

I. ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES - COUNTY BACKGROUND & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

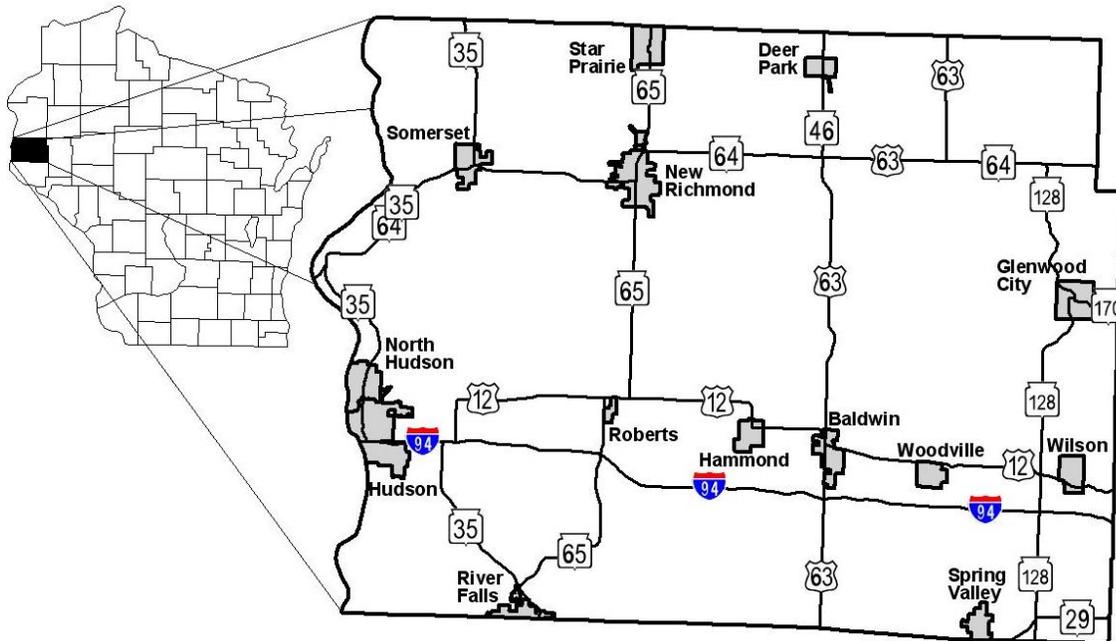
Volume 2 of St. Croix County’s Comprehensive Plan contains all the background information required by the Wisconsin Statute on Comprehensive Planning. It does not contain the goals, objectives, policies, future land use maps or implementation activities; those are contained in Volume 1 of the plan. Volume 2 is divided into one or more sections for each required element of the comprehensive plan.

The Issues and Opportunities Element is broken into two parts for easier review. This section contains the county background information and a summary of the public participation activities held during the development and adoption of this plan. More detailed population and demographics data is provided in Volume 2-2 of the Issues and Opportunities Element.

The County Setting

St. Croix County is located in west central Wisconsin and is separated from Minnesota by the St. Croix River to the west. The county is bordered on the north by Polk County, the east by Dunn County and the south by Pierce County. St. Croix County has a combined land and water area of approximately 469,760 acres. This amounts to roughly 734 square miles, of which 17 percent is in forest cover and 70 percent is used for agriculture. The county is rectangular in shape and is about 33 miles east to west and 24 miles north to south. It ranks 40th in land area and 20th in population among the 72 Wisconsin counties.

Figure 2.1 - St. Croix County Locational Map



Physically, St. Croix County is part of the Western Upland region of Wisconsin that extends east from and parallel to the St. Croix River, and is higher in elevation than the Central Plain to the east. The surface topography of the region varies from rolling plain to rugged hills and escarpments. The glaciers pushed through this area only leaving a portion of southwest Wisconsin, southeast

Minnesota, northern Illinois and northwest Iowa untouched on their southward march. This accounts for the southern two-thirds of the Western Upland having rugged topography while the northern third is smoother. The St. Croix River which borders the western side of the county is a significant tributary of the Mississippi River. The St. Croix River enters the Mississippi River some seven and a half miles south of the St. Croix County border at Prescott, Wisconsin.

