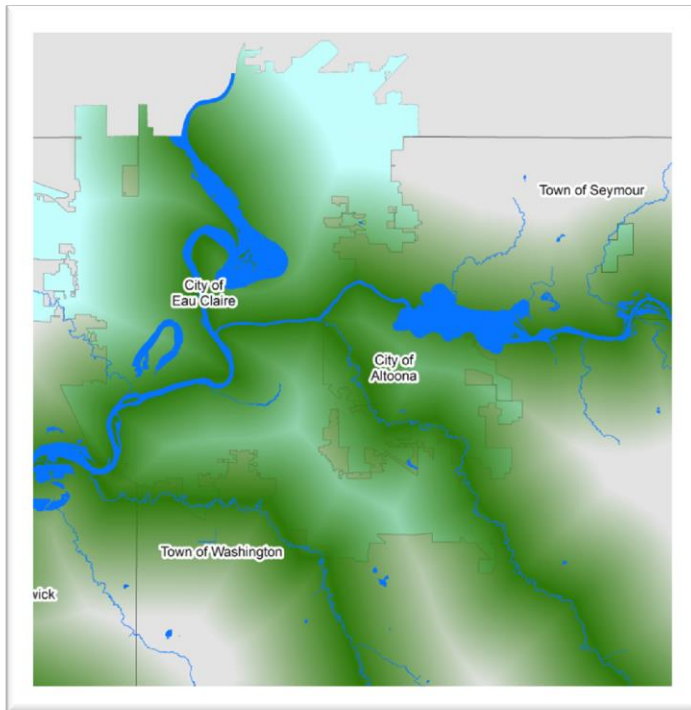
### 1. Eau Claire County Forest

One large, existing high quality stewardship tract is the 52,000-acre Eau Claire County Forest Conservation Corridor bordering the Eau Claire River and many tributaries running east to west in the northeast/north central area of the county. There are numerous, high quality private parcels that could be acquired over time to further consolidate public ownership of the county forest and provide more greatly needed public access for forestry, outdoor recreation, clean water and secure soil. This area is an opportunity to create large, contiguous tracts which may become more difficult to find in the future.



## 2. Eau Claire and Altoona City River and Park Corridor

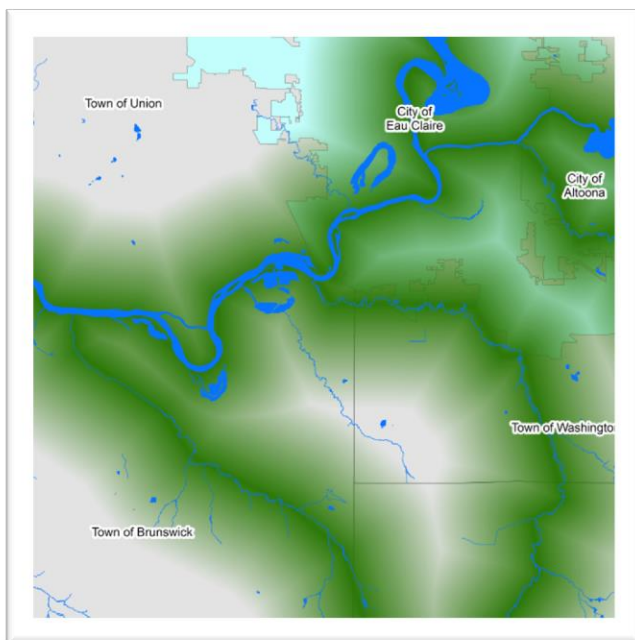
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This well-established area includes river frontage of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers and is expanding to include Altoona River Prairie and potentially Lake Altoona Park. Numerous trails, parks, and access points exist and urban development activity is leveraging this area to increase use and appeal.

