

Public Scoping Summary Report

West Fork Kickapoo & Coon Creek Watersheds

February 2022



Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym or Abbreviation	Meaning
CC	Coon Creek
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
PLAN-EIS	Watershed Project Plan and Environmental Impact Statement
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFK	West Fork Kickapoo
WFPO	Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Purpose of a Scoping Report.....	1
1.2	Project Overview	1
1.3	Description of the Scoping Process	2
	Project Website	2
	Press Release.....	2
	Project Distribution List.....	2
	Preliminary Scoping Meetings.....	2
2	Scoping Results.....	5
2.1	Method of Comment Collection and Analysis.....	5
2.2	Summary of the Public Comments Received	5
	Comments Received at the Open Houses .. Error! Bookmark not defined.	
	Comments Submitted Outside of the Open Houses.....	5
2.3	Summary of Comments and Issues.....	6
	Alternatives and Construction.....	7
	Socioeconomics	10
	Biological Resources: Fish	11
	Transportation and Infrastructure	11
	Wetlands	11
	Water Quality.....	11
	Land Use	11
	Climate Variability.....	12
	Other	12

List of Figures

Figure 1. Coon Creek Watershed Planning Area and Dam Locations 3
Figure 2. WFK Watershed Planning Area and Dam Locations..... 4
Figure 3. Number of comments per watershed..... 6
Figure 4. Summary of Comment Purpose..... 7

List of Appendices

Appendix A Notification Materials
Appendix B Public Comments Received During Scoping Process

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of a Scoping Report

The purpose of this Scoping Summary Report is to document the public scoping process for the Watershed Project Plan – Environmental Impact Statements (PLAN-EIS) for both the Coon Creek (CC) and West Fork Kickapoo (WFK) watersheds.

Scoping is a collaborative public involvement process implemented early in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The purpose of the scoping process is to discuss the issues to be addressed, review the proposed alternatives, identify potentially significant issues related to the proposed alternatives and capture public comments.

1.2 Project Overview

The original CC and WFK watershed project (work) plans were developed in 1958 and 1961, respectively, to reduce flood damages in the CC and WFK valleys. The need for a new watershed project plan arose from the failure of three CC dams and two WFK dams caused by intense rainfall in a matter of hours, resulting in severe flooding, on August 27-28, 2018. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the proposed CC and WFK project areas.

Monroe, Vernon, and La Crosse Counties (Sponsors) requested assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to re-plan the watersheds and identify alternatives to prevent or reduce flood damages. The PLAN-EIS is funded under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019 and administered through the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program (WFPO).

The NRCS is the lead federal agency for the PLAN-EIS, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) is a cooperating agency. M&E Consultants have been contracted by the NRCS to prepare the PLAN-EIS’.

Current watershed planning includes inventory and analysis of existing environmental and socioeconomic conditions with regard to flooding; and the effectiveness of the original project measures over the last 63 years. The results of the retrospective analyses will be documented in the PLAN-EIS and provide context for determining the environmental, economic, and social effects of considered alternatives.

The scoping process included a preliminary scoping meeting within each watershed, held in September 2020. That scoping effort focused on identifying environmental concerns and elements of the environment that may be affected by the proposed alternatives. That scoping was also intended to formulate new or modify preliminary alternatives. Public comments were summarized in a scoping report to be included as an appendix of the PLAN-EIS for each watershed.

The public scoping detailed in this report focused on presenting the proposed alternatives and recommended action. The presentation in each watershed detailed the economic research, preliminary engineering and water modeling completed to support the proposed alternatives. The

public scoping will be documented through the NEPA process and presented in the Draft PLAN-EIS’.

1.3 Description of the Scoping Process

Two presentations were held, one in Coon Valley, Wisconsin, and one in Cashton, Wisconsin. These meetings were advertised with a 30-day public notice published in the newspaper of record for each Monroe, Vernon and LaCrosse counties. That notice was also issued as a press release, distributed to the project distribution list, posted on the project website and county Facebook pages. Notification materials are included in Appendix A.

Project Website

The M&E consultant team has developed a website on behalf of NRCS to provide detailed information on the project: <https://www.wfkandccwatersheds.com>. The website provides background information, a description of the project, interactive GIS mapping, information on public involvement, a virtual scoping tour, recordings of the public meetings and downloadable information sheets and presentations. The website also allows visitors to digitally submit comments and questions.