The topography of St. Croix County ranges from gently rolling, to hilly and rough. A large portion of the central part of the county is a rolling plain. This plain is broken by mesas of resistant rock formations in southwestern St. Croix County. The northwestern areas and eastern fringe of the county contain the most rugged topography.

Continental glaciation covered the entire county which contributed greatly to its physical characteristics. While glacial deposition has occurred across the county, the most prominent glacial features are the rough and scenic landscapes of the Towns of St. Joseph and Somerset, and the St. Croix River valley which was a major drainageway as the glaciers of the Pleistocene Epoch receded. Rugged, hilly areas that resisted the scouring action of the glaciers are in the eastern part of the county and are noted for local relief averaging 200 feet.

St. Croix County is almost entirely in the St. Croix River Basin. A part of eastern St. Croix County lies within the Lower Chippewa River Basin. Numerous tributaries running into the Apple, Willow, Kinnickinnic, Rush, Eau Galle and Hay Rivers drain the County. There are also numerous lakes in the northwestern part of the County and in the Towns of Somerset, Star Prairie, Stanton and St. Joseph.

Within St. Croix County there are 21 unincorporated townships, 11 villages, and 4 cities. All but six towns in the County, the Towns of Somerset, St. Joseph, Hudson, Troy, Pleasant Valley and Rush River have boundaries that correspond to both the civil town boundary and the congressional survey township boundary. The first 4 have irregular boundaries along the St. Croix River and the latter 2 are each half of a survey township. The villages and cities include the Village of Spring Valley and City of River Falls which lie mostly in Pierce County. The City of Hudson is located on the western edge of the county along the St. Croix River and is the county seat.

The communities of St. Croix County are diverse not only because of their physical setting differences, but also because of the effects of differing human activity. The western area contains the urban areas of the county. All territory, population and housing in urbanized areas, and incorporated communities over 2,500 population and outside of urbanized areas, are considered urban by the Bureau of the Census. The Cities of New Richmond and Hudson, and Village of North Hudson fit the urban classification. However, it is evident that the towns in the western area are also urbanizing with rapid residential and commercial development. The Towns of Hudson, St. Joseph and Troy add about 17,000 people to approximately the same amount of people in the City of Hudson and Village of North Hudson, which they surround. This constitutes an urbanizing area containing over 33,500 people. Close to 30,000 people live in the next ring of towns (Somerset, Star Prairie, Richmond, Warren and Kinnickinnic) and the cities (New Richmond and River Falls) and villages (Roberts and Somerset). Hence, in the western part of the county, forty percent of the land area contains three-fourths of the county's population. The nearness to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and the rural lifestyle amenities of western Wisconsin can account for this urbanization. However, even the smaller villages in the central agricultural area and eastern wooded hills have felt some impact from the eastern migrations from Minnesota and the growth of the western portion of the county.

Major transportation corridors include Interstate 94, which travels east and west through the County; U.S. Highway 63, which runs north-south through the west half of the County; State Trunk Highway 29, which bisects the southern part of the County running east and west; State Trunk Highway 64, which runs east and west across the northern third of the County; and State Trunk

Highway 27, which runs north and south in roughly the eastern third of the County. A relatively fine network of town roads distributes traffic to numerous county trunk highways.

St. Croix County is the most easterly county in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan area. The influence of economic opportunities and residential migration from the metropolitan area was recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1980 when St. Croix County was added to the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area. A Metropolitan Statistical Area is a county or counties with a central city of at least 50,000 people, a total population over 100,000, and significant social and economic ties which exist between the central city and any outlying counties that are included. As a result of the 1990 Census, Pierce County to the south of St. Croix County was included in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area by the Census Bureau. Hence, it is apparent that the influence of the metro area is spreading. Polk County to the north of St. Croix County is also feeling the influence of the metro area.

