



Strategic Framework

2024-2028

Adopted: 11/9/23

Vision & Mission

We envision a community renowned for its healthy lakes, lands, and waters.

Healthy Waters - Thriving Community

It is our mission to champion our lakes and watershed stewardship for the benefit of all.

A community renowned for its healthy lakes, lands, and waters

Healthy waters - thriving community. You cannot have one without the other. Greater Madison's abundance of water has long shaped its identity and the quality of life we enjoy. The five major lakes literally put us on the map, differentiating us from anywhere else as a special place to live, work and visit. They help us regularly rise to the top of "Best Places in the Nation" lists and attract businesses and tourism dollars that sustain a robust economy and strong property values. For every dollar invested or action taken in creating healthier lands and waters, dividends accrue in the form of co-benefits that touch the lives of all who call Teejop (Ho-Chunk for the "Four Lakes" region) home.

Our updated vision articulates the type of future we aspire to achieve. It is ambitious but achievable. It holds the promise of what we can become. And it recognizes the intersection and inseparability of land and water. In this future, we have made Greater Madison widely known and admired as a national model for its natural resource stewardship.

Champion our lakes and watershed stewardship for the benefit of all

Back in 2010, a one-day festival on the shore of Lake Monona sought to spotlight the lakes and raise money for improvement projects. Called the Clean Lakes Festival and hosted by the Mad-City Ski Team, it helped spark renewed public interest in our local waters. Clean Lakes Alliance was founded later that same year, turning a one-day festival into a full-time endeavor to focus attention on our lakes. Milestone achievements include launching Yahara Pride Farms, developing the *Yahara CLEAN Strategic Action Plan for Phosphorus Reduction*, creating the LakeForecast monitoring

network, publishing an annual *Greater Madison Lake Guide* and *State of the Lakes Report*, and leading the Yahara CLEAN Compact’s “Renew the Blue” stakeholder-action initiative.

Since our founding, we have pursued a mission of bringing stakeholders to the table to work together for cleaner lakes. Clean Lakes Alliance was originally tasked to “continue building a community of people, businesses, organizations, and government agencies dedicated to improving and protecting water quality in the Yahara River Watershed.” Today’s 2,000+ donors, nearly 50-member Community Board, thousands of annual program and event participants, and partnerships like the Yahara CLEAN Compact are clear evidence of a former mission in action. To build on that success while recognizing that individual actions can lead to big cumulative impacts, our newly adopted mission seeks to turn stakeholders into active participants. As more people act and advocate for change, the further we will move toward our vision.

Our Values

We hold seven values to be integral to our future success. Clean Lakes Alliance commits to making these values guiding tenets and their underlying principles central to everything we do. By living each value as both individual team members and as an organization, we can cultivate the type of culture and relationship building that will help us thrive.

Optimism

Together, we can build a better future knowing cleaner lakes are possible.

Respect and Reverence for Water

Our waters are the heart and life of our community.

Focus

Directing our energy makes us effective.

Engagement

Our community thrives when everyone celebrates, connects with, and cares for our lakes, lands, and waters.

Inclusion

We are stronger and wiser when we embrace and value all voices and experiences.

Collaboration

Alliances and teamwork flourish when we intentionally build trust and respect.

Grounded in Science

Good information and objectivity lead to high-impact decisions.

Our Role in the Community

Clean Lakes Alliance is in the business of connecting the community to its lakes, raising awareness, and empowering people to take impactful action. With a primary focus on phosphorus reduction as the main driver of water quality conditions, our team works to engage stakeholders within the 385-square-mile watershed that drains surface water to the five major lakes (Mendota, Monona, Wingra, Waubesa and Kegonsa). This

work also touches on issues outside of phosphorus reduction when the organization’s involvement or support is strategically relevant and vital (see five-point “decision criteria” on page 5). For example, *E. coli* bacteria contamination – a major cause of beach closures – was identified through our strategic planning as a growing issue of concern meriting the organization’s future attention. Ultimately, we want the lakes to be: 1) protected by healthy landscapes and clean, inflowing stream water; 2) supported by vibrant lakeshores; and 3) enjoyed and celebrated as our most valuable natural assets. By nurturing a culture of stewardship, promoting needed actions, and serving as a positive voice and fundraising vehicle for the lakes, we are confident this is attainable.

