

Dear Fellow Ummer Board Members,

Here are some thoughts about our vision, mission, and action plan. My major points are in bold black. Supporting or clarifying material are in blue.

First, I think that we already have a vision and mission by virtue of being a LWV entity.

Our ILO subscribes to the Mission Statement and Core Values as stated below by LWV-US.

LWVUS/LWVEF Mission Statement and Core Values

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Vision, Beliefs and Intentions

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide.

The League of Women Voters of the United States is a nonpartisan political membership organization, which:

- **acts** after study and member agreement to achieve solutions in the public interest on key community issues at all government levels.
- **builds** citizen participation in the democratic process.
- **engages** communities in promoting positive solutions to public policy issues through education and advocacy.

The League of Women Voters Education Fund is a nonpartisan public policy educational organization, which:

- **builds** citizen participation in the democratic process.
- **studies** key community issues at all government levels in an unbiased manner.
- **enables** people to seek positive solutions to public policy issues through education and conflict management.

We believe in:

- respect for individuals.
- the value of diversity.
- the empowerment of the grassroots, both within the League and in communities.
- the power to collective decision making for the common good.

We will:

- act with trust, integrity and professionalism.

- operate in an open and effective manner to meet the needs of those we serve, both members and the public.
- take the initiative in seeking diversity in membership.
- acknowledge our heritage as we seek our path to the future.

Core Values:

- We are a nonpartisan political membership organization.
- We believe that grassroots initiatives and consensus building are the strengths of our organization.
- We believe that our organizational models the principles of good governance.
- We consider well before taking action and prepare well before beginning to act.
- We believe that citizenship requires knowledge, as well as the ability and will to act.
- We believe that the responsibility of good government rests on the shoulders of its citizens.
- We believe that the rights of citizens at home and abroad are interdependent.

Secondly, we chose to organize as an ILO for the specific purposes stated in our bylaws emphasizing the preservation of our water resources within the watershed we all share: the Upper Mississippi River Basin.

ARTICLE II – PURPOSES AND POLICY

Section 1: Purposes. The purposes of the **LWV-UMRR ILO** are to:

(a) educate the public concerning the necessity of preserving our Region’s water resources

(b) improve public understanding and active, informed citizen participation in evidence-based decision-making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of the natural resources of the Upper Mississippi River Region;

(c) promote resource conservation, science-based stewardship, and long-range planning for managing the region’s natural resources, efficient and economical government requiring competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibilities, adequate financing, effective enforcement, coordination among the different agencies and levels of government and well defined channels for citizen input and review;

(d) publish on our website, Face Book page, and other media outlets information related to resource preservation efforts and developments;

(e) meet with governmental representatives to report to governmental committees, agencies, and boards; and generally to attempt to help local, state and federal lawmakers establish enforceable legislation to help protect the region’s natural resources; and

(f) expand and redefine our educational and environmental program from time to time as necessary to meet the continuing challenge of protecting our region's natural resources.

Thirdly, based on our mission and purpose, we chose an Action Focus for our programing in the first year and a half of work: nutrient pollution. That was voted on at our Annual Meeting. We shared the following with the local LWVs who joined us.

Why are we working hard to develop the LWV- Upper Mississippi River Region ILO?

Some issues are best understood and dealt with on a regional level that transcends political boundaries. That's especially true for water issues. As you can see from the map below, what goes into the Upper Mississippi River is determined by decisions, actions, and choices made in a very large area.

As an example, let's examine just one issue: nutrient pollution.

"Nutrient pollution is a major threat to water quality. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus carried in runoff from city streets and farm fields or flowing out of wastewater treatment plants can fuel algae blooms that decrease oxygen needed by aquatic plants and animals. Nutrients washed down the Mississippi River have created a 'dead zone' in the Gulf of Mexico that stretches for thousands of miles. At home, nutrient pollution can also lower property values, hinder recreation, and degrade drinking water quality." (From the EPA IL Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy)

How could an LWV-Upper Mississippi River Region ILO help fix such a problem?

- By educating ourselves and our fellow citizens in over 75 different communities in 4 states to learn what we can do on an individual, community, regional, and national level to fix the problem
- By capitalizing on the LWV relationships we have made with the legislators and regulators at every level of government to advocate for the legislation and/or regulations needed to fix the problem
- By using our 501.c.3 status and pooling time and resources to apply for grