

Solid Waste Management Plan

Executive Summary

2025 – 2030 AND BEYOND

LA CROSSE COUNTY SOLID WASTE DEPARTMENT

LA CROSSE COUNTY, WI



LA CROSSE COUNTY
Exceptional services. Extraordinary place.

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LA CROSSE REGIONAL DISPOSAL SYSTEM - OUR CORE VALUES GUIDE US

Committment



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.

Continous 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.



Landfill dual in/out scale. Materials processing and citizen drop off in background.

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 marketplace.



La Crosse County Solid Waste Office

Executive Summary

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

La Crosse County (County) is a recognized leader in solid waste management in the region, the state of Wisconsin, and nationally. Through partnerships with multiple municipalities, counties, and private industry, the County has led the creation of the La Crosse County Regional Disposal System (the “System”) that reflects community values, provides accountability to the public, manages resources locally, reduces liabilities, and ensures strong private sector competition by having equal opportunities for all haulers.

The County’s long-term commitment to delivering environmentally sound, financially stable solid waste services is reflected in this update to its Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP). Through planning processes such as this update to the SWMP, the County and its partners stay abreast of changing conditions and prepare for the future. This update to the SWMP provides a guide for solid waste management decisions 2025 - 2030 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 Comprehensive Plan – Envision 2050
- La Crosse County Strategic Plan for Sustainability
- La Crosse Area Blufflands Plan
- La Crosse County Outdoor Recreation Plan

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.

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, Integrity Grading & Excavating, Hilltopper Refuse and Recycling, and Gundersen Envision/Emplify 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

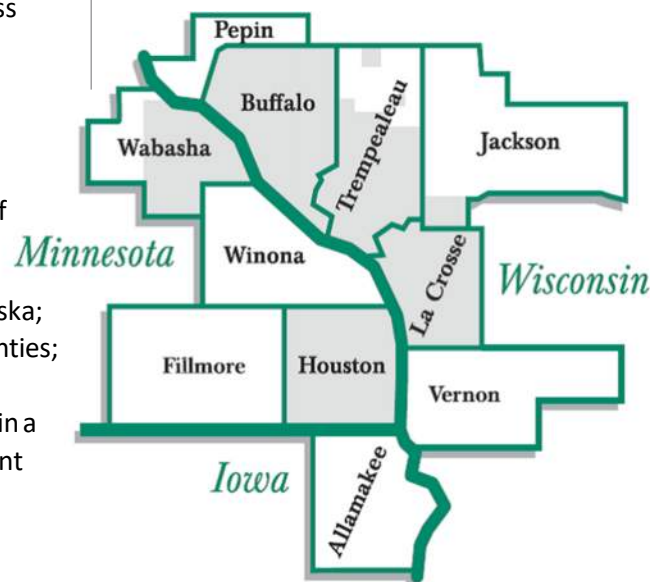
Modern subtitle D landfill cell constructed at County landfill site

2000s

1970s era County landfill remediated; new landfill capacity added; new pollution control equipment installed at Xcel facility; SWPB established; HHM facility opened

2010-2024

Multiple solid waste diversion programs operating successfully; landfill gas-to-energy partnership implemented; single stream recycling adopted by cities of Onalaska and La Crosse; updated SWMP prepared; Xcel contract extended through 2030, landfill expansion approval, HHM program expansion, facility entrance reconfiguration





Landfill Gas to Energy Facility



Product re-use room.



HHM Facility

The Department has received multiple awards at the national, regional, and local level.

Key services and facilities include:

- Waste to Energy (WTE) at Xcel's WTE facility
- A 320-acre site on Highway 16, which hosts a broad range of disposal and waste management services recycling/reuse, land use management
- A landfill gas-to-energy system that delivers landfill gas to Gundersen 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 since the previous plan update.

- Tip Fee Management: Proactive vs reactive pricing adjustments to tip fee.
- Strengthened Relationship with Xcel Energy: Renewed agreement until 2030.
- Landfill Expansion Approval: Received WDNR approval of an approximately 3.1 million cubic yard contiguous expansion.
- Former Landfill LTC Funds Release: Long term care funds for the former exhumed landfill released back to the County.
- Recycled Asphalt Shingles Usage: Received WDNR approval to repurpose processed asphalt singles as aggregate replacement.
- WTE Advocacy: Successfully advocated for legislature change (2021 Wisconsin Act 58) exempting WTE reject material from statutory tip fees to encourage WTE over direct landfill and economic benefits to the System.
- HHM Expansion & Renovation: Ongoing expansion of materials accepted and operating hours. Improved waste storage capacity and compliance.
- HHM Intergovernmental Agreement Renewed: Funding in effect until 2028.
- Facility Entrance Reconfiguration: Dual in/out scale system, separate access to landfill office and HHM facility, relocation citizens drop off which have all improved safety and traffic flow.
- Facility Operations Contract: Successfully bid and negotiated a 10-year contract with new landfill operations contractor; Integrity Grading & Excavating.
- Virtual Tours: Developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue long standing practice of landfill tours and education when in-person not possible.
- New Waste Diversion Programs: Polystyrene foam, water filters from Town of Campbell residents affected by PFAS.