Creating watershed stewards is foundational to our new mission. We believe the greatest power for change resides within each of us as individuals. It is through the cumulative impact of many individual decisions when we see transformational progress. To fulfill our mission, we:

- LEAD... by setting a vision for our lakes, building alliances, and marshalling the resources to affect change.
- EDUCATE... by offering unique learning experiences to increase public awareness about threats and opportunities.
- ACTIVATE... by developing, mobilizing, and guiding stewards to engage in meaningful actions.
- CELEBRATE.. by connecting people and groups to the lakes and recognizing shared successes.

One of Clean Lakes Alliance’s biggest strengths is our history of bringing people together, offering fun and educational ways to connect with the lakes, and often working behind the scenes to move the needle in addressing complex problems. We will continue to be effective playing the role of catalyst, supporting grassroots efforts, and encouraging others to act and lead by example. This approach has grown Clean Lakes Alliance into one of the largest and most influential lakes organizations in the nation. Locally, it has brought together an extensive coalition of partners endorsing a shared roadmap for cleaning up our Yahara chain of lakes.

Why a Strategic Framework

The strategic framework is a summary of Clean Lakes Alliance’s vision, mission, values, strategies, tactics, and key performance indicators. It sets the direction of the organization’s work over the next five years. It also helps get team members and supporters on the same page regarding lessons of the past, what the current moment calls for, and what it will look like when we reach our destination. This includes identifying new opportunities where additional resources and capacities could be directed to broaden or accelerate our impact.

Reducing phosphorus remains the top priority for Clean Lakes Alliance. The strategic framework solidifies this and other priorities to guide the organization’s future focus. Phosphorus pollution mostly enters our lakes in the form of stormwater runoff, and it is the leading contributor to poor water clarity, cyanobacteria blooms, and beach closures that limit our ability to use and enjoy them. *Renew the Blue* (2022) recommendations also underscore the importance of highly functioning shorelines and lake parks, and call attention to the

THANK YOU!

Clean Lakes Alliance is grateful to its committed staff, Community Board members, and the many trusted advisors and supporters whose voices informed the development of this strategic framework. A special thank you to our third-party facilitators for their overall guidance, to the leadership “Core Team” for its role as an ad-hoc advisory body, and to all those who offered their feedback and opinions through surveys, interviews, and workshops.

role of *E. coli* bacteria in closing beaches. These other areas present new opportunities for focus within the scope of this five-year strategic framework. But while the framework offers tactical considerations under each strategy pillar described below, it is not an operations plan. Instead, it is designed to help inform the development of annual goals and work plans governing the execution of day-to-day activities.

Strategies

An intensive discovery process revealed several main competencies that are rooted in each of our strategies. We are known for bringing partners together and holding up a vision for what is possible; for giving people opportunities to learn, celebrate, and act in meaningful ways; and for using credible science to tell the story of lake and watershed health. Looking ahead, we will be doubling down on those strengths.

Our work will:

- Build on the success of core programs, events, and publications
- Focus attention on the shorelines and lake parks that connect us to the water
- Explore new tools and revenue approaches to help us broaden our impact

The strategies below call for investing in our extraordinary staff, board and committee members, donors, volunteers, and community partners who have brought us success in the past. Organized into pillars, each delineates a pathway to producing the measurable outputs and outcomes that are central to our mission and vision.

STRATEGIES

Four strategy pillars reflect a holistic approach to effecting watershed-scale change. Fundamentally, they are designed to grow, inspire, and activate watershed stewards throughout the community.