Public Notice

A Public Meeting Notice was published 30-days in advance of the meetings in the newspapers of record for the three counties and distributed to other interested media outlets in and around the project area. The public notice provided the dates and venues for the scoping presentations, briefly described the project and explained the various methods for submitting comments.

Project Distribution List

Multiple informational emails announcing the meetings and introducing project material available for review was distributed to the project distribution list. The public is able to add themselves to the distribution list via the project website or indicate to be added on the public scoping meeting sign-in sheets.

Public Scoping Meetings

The two meetings were held at the following dates, times, and locations:

1. WFK: June 22, 2021, 5:30 p.m., Cashton Community Hall, 812 Main Street, Cashton, Wisconsin 54619
2. CC: June 23, 2021, 5:30 p.m., Coon Valley Legion Hall, 105 Park Street, Coon Valley, Wisconsin 54623

The meetings were also hosted live via Microsoft Teams to allow members of the public to participate virtually. Virtual participants were advised that comments posed virtually via Microsoft Teams were not retained for the record. Virtual attendees were directed to submit comments for the record through the methods described in Section 2.1.

Notification materials requesting public comment are included in Appendix A and all comments received through July 30, 2021 are included in Appendix B.

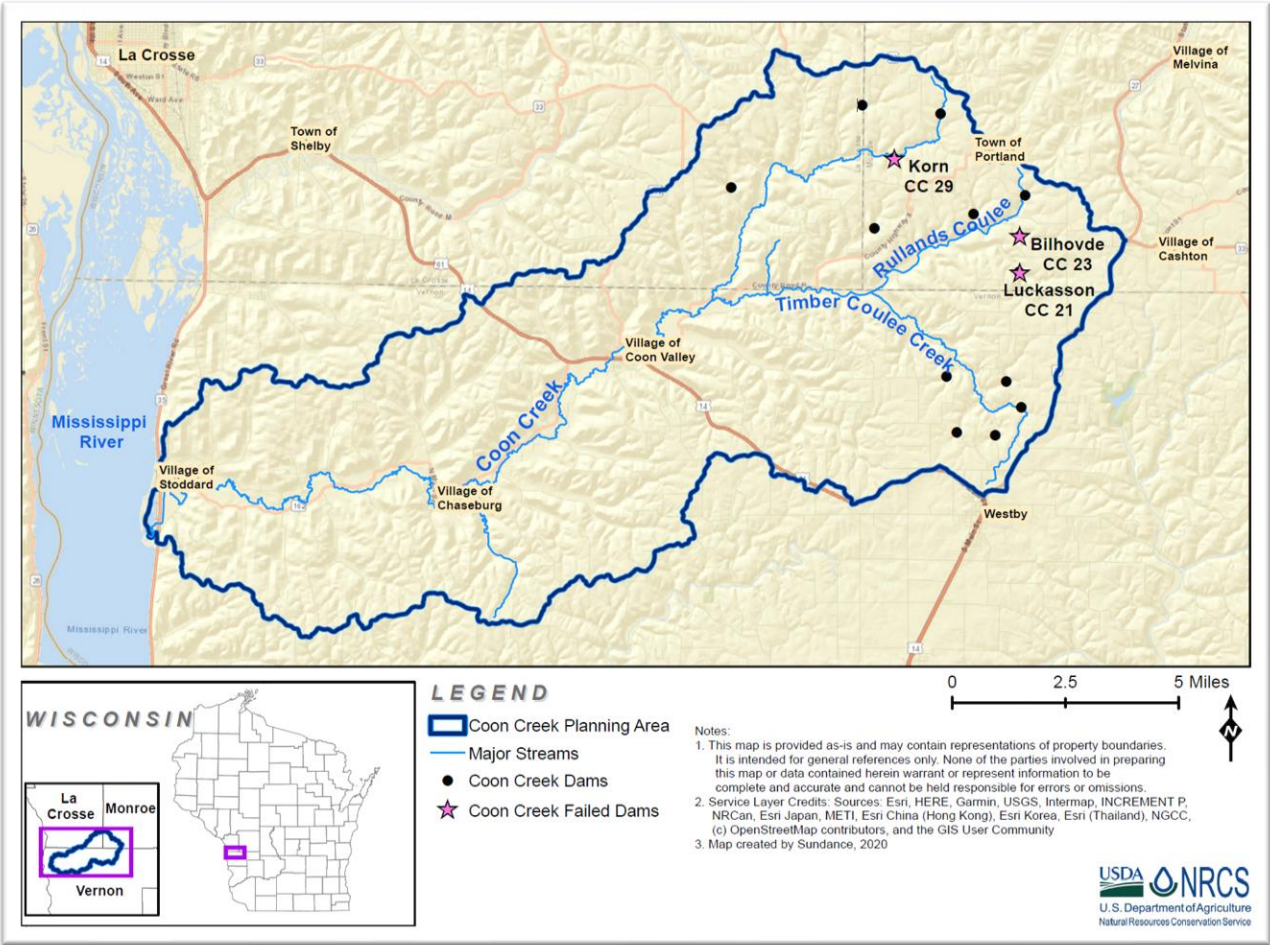


Figure 1. Coon Creek Watershed Planning Area and Dam Locations

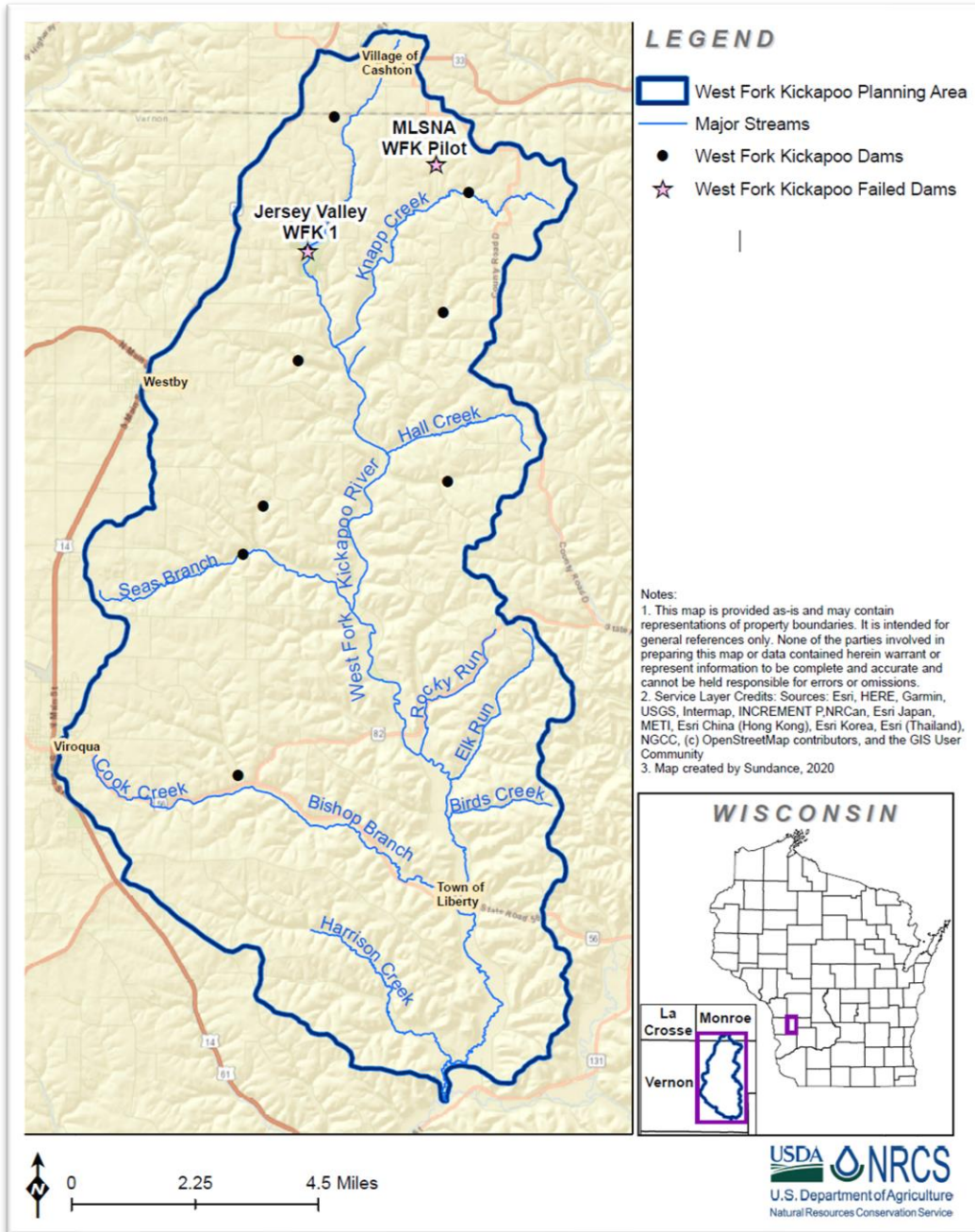


Figure 2. WFK Watershed Planning Area and Dam Locations

2 Scoping Results

2.1 Method of Comment Collection and Analysis

Opportunity for public comment was gathered through multiple methods.