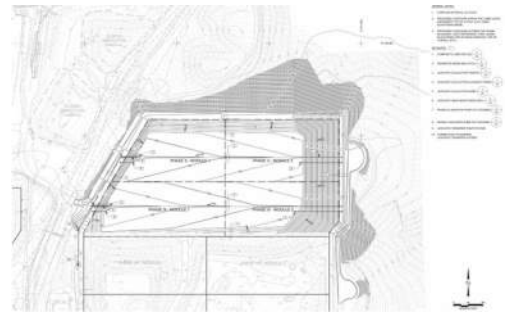
SECTION 3 & 4: SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT TRENDS – LOCAL & NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Reflecting its commitment to long-range planning, and seeking to build on the accomplishments described above, the Department initiated this update to the 2015 SWMP. The previous update was completed over the course of one year with significant stakeholder engagement. Many of the key issues of that update remain current, however trends in waste generation and management continue to evolve at the local and national levels.

The County completed a detailed analysis of solid waste generation, disposal, diversion and recycling in the service area, statewide, and nationally. The Counties detailed data tracking regarding waste quantities and characteristics within the service area allow for data driven decisions.

Key takeaways from the analysis included:

- The landfill has experienced a consistent annual tonnage averaging roughly 114,000 tons over the last 10 years making establishing tip fees and budgeting less volatile.
- A consistent amount of waste continues to be directed to Xcel's WTE facility to meet contract obligations. Approximately 75% of the waste delivered to Xcel is converted to energy and diverted for metal recycling.
- The hauler rebate program continues to provide a steady stream of waste to the landfill.
- Recycling volumes have increased dramatically with the deployment of single stream recycling.
- The HHM program serves on average approximately 8,000 residential customers collecting 500,000 pounds annually.
- Shingles continue to be one of the most diverted materials on the material processing pad followed by clean wood, concrete and asphalt.
- The WDNRs 2020 – 2021 waste characterization study indicate organics, paper, and plastic make up the top three materials landfilled. This is also the case at the national level. There may be future opportunities for additional organics diversion.
- At the national level, MSW generation continues to increase meanwhile the per capita disposal rate is plateauing.
- C&D waste disposal is steadily increasing at the landfill. C&D also appears to be growing at the national level.



Engineering plan of the Phase 2 North Expansion

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

The HHM program provides a critically important environmental service for the region and is highly valued by citizens and system partners.



La Crosse County Solid Waste Facility Map



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 5: 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 are 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 where financial stability is key to sustain operations and uphold 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” and transparent to all.

Key Recommendations:

- Continue proactive management of the tipping fee (vs reactive)
- Utilize predictive financial management tools consistent with the Department's Enterprise Fund structure
- Explore bringing in waste from outside the region
- Continue to diversify revenue sources

Issue No. 2: Xcel WTE – how can the Department continue to strengthen its partnership with Xcel to the benefit of both parties and the System as a whole?

Importance: The current contract expires in 2030. Extending the Xcel WTE contract provides system stability and enables investments in other areas. Whereas, eliminating WTE from the current system would impact landfill operations significantly, reducing its effective lifespan. Maintaining a strong relationship with Xcel helps reduce uncertainty, which may not be feasible without a long-term agreement in place.

Key Recommendations:

- Contract extension and restructuring beyond 2030
- Support Xcel's cost reduction goals and maximize waste delivered to Xcel.
- Foster trust and transparency between Xcel, the County, and the public

Issue No. 3: Waste Stream Security & Airspace Capacity – how can the Department maintain an adequate waste stream now and, in the future, to achieve its financial objectives? How will the Department manage the future waste stream knowing further expansion of the existing landfill is unlikely?

Importance: The County is obligated by contract to provide 70,000 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 to remain financially viable.

Key Recommendations:

- Facilitate proper waste disposal education
- Remove barriers to participation by other partners
- Continue to explore opportunities for organics diversion partnerships and resource recovery and reuse.
- Conduct a waste capture audit and enhance waste security.
- Start planning now for future solid waste disposal once the landfill is closed.

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

Importance: Cooperation among partners is essential to address significant challenges and issues important to the region. 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. Consider HHM services as an incentive.
- Collaborate 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.



Materials processing pad.

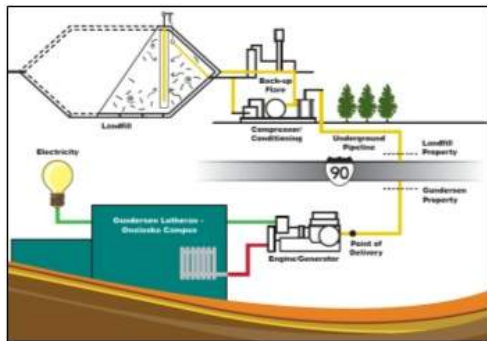


Bike repair/rest area along trail network at landfill.

“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 Trempealeau County
Solid Waste Commission

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.