People	Lands	Shorelines & Lake Parks	Organization
Cultivate a love of the lakes	Lead and inspire care of the land impacting our waters	Support the creation of vibrant lakeshores	Continue building an effective and enduring organization

<p><i>Offer fun, educational, and enriching experiences that connect people, businesses, and organizations to the lakes.</i></p>	<p><i>Provide stakeholders with the motivation, guidance, and support to act.</i></p>	<p><i>Celebrate, showcase, and nurture stewardship and legacy placemaking where land meets water.</i></p>	<p><i>Sustain a thriving workplace and high-impact organization by living our values as team members and partners.</i></p>
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Tactics

Tactics are how we will accomplish our strategic objectives. The four strategy pillars call for tactics representing new growth opportunities for the organization. Any new initiatives that expand our core services are generally expected to require supplementary resources to support the increased scope of work. By strengthening the alliance, growing our revenue streams, and creating a culture of stewardship, we will be able to successfully advocate for needed policies, investments and projects. Ultimately, the tactics and supporting services we select will direct our energy toward the highest-impact approaches to fulfilling our mission.

Effective tactics and opportunities will:

1. Fit within the scope of our **mission (pg. 1)**.
2. Support one or more of our seven **values (pg. 2)**.
3. Align with one or more of our four **strategies (pg. 4-5)** and their associated **tactics (pg. 5-7)**.
4. Positively contribute to one or more **Key Performance Indicators (pg. 7-8)**.
5. Leverage Clean Lakes Alliance’s unique strengths to yield a positive cost-benefit.

Clean Lakes Alliance regularly receives requests for action or assistance pertaining to matters affecting the lakes. Using the decision criteria above, a gradient of support can be provided in the form of a current program offering, a Clean Lakes Grant award, shared information, or by providing connections to applicable partners and resources. We also may periodically mobilize support for large, visible initiatives on the landscape (e.g., Pheasant Branch Conservancy restoration), in the public policy realm (e.g., Dane County Healthy Farms, Healthy Lakes Task Force and the Yahara CLEAN Compact), or in the marketplace (e.g., Yahara Pride Farms). We do this when the initiative exploits a window of opportunity, impacts a critical success factor in furthering our mission, or helps move a practice or policy from edge innovation to the mainstream.

Note that although various tactical options are presented under each strategy pillar below, this is not intended as an exhaustive or prioritized listing of action items. Their relevancy, scope, and timing as viable options will depend on multiple factors, including the availability of needed resources to ensure their successful implementation. Current activities and growth prospects will be regularly evaluated against the Key Performance Indicators that follow as a means of ensuring proper strategic alignment.

TACTICS

Tactical considerations relating to both current work and planned growth are presented below. Asterisks (*) denote tactics that represent a new opportunity requiring additional resources. Because of their dynamic nature, specific tactics may be added, modified, or deleted as needs and opportunities evolve over the five-year timeframe.

People	Lands	Shorelines & Lake Parks	Organization
<p style="text-align: center;">Invite the community to celebrate, connect with, and care for our lakes, lands, and waters.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Champion Yahara CLEAN Compact recommendations in <u><i>RENEW THE BLUE: A Community Guide for Cleaner Lakes & Beaches in the Yahara Watershed.</i></u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Focus public attention on reimagining and investing in those special places where land meets water.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Continue to grow and diversify a sustained base of support while fostering a rewarding, values-based culture across the organization.</p>
<p>P.1. Continue offering a set of core programs and events that connect people to the water and inspire and activate stewardship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Volunteer Days -LakeForecast monitoring -Clean Lakes 101 science cafes -Clean Boats, Clean Waters -Lakeside Chats, Lunch & Learns, and Lake-O-Grams -Frozen Assets -Loop the Lake -Community Breakfast -Fore! Lakes 	<p>L.1. Continue awarding annual Clean Lakes Grants to leverage resources and help advance strategically valuable projects and partner efforts. Reserve a portion of annual grant funding to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) objectives - agricultural initiatives - youth engagement - the work of neighborhood and Friends groups <p>L.2. Integrate the Yahara CLEAN Compact into the organization’s board structure and operations. Lean into these established partnerships to advocate for and</p>	<p>S.1. Cultivate a closer working relationship with the Ho-Chunk Nation by formalizing partnership goals, elevating cultural awareness, and promoting “seven-generation” caretaking principles (<i>Teejop Initiative</i>).</p> <p>S.2. Develop and advocate for a set of standards and best practices for shorelines and lake parks.</p> <p>S.3. Complete a condition and opportunities assessment of all Yahara lakes’ shoreline, public</p>	<p>O.1. Continue to adapt annual operation plans to optimize the organization’s functional effectiveness and durability following the strategic framework.</p> <p>O.2. Clarify staff, board, committee, partner, and volunteer roles to foster cohesive working relationships. Maintain a strong leadership-succession strategy.</p> <p>O.3. Explore innovative resourcing/funding models, such as fee-for-service contracts and endowments, to pay for identified</p>