- Written comments were collected at the two public presentations
- Mailed to the M&E team at Attn: Keri Hill, Senior Project Manager, Sundance Consulting, Inc., 305 N. 3rd Avenue, Suite B, Pocatello, Idaho 83201
- Comments were submitted via email to khill@sundance-inc.net
- Comments were submitted via telephone to (208) 550-2056
- Comments submitted online on the project website <https://www.wfkandccwatersheds.com/>.

Initially, it was advertised that comments would be accepted through July 16, 2021; however, due to additional public interest after the presentations, the deadline was extended to July 30, 2021.

All comments were reviewed to identify specific issues or concerns. Each comment was categorized based on the primary and secondary purpose for which the comment was provided, such as to offer a suggestion or to make a general statement. During the analysis of potential alternatives and environmental impacts, the NRCS will consider the issues brought forward in these comments.

2.2 Summary of the Public Comments Received

In total, 32 comments were received. Specifically, 2 comments refer to the CC Watershed, 24 comments refer to the WFK Watershed, and the remaining 10 comments refer to both watersheds.

Public Meeting Attendance and Comments Received

Based on the number of attendees on the sign-in sheets, thirty-three people attended the WFK presentation, while sixteen people attended virtually. Twenty-one written comments were submitted at the WFK presentation.

Fourteen people attended the CC presentation, while nine people attended virtually. One written comment was submitted at the CC presentation.

Comments Submitted Outside of the Public Meetings

Ten sets of comments were submitted outside of the open houses via email. No comments were received via U.S. mail or the project website. All comments were submitted by private citizens or local organizations. Some comments received by email included a separate attached document.

2.3 Summary of Comments and Issues

Comments were categorized by watershed and environmental concern. Comments were also assigned a primary and secondary focus depending on the content of the comment.

Figure 3 illustrates the breakdown of comments by their associated watershed.