County History

The French were the first white people to sight the land which is now St. Croix County. In 1687 Daniel Greysolon du Luth, a French explorer and adventurer, used the Brule-St. Croix waterway as a short route from Lake Superior to the Mississippi River. A year later, Father Louis Hennepin, a priest of the Order of St. Francis, was brought into the St. Croix territory as a prisoner of the Sioux Indians. It was not however, until 1689 that Nicolas Perrot took possession of the lands of the present Upper Mississippi, St. Croix and St. Peter Valleys in the name of France. French rule ended in the Upper Mississippi Valley with the Treaty of Paris of 1763, and by the Peace of Paris of 1783 the land east of the Mississippi became part of the United States.

Although Laurient Barth, Jacques Porlier, and Charles Reaume established a fur-trading station in 1793 on the St. Croix River bordering the land which is now St. Croix County, it was not until peace was fully established with the Indians that this region could be fully settled. By a treaty signed at Washington in 1837 the Dakota or Sioux Indians conceded to the United States Government all their lands east of the Mississippi River. In the same year, a treaty was made at Fort Snelling with the Chippewa or Ojibway Indians whereby they conceded to the United States all their lands east of the Mississippi to near the headwaters of the St. Croix and Chippewa Rivers.

The first settlement was made at the mouth of the Willow River in 1840 by Louis Massey and Peter J. Bouchea. In the spring of 1839 the steamer Palmyra opened the St. Croix River to trade and travel. The pine forests between the St. Croix River and Minnesota attracted interest in lumbering, and many lumber mills were built in this vicinity in the 1840's. By 1847 frame houses began to appear, and in 1849 a boarding house was opened at what is now the City of Hudson by Moses Perrin. With the establishment of the United States Land Office at Hudson in 1849, great advances were made

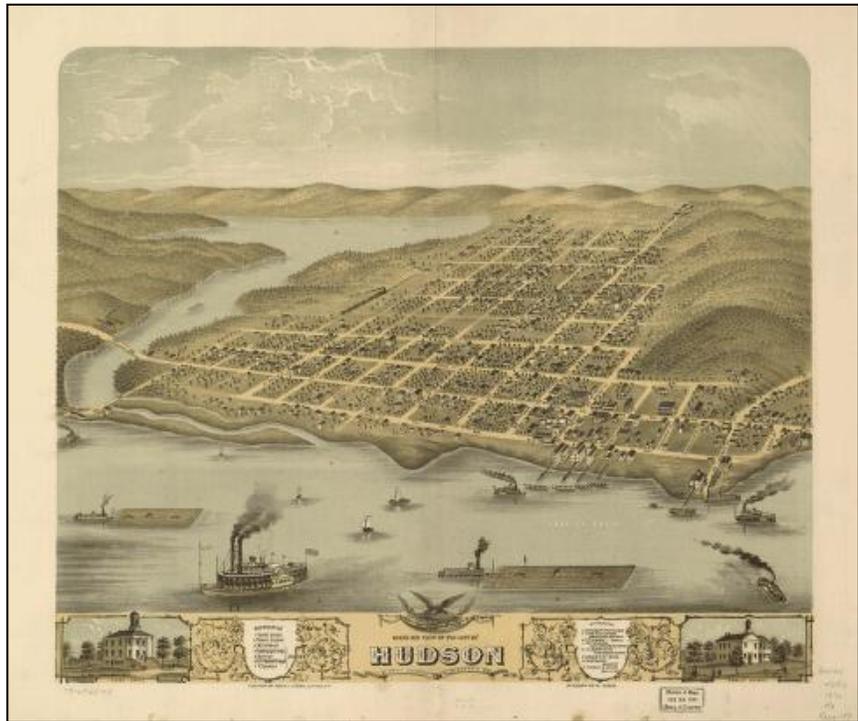


A historic photo of one of the ferries that operated in Hudson. Date unknown.

in population. As a result, the population of St. Croix County, 624 in 1850, had increased to 2,040 by 1855 and 5,388 in 1860.

In 1840 the Legislature of Wisconsin created the county of St. Croix, carrying the same name as the bordering river which derived its name from a Monsieur St. Croix, an explorer who was drowned at the mouth of the river late in the seventeenth century.