Landfill gas to energy schematic.

Issue No. 5: Enhance Community Outreach – how can the Department continue to build upon its efforts to proactively engage its stakeholders and partners to better meet their needs?

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

Key Recommendations:

- Promote an equitable and inclusive System through diverse outreach methods that extend to under-resourced communities.
- Build community partnerships through collaboration with non-profit organizations on educational and service initiatives
- Use technology like artificial intelligence (AI) to assist in daily tasks meanwhile devoting personnel to critical topics like diversion and sustainability.

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: Operational effectiveness and efficiencies are essential for providing quality services. Ensuring proper disposal and waste security are important for diversion and beneficial use programs as well as overall financial stability. There is a growing demand for specialty services such as HHM and zero waste at Xcel's WTE facility. The continued focus on operational effectiveness and efficiency can provide opportunities to reduce expenditures or increase revenues.

Key Recommendations:

- Develop a formal framework to regularly review, monitor, and implement operational improvements.
- Optimize existing C&D waste diversion/processing programs and continue to find new opportunities for expansion.
- Continue to expand HHM services.
- Explore use of technologies (i.e., AI) to improve operational efficiencies.

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. Understanding the origins of the System is crucial for making informed decisions moving forward. Budget constraints and a competitive talent market make backfilling retirements of experienced solid waste management staff challenging. Attracting and retaining skilled professionals becomes increasingly challenging.

Key Recommendations:

- Invigorate the SWPB membership
- Engage young talent in the solid waste industry
- Address workforce shortages with other municipalities. Extend career opportunities to under-resourced communities.
- Prioritize succession planning.
- 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 (MLUP) and related documents?

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

Key Recommendations:

- Continue to expand and refine funding strategies for recreational asset development
- Engage with educational institutions to use the landfill as a “living lab”
- Use the MLUP as a road map for collaborative trail management with other entities involved in managing and maintaining the greater trail network.
- Encourage adjacent development that could utilize landfill resources.

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



Trail Building at Landfill by Wiscorp

“People support that which they help create”.

Unknown Author



Pedestrian Bridge over wetlands completed by Eagle Scout Brant Attleson

The annual meeting provides a venue to present and share information with the 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.



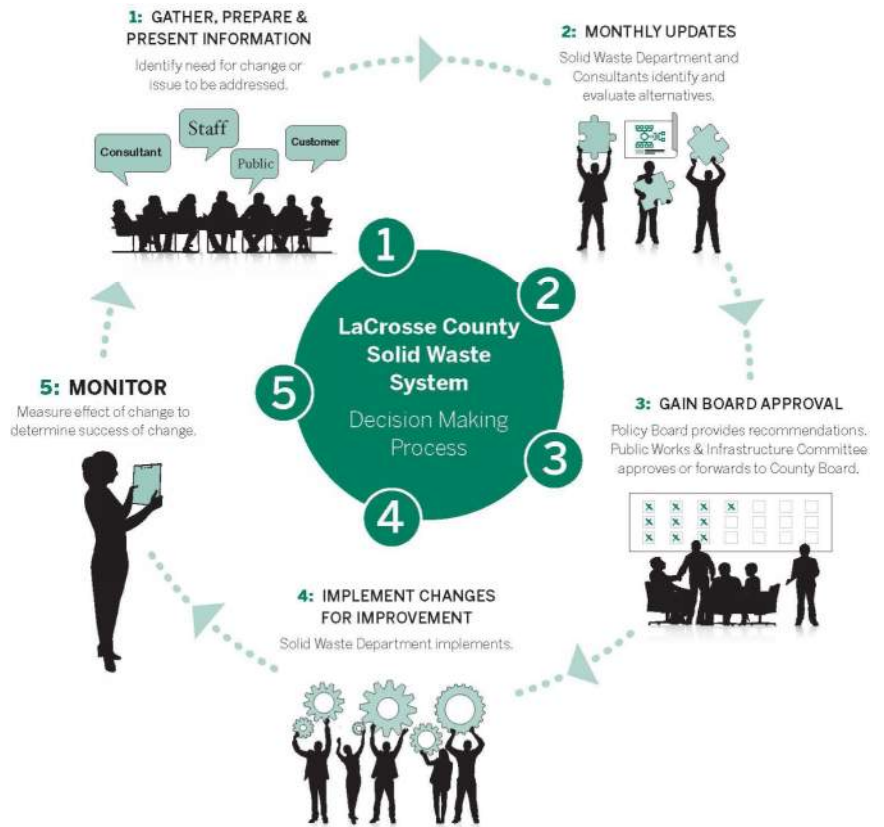
An emphasis on holistic, long-term decision making, by embracing new opportunities and responding to changes in the environment.

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 6:

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 the proposed plan. Step 3 represents the Policy Board, PWI, and County Board’s endorsement of the Plan. Step 4 is Plan Implementation or “next steps.”



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 PWI 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:

www.lacrossecounty.org/solidwaste

To arrange for a tour of the landfill contact the Department at:

608.785.9572



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