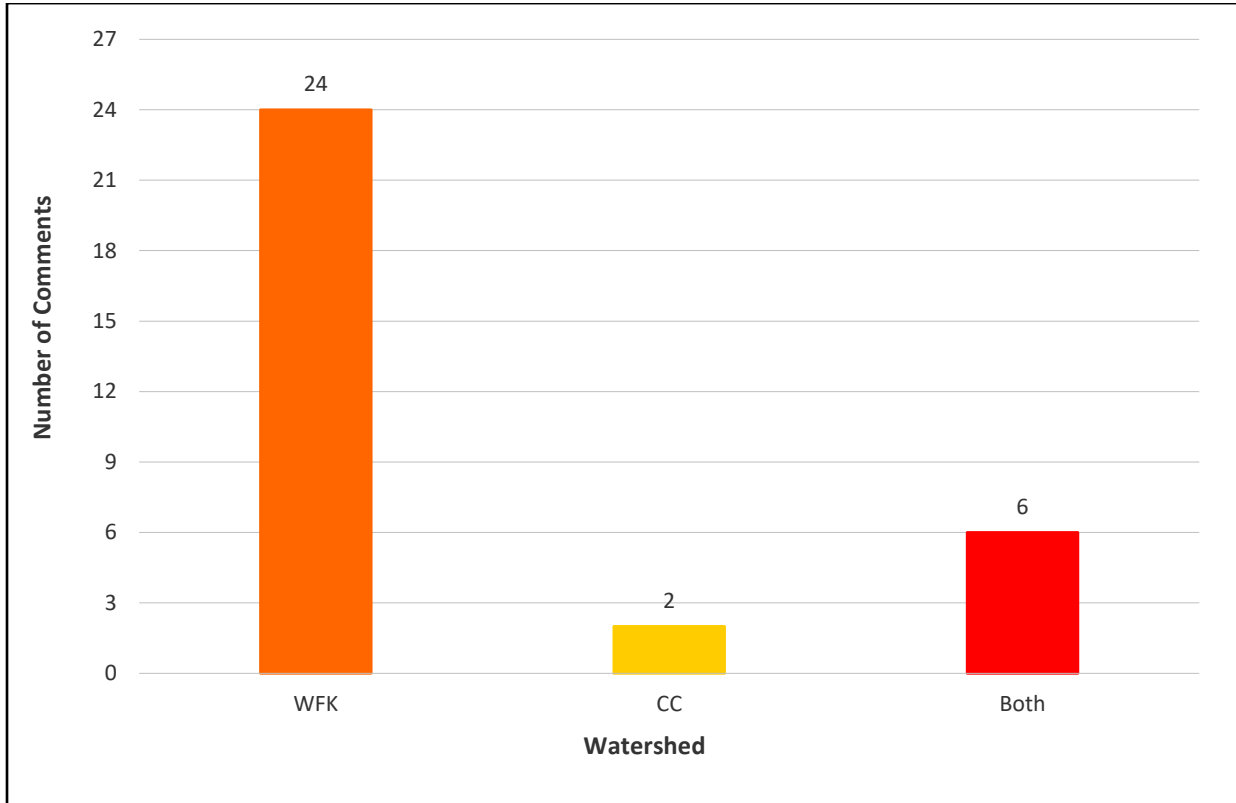


Figure 3. Number of comments per watershed

Figure 4 illustrates the breakdown of comments by their primary and secondary focus.

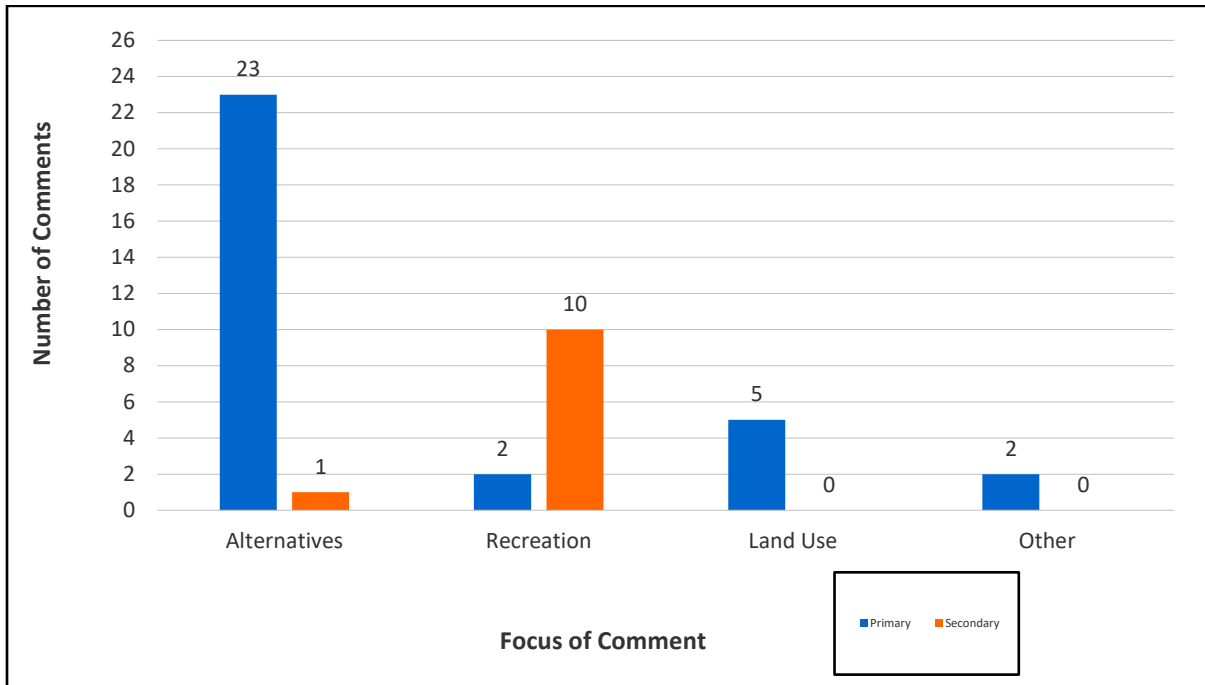


Figure 4. Summary of Comment Purpose

This section identifies the major comments and issues provided to NRCS as part of the scoping process. It was not uncommon for a single comment to refer to multiple resource areas of concern. Comments received are included in Appendix B.

Alternatives and Construction

Comments included responses to suggested alternatives or proposed actions. Specific comments are listed below.

- **(CC) Comment EM_004:** We live 2 miles below the failed Korn Dam on the Coon Creek watershed. I have lived on my farm all of my life and know that this dam has to be in place for the survival of our farm. Without the dam our crops and pasture are quickly flooded with most heavy rains. With a properly maintained dam we can continue farming with minimal damage even with heavy rains. in the almost 60 years of the dam water reached the top 3 times and each time the dam was half full of water before the rain. when the dam was empty and maintained, it would hold any heavy rain that fell. the creek would stay in its banks because the dam held the water back enough to release it much slower than if it wasn't there. please go with the second alternative (Dam Replacement). Thank you.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_004:** Please fix the lake with \$20M. Thank you.
- **(WFK) Comment EM_003:** With steep slopes and the propensity for extreme rain events, the West Fork Kickapoo and Coon Creek Watersheds share similarities to the Marengo River Watershed. In both regions, extreme rain events are expected to continue. Given the recommendation to decommission, the communities need more information about the types of practices that may offset lost storage. With the recent increases in

larger storms, additional support is also needed to manage runoff from events that exceed the dams' original design standard (i.e., the 50-yr flood).

We suggest the following to improve the alternatives analysis and final recommendations:

Evaluate and report on the storage benefits of floodplain reconnection.

Floodplain disconnection contributes to flooding, erosion, debris transfer, and public infrastructure damage. Our experience is that many, if not most, of the streams in the study area are disconnected through channelization, levy development, incision, aggradation, or other means. Our streams would benefit from simple practices such as grade control and removal of natural levees and berms to reestablish hydrologic connections and processes. We are concerned that the planning study has not yet evaluated potential storage benefits associated with floodplain reconnection and the extent of such opportunities in the study watersheds. Though streambank stabilization is a common practice in the region, and was evaluated, the most resilient streams and the greatest flood storage benefits occur when the stream is well-connected to its adjacent floodplain. Those floodplains are healthiest when they are flat and free to evolve.

While a complete analysis of storage potential of available restoration opportunities may not be feasible at this stage, we encourage you to at least run and include the results of some sub-watershed scenarios, and to include discussion of the benefits of hydrologic restoration of floodplains in the study findings and recommendations.

Evaluate and/or acknowledge the benefits of restoring additional hydrologic processes.

Because runoff management is a hydrology-driven problem, we also recommend more discussion about the need for hydrologic management on a sub-watershed scale. This discussion should acknowledge that it will likely take a combination of diverse practices across the landscape to replace storage lost to dam decommissioning, and to manage runoff beyond the design standards for the original dams (i.e., 50-yr flood). This could include restoration or repair of drained or damaged wetlands, floodplain restoration, infiltration practices, and more. Because the decommissioning of NRCS-sponsored dams will decrease flood storage, the report should also discuss what opportunities may be available through NRCS special initiatives or programs (i.e., RCPP, Floodplain Easements) to evaluate and invest in strategic hydrologic restoration and management practices in the affected watersheds.

- **(Both watersheds) Comment HC_014:** We live in the small Amish community of Cashton, WI. We have approximately 350 to 400 Amish families living here. There are not many Lakes and Parks that we can drive to with our horse and buggy for a family outing, and to do some fishing. So, I would highly recommend that alternative number two should be carried forward to replace structures and rebuild Jersey Valley Lake back to its original size.
- **(Both watersheds) Comment HC_019:** We are at the very north most end of a watershed we'll call the Kickapoo. This is where the highest point is in Monroe County. We feel more breeze than flood. The way I feel about building dams and such work - Go

ahead! We Amish build and all such and overdo it. We have no drain to pollute your dams! We let it be done in a simple way. We are not shorting you off on electricity, nor burning gas away all day. But we respect (if not it shall be seen after) your efforts. At times we complain, but that too shall pass. By the way, if your project kills a few fish and birds, I'm no regular fisher, nor hunter, nor sight seer. I just see it when I go by. I'm here right now.

- **(WFK) Comment HC_002:** My comment would be to repair the dams if it is financially feasible.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_007:** For the safety of the people living below the failed dams, I think it would be good to rebuild them. I have a cousin whose house was flooded twice in the 100-year flood. A muddy, muddy mess.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_010:** I think it would be a good idea to replace the dam downstream like the plan 2 you have on the back of this sheet. We would benefit more that way for the money you will spend anyway.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_011:** Our option for Jersey Valley would be build a new dam. We would be very pleased to see \$20M get spent on a new dam rather than \$8M on decommissioning it. Jersey Valley Lake used to be the No.1 go to lake for me and my brothers. Please trout fishing success in the W. Fork degraded drastically since the dam breach in 2018. We are looking forward to your effort in building a new dam.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_012:** I would highly recommend building a new dam 800 feet downstream of the Jersey Valley Lake.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_013:** Please fix Jersey Lake if possible. It is close enough to our home so that I can hitch my horse to the buggy and take my wife and 3 little girls fishing. We love pan fishing. So my hope is to see it fixed ASAP.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_015:** I live close to Jersey Valley Lake and I'm an avid fisherman and yes I support the idea of building the new dam like that. It was very disappointing to us when the dam failed. The fishing in that lake was absolutely the best and it's the only lake we can drive to that's under 18 miles. Or that is open to the public. We really lack good fishing spots in this area. So please please fix it ASAP. What is the use of State land that is closed to the public?
- **(WFK) Comment HC_018:** Being a member of the horse and buggy (Amish) group, I enjoy fishing at these lakes with my 5 yr. old son. At first, I thought it expensive to fix the dams, but then it is also expensive to decommission them. My thought is to spend a little more money and fix them right and have the flood control and fishing back again, rather than spend (or waste) money to decommission them. I understand that the funds need to be available for anything to go forward, though. Thanks for letting us share our input. I will be okay with whatever option you choose.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_005:** My comments focus more on Jersey Valley Lake. I would very much like to see that lake made into the fishery it used to be. I just think if you're going to spend money on fixing it, I'd say make it a lake again. It might cost more overall, but like it was said it would cost \$20 million to redo the dam downstream and only \$8 million to fix what is there. but it said something about 60% of the \$20 million would be funded by a group of some kind if forget its name, that would only leave \$8 million left. So really, I think it should be made a lake again.

- **(WFK) Comment HC_006:** Jersey Valley has long been one of my favored recreational spots. I am, however, concerned about the replacement of a high dollar structure (the dam). The water quality in the past 8-10 years at Jersey Valley Lake has been very poor due to runoff. If this problem is not solved - first replacement of the dam will result in a substandard body of water and thus the recreational value of the park is/will be grossly overstated. Given the minimal flood control benefit of the dam, it seems prudent to address water quality before investing large dollars for recreational purposes.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_008:** We live very local to both dams on the West Fork Kickapoo. Based on my observations there is more damage downstream after a hard rain since the dams are out. Concerning the Jersey Valley Dam, we would love to have the lake back as we loved to fish it. My first memories of fishing were on this lake and our children have had great times fishing it too. I would encourage dredging the bottom of the lake to remove silt, etc., where necessary. We do not think the lake will be detrimental to trout fishing downstream. We are trout fishermen too. We would love to see the move along sooner than later.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_009:** I definitely want our lake back. Thumbs up as you proceed on the project.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_017:** Concerning the watershed project for the West Fork, I do not think it makes fiscal sense to rebuild MLSNA Dam as that would be a benefit to only a small amount of people. Jersey Valley Dam should definitely be rebuilt as there is no other recreational lake in this immediate area. I definitely hope the county realizes the need and puts all effort forward to rebuild the dam and lake as soon as possible.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_020:** My comments apply to the West Fork Kickapoo Watershed. Center on the Jersey Valley Dam. I was very sad when the dam failed in the 2018 flood, and everybody I talked to felt the same way. The thing everybody liked so well about this dam was not so much in flood control, as the recreation part of it. The fishing, swimming, and picnicking with the whole family, thus enjoying the whole day out and basically forgetting that anything else exists other than the place that you are at. What also made the Jersey Valley County Park Dam special was the fact that it was close by and accessible. Most of the time when we went there, we would meet with friends that also happened to be there just enjoying nature. That makes it a great day, any day!
- **(Both watershed) Comment HC_022:** Please fix up the dams, especially the Jersey Valley dam to provide fishing to the local community.
- **(WFK) Comment EM_002:** Potential practices available to reduce flooding are being ignored as your focus seems to be placed on purely structural solutions. Yet, even among the structural solutions, the possible advisability of dredging the former impounds of any decommissioned dam and turning them into sediment-trapping and groundwater-recharging wetlands, something I would be strongly in favor of, get no mention.