The boundaries of St. Croix County have remained constant since 1853. St. Croix County is 30 miles wide in the northern part, increasing to 33 miles in width in the central part, and then tapering down to 30 miles again at its southern extremity. It is 20 miles long and has an area of 729.45 square miles. It was not until 1851 that the County Board of Supervisors appointed Ammah Andrews to erect county buildings. This order was rescinded at a subsequent meeting, but an appropriation of \$350 was made for the construction of a county jail. No further progress was made until 1856 when a contract was again made with Ammah Andrews to build a courthouse for \$14,300. The total cost of the



Birds eye view of the City of Hudson, St Croix County, Wisconsin - 1870

buildings, completed in 1856, was \$20,045. These buildings were used with minor repairs until 1900 when a new courthouse, jail and sheriff's residence were constructed at a cost of \$50,000.

As demands for more space became apparent, a new jail was erected in 1963 at a cost of \$325,000. Upon completion, the previous jail and sheriff's residence were dismantled and construction commenced on that location for a new county courthouse. Erection of the 1965 courthouse was completed in 1966 at a cost of \$725,000.00.

Another account said Father Hennepin gave this region the French name St. Croix (originally Ste Croix) which means Holy Cross. The rich, rolling prairie lands of St. Croix County were conducive to farming, and by 1881, wheat had become the main farm crop. Oats, corn, potatoes, barley, rye and hay were also raised until dairying commenced. Today St. Croix County is well known for its dairy products with milk as the most important source of income for its farmers.

St. Croix County has a total of 21 towns, 9 villages, 3 fourth-class cities, and 2 Wards of River Falls located in St. Croix County. The population of St. Croix County in the 1980 census by the Bureau of Census at Washington was 43,867; in 1990 the Census showed a population of 50,261 (a 16% increase); in 2000 the Census showed a population of 63,155 (a 20% increase); and in 2010 the Census showed a population of 84,345 (a 34% increase).

There are 4 county owned parks in St. Croix County. Troy Park, located approximately 5 miles south of Hudson on the beautiful St. Croix River, offers swimming and picnic areas. Glen Hills

Park, located 5 miles south of Glenwood City, offers swimming, boating, picnic areas, fishing, a golf course, camp sites, snowmobile trails and cross country skiing. Pine Lake Park, located 4 miles north of Baldwin, offers a scenic park, fishing, boating, picnic area and recreation. Homestead Park on Perch Lake is located 3 miles northwest of Burkhardt off of County Road E and County Road I, and opened May 2003. St. Croix County is also proud to have Willow River State Park located within our boundaries about 5 miles east of Hudson, which offers beautiful scenery, camping, picnic grounds, water cascades, nature trails and winter cross country ski trails. There are approximately 100 miles of designated snowmobile trails located in St. Croix County.

In November of 1991, the County Board Supervisors voted to approve construction of a new Government Center with bonding for \$11,500,000. The new Center is located on the Boody property along County Trunk UU and Carmichael Road.

June 14, 1993 was the day of occupation of our new Government Center. An Open House was held prior to the jail being occupied with over 1200 participating. The Dedication Ceremony was August 17, 1993. The jail was occupied in August, 1993. The Emergency Communications Center moved to the Government Center in April, 1995. The 1900 Courthouse was sold to David Tank who renovated it into condominium apartments.

In December of 1994, the 1965 Courthouse was sold for \$400,000 to the City of Hudson for use as a Library and other offices.

In 1998, the Ag Center was constructed in Baldwin and houses the UW-Extension, Land and Water Conservation, Farm Service Agency and NRCS offices.

Construction of the 80-bed Huber Facility began in 2003 and was completed in April 2004.

Public Participation

Wisconsin Statutes §66.1001(4)(a), requires that the governing body of the governmental unit, St. Croix County Board of Supervisors, adopt written procedures designed to foster public participation. Public participation shall include open discussion, communication programs, information services and public meetings for which advance notice have been provided at every stage of comprehensive plan preparation. Such written procedures provide for wide distribution of proposed, alternative or amended comprehensive elements, an opportunity for the public to submit written comments on the comprehensive plan and a process for the governing body to respond to such comments.