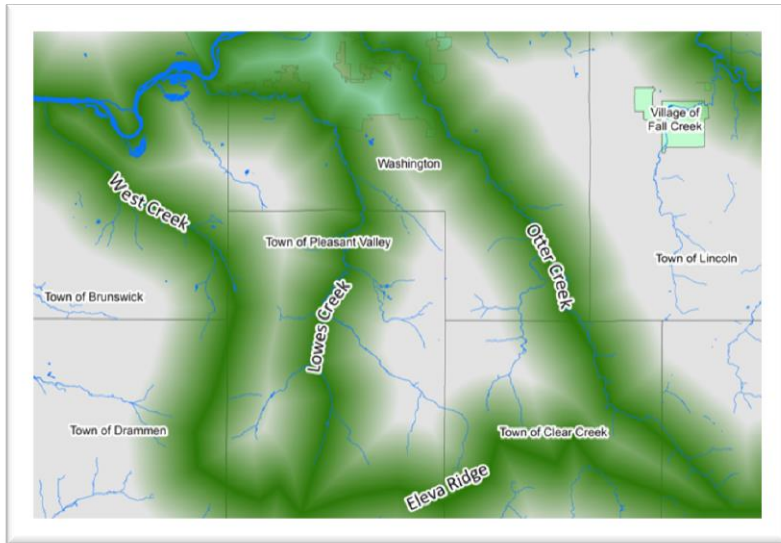
## 3. South Chippewa River Corridor

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This area is less developed than within Eau Claire City, roughly downstream of the I-94 bridge. This area contains the Chippewa Bike trail, Town of Union festival sites, State Powell Lake area, and wayside canoe access. This is a popular area for floaters and fishers, who may continue to the State recreational property at the confluence of the Chippewa and Red Cedar Rivers.

#### 4, 5, 6. West Creek, Lowes Creek, and Otter Creek

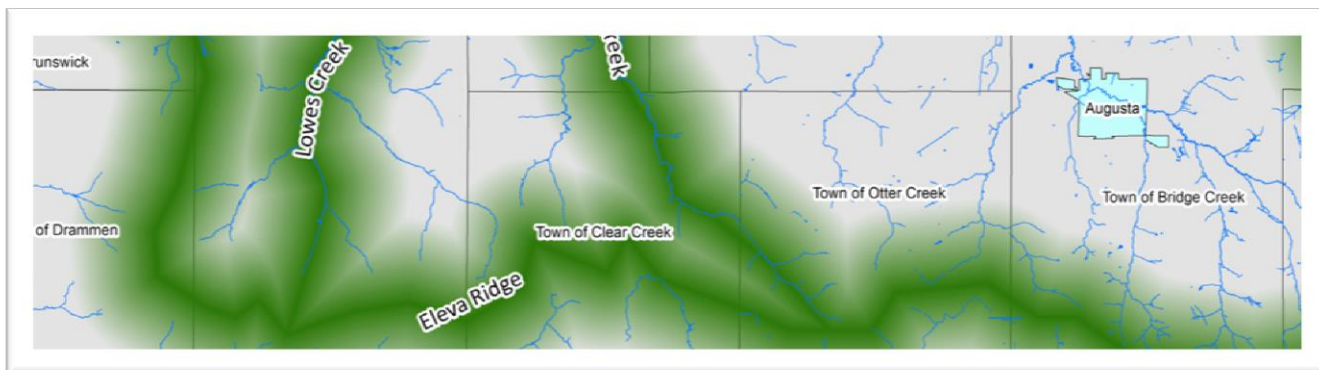


Identified by citizens in the west side of the county is the Lowes, Otter, and West Creek Conservation Corridor. This area stretches roughly north-to-south from Powell Lake along the Lower Chippewa River, southwest of Eau Claire. This region has a mixture of grasslands, woodlots, riverine bluffs and rural residential and agricultural lands, with very little public access. The streams flow generally north into the Chippewa River and retain rare cold-water and cool-water characteristics that has the potential to deteriorate as

development spreads for residences, farming and industrial mining. The region could provide much greater public access to land through acquisition, conservation easements, or outright donation.

#### 7. Eleva Ridge & Southern Eau Claire County

The landform identified by citizens as the Eleva Ridge Conservation Corridor in the southeast part of the county is an area known for its scenic hills and valleys with tributaries flowing south to the Buffalo River along Highway 10. This is the part of Eau Claire County in the Driftless Area. A geologic map shows this region holds a vast deposit of "frac sand". This deposit is currently sought after for oil and natural gas drilling around the world. Potential mining, similar to the Augusta/Fairchild areas near the Eau Claire County Forest, could have major environmental and aesthetic impacts on this hilly terrain. Very little public access exists in this area, which is popular with hunters, fishers, birders and bicyclists. Preservation of key parcels could be attained through acquisition, conservation easements or outright donation. These properties, once reclaimed, might also provide unique recreational opportunities.



*8. Farmland/Wetlands Conservation Corridor in central Eau Claire County.*

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Currently part of this area is the base of a statewide effort to preserve valuable farmland with landowners committing to conservation practices that protect soil and other natural resources. Access for outdoor recreation is granted only by private landowner permission. Gaining more public access and enhancing wildlife habitat would be possible through acquisition, conservation easement or outright donation. This area holds great opportunities for conservation groups, such as creating partnerships with farmers and other private landowners to manage habitat.