Socioeconomics

Although comments mentioned the potential cost of dam replacement versus dam removal of the Jersey Valley Dam, there were no specific comments regarding concerns for socioeconomics during this comment period.

Biological Resources: Fish

Although comments mentioned the recreational benefit of fishing in Jersey Valley lake, these comments focused on recreational fishing rather than fish as a biological resource.

Transportation and Infrastructure

No comments were submitted during the comment period regarding transportation and infrastructure.

Recreation

Multiple comments referenced Jersey Valley Lake, and subsequently Jersey Vally Dam, as a source of recreation. Specific comments are listed below.

- **(WFK) Comment EM_001:** I saw a paper asking for public comments regarding the Jersey Valley recreation area/lake near Westby Wisconsin. I believe the dam should be rebuilt in order to restore the lake. I enjoy fishing and in this part of Wisconsin there aren't any bodies of water to fish on. There are trout streams and rivers, but the closest lakes are part of the Mississippi River or Wisconsin River systems which are at least 45 minutes away. Jersey Valley provides a close body of water to fish for bass and panfish; either from the shore or via kayaks. My wife and I choose to use kayaks and float/fish. I believe if this area was restored and improvements are made, it would have a HUGE recreational draw for our area.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_001:** I like the idea of a fishing pier between two lakes. So, if you ask me, go for it and God bless you all. I'm getting my fishing tackle ready.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_003:** I strongly encourage and support restoring the dams. I am a local farmer and fished at Jersey Lake as a kid. Please work to have that restored.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_021:** I would be all for rebuilding Jersey Valley. Why spend \$8 million for decommission if the public cannot fish. This community needs more lakes that are open to public for fishing.

Wetlands

No comments were submitted during the comment period regarding wetlands.

Water Quality

No comments were submitted during the comment period regarding water quality.

Land Use

Land Use was the third most common focus of comments. Comments focused on the impact of flooding on farming and the ability to construct improvements on land. Specific comments related to land use are listed below.

- **(WFK) Comment EM_005:** I called the Vernon County Zoning Office and was told by them I am unable to build or replace my current mobile home because I am in a Hydraulic Shadow (Breach Route) of Jersey Valley dam. I told them I never heard of this, and I was told this was in effect since 1998. The bank, realtor, title company, insurance company and all my neighbors have also never heard of this. There are so many people that are negatively impacted by the hydraulic shadow (breach route)

because of these dams and many people may still be unaware they are affected until they want to make improvements to their homes or properties. Without the ability to improve my property or replace my old mobile home, my property will depreciate in value and the property values for neighboring properties will be negatively impacted as well.

- **(WFK) Comment EM_006:** We spoke months ago following the first presentations your group made here in our area last fall. I am Board Chair of Valley Stewardship Network as well as the lead person with the West Fork Watershed Neighbor's Council. At that time, I was concerned that land use in the uplands was not being given enough weight in your flood mitigation modeling. However, I was between comment periods and was basically told to wait till after your report was made public and another round of public comments was sought. I guess that time will soon be here.
- **(WFK) Comment HC_016:** Jersey Vally Lake should be restored, Option #1. MLSNA Dam is not so important to me. Just have the farmers plant more perennial grasses and crops and the runoff will slow down.

Climate Variability

No comments were submitted during the comment period regarding climate variability.

Other

Other comments included requests for meeting recordings and communications regarding the timeline of public notices. They are included below for informational purposes.

- **(WFK) Comment EM_007:** To whom it may concern: This is quite unacceptable to send out a meeting notice for 11 days from now. People have careers and for myself, I live in a different state. As well as I travel internationally for work. I won't even be in the country on June 22nd or June 23rd. There is no way possible for me to plan to attend a meeting that is scheduled during the week and is only 11 days away. Again, how is this supposed to get public feedback with the lack of advanced notice. I obviously will not be able to attend. This is deplorable.
- **(WFK) Comment EM_007:**
- I appreciate the follow-up. I think you can appreciate my concern with the whole project because my property will be directly affected with whatever decision is made. It will not be feasible for me to even join remotely because of the time difference, and the fact I need to be on top of my game for my business discussions I will be having abroad in Europe. So, with all that being said, I would like to have a recording of the meeting, if that is possible. Then I could review. I would also like to follow-up with you (or whoever would be available for something like that) after I return if that is feasible.

Appendix A

This appendix includes the notification materials listed below.

- Email letter sent to project contact list
- Press release

Appendix B

This appendix includes the comments received during the scoping process.