The governing body of each governmental unit participating in the West Central Wisconsin Multijurisdictional Planning Project recognizes the need for an open and active public participation process to foster a strong community commitment to the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan to guide the community's future growth and development. To ensure that the public has an opportunity to be involved in every stage of the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan, the participants identify the following actions to promote an active public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing the plan. Listed below are the components to the Public Participation Plan:

- St. Croix County has appointed the Community Development Committee as the County Community Development Agency, pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes §59.69(2).
- All Committee meetings are open to the public and are officially posted to notify the public as required by law. An opportunity for public comment is provided.
- One Issues and Opportunities Identification workshop, where the Committee and the public will participate in a facilitated session to develop and prioritize key issues to be considered in the

planning process, explore community values and problems, as well as strengths and weaknesses in being able to address the issues. The workshop is noticed and the public is invited to participate. **A workshop was held on November 11, 2008 in order to identify 25 priority issues in St. Croix County.**

- One statistically valid Community Opinion Survey developed with consideration of the Issues and Opportunities Identification workshop outcome. **In September 2008, the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls mailed surveys to 1,146 County residences.** The initial mailing was followed by reminder postcards and a second mailing to non-respondents. The overall response rate was 44 percent (500 completed questionnaires). Statistical tests do not indicate that “non-response bias” is a problem in this sample. However, the demographic profile of the sample contains fewer women, renters and young people than would be expected. The SRC notes differences of opinion of different demographic groups throughout the report, and in one instance, adjusts the results to reflect more accurately the opinions of all St. Croix County residents. Results of the survey were incorporated throughout the comprehensive plan. A complete summary of the survey can be found in Appendix A.
- One Community Vision and Development Design workshop where the Committee and the public will participate in roundtable discussions, design preference activities and develop a community vision. The workshop is noticed and the public is invited to participate. **Two separate visioning workshops were held on February 18 & 25, 2009 to identify a vision statement for each element of the Comprehensive Plan.**
- Open House and Information/Education meetings where information about planning activities and plan products will be presented. The meetings are noticed and the public is invited to participate. **Open House Workshops were held on November 18, 2009 and June 18 and 20, 2012 to share and discuss draft elements of the Comprehensive Plan with the public. Also an information meeting on the draft plan was held on October 10, 2012 to share and discuss the plan with the public.**
- Additional public information activities and a public hearing were conducted during the year-long development of the agricultural element of the plan, which also serves as St. Croix County’s Farmland Preservation Plan. Additional detail on the public participation activities is provided in section 7. Agriculture/Farmland Preservation Vol 2.
- The governmental units of internal, adjacent or overlapping jurisdictions have been notified of the county’s undertaking of the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan and their input sought on jurisdictional issues concerning land use, municipal boundaries and service provision.
- The County Board receives periodic reports from the Committee during the preparation of the plan and has the opportunity to review and comment on materials developed for incorporation into the Comprehensive Plan.



St. Croix County staff member discussing draft elements of the Comprehensive Plan with a local official.

- Where practical, provide information about planning activities and plan outcomes on the St. Croix County Internet website, with links to the related information on the WCWRPC website. A webpage dedicated to the comprehensive plan project was maintained throughout the project, located at www.sccwi.us/countycompplan.
- All meetings of the County Board are open to the public and are officially posted to notify the public as required by law.
- Draft copies of the recommended Comprehensive Plan will be available at offices of the County and other public places, for the public to review and to submit written comments.
- **A Public Hearing will be conducted on October 25, 2012 on the Comprehensive Plan prior to Community Development Committee recommendation and the County Board enacting the plan by ordinance.** The Public Hearing will be preceded by a Class 1 notice under Chapter 985, Wisconsin Statutes, published at least 30 days before the hearing is held. Additional notice will be provided pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes §66.1001(4)(e). The public is invited to comment and submit written comments.
- The County Board will consider and respond to written comments regarding the plan before enacting it by ordinance.
- The adopted comprehensive plan will be distributed to:
 1. Every governmental body that is located in whole or in part within the boundaries of the local governmental unit.
 2. The clerk of every local governmental unit that is adjacent to the local governmental unit which is the subject of the plan.
 4. The Wisconsin Department of Administration.
 5. The West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.
 6. All public libraries that serve the County.