<p><i>-Greater Madison Lake Guide with State of the Lakes Report</i> <i>-Partnered fundraising events</i></p> <p>P.2. Tailor core programs, events, outreach, and relationship building to connect with a broader, more diverse spectrum of stakeholders. Leverage Community Board members to help make and grow these connections.</p> <p>P.3. Tell the story about the lakes’ far-reaching economic and quality-of-life values. Quantify and communicate these values, including what we stand to gain or lose depending on future actions.</p>	<p>set specific goals around top-priority <i>Renew the Blue</i> recommendations.*</p> <p>L.3. Develop “<i>Score Your Impact</i>” and train-the-trainer programs to promote and support the completion of at-home stewardship actions.*</p> <p>L.4. Continue using an annual <i>State of the Lakes Report</i> to tell the story of lake and watershed health. Develop an online progress dashboard to increase access and awareness to this information.*</p>	<p>lake parks, and sites of historical/cultural significance.*</p> <p>S.4. Advocate for expanded beach testing and related public-information sharing.</p> <p>S.5. Explore innovative partnerships, design concepts, and funding strategies that can support the development of model parks and lake ecology centers. Prioritize green infrastructure, sustainability, and stewardship programming for both youth and adults.*</p>	<p>areas of strategic growth (noted by asterisks).</p> <p>O.4. Promote ongoing staff resiliency by regularly reviewing internal policies and annual goals for consistency with our values. Stagger the yearly timing of major events and adjust the scale or intensity of program services (allows for improved flexibility to respond to unanticipated needs and opportunities as they arise.)</p> <p>O.5. Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by offering training and refining staff/board-recruitment procedures. Collect and report voluntarily provided DEI information to maintain Candid’s Platinum Seal of Transparency.</p>
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KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

We all want *swimmable lakes that look good, smell good, and are safe to use*. A short list of metrics was chosen to help us track our general progress in meeting these expectations. They help focus the selection of tactics while characterizing what we ultimately want for our lakes (“Community-level KPIs”) and what our strategy pillars will need to deliver to achieve those outcomes (“Strategy-output KPIs”).

Community-level KPIs

1. Clearer water
2. Open beaches
3. Fewer cyanobacteria blooms

Strategy-output KPIs

(Factors or conditions that indicate how well we are progressing in achieving the Community Goals)

Less pollution, improved soil health, and greater watershed stewardship.¹

<p>People</p> <p><i>People enjoying and learning about the lakes</i></p>	<p>Lands</p> <p><i>Green, water-absorbing land surfaces</i></p>	<p>Shorelines & Lake Parks</p> <p><i>Model lake parks and shorelines</i></p>	<p>Organization</p> <p><i>Successful fundraising, effective operations, and a thriving staff and board</i></p>
<p>P.1. Increased Clean Lakes Alliance program/event participation</p> <p>P.2. More people using the lakes, beaches, and lake parks</p>	<p>L.1. Lower average soil phosphorus index in agricultural areas</p> <p>L.2. More acres in cover crops</p> <p>L.3. More acres managed under a state-compliant Nutrient Management Plan</p> <p>L.4. Increased watershed literacy and knowledge of “Score Your Impact” actions</p> <p>L.5. More direct public investment in waterfront and water quality improvement</p>	<p>S.1. Lake parks and master plans prioritize green-infrastructure and sustainability objectives</p> <p>S.2. Improved shoreline health</p> <p>S.3. More frequent and weather-event-based testing of public beaches and related public information sharing</p>	<p>O.1. Positive staff/board-engagement assessments</p> <p>O.2. Achievement of annual work-planning goals</p> <p>O.3. Annual revenue as a percentage of planned revenue</p> <p>O.4. Growth in donor numbers, average gift amount, and retention</p>

¹ Clean Lakes Alliance will create SMART goals for each strategy-specific output. These are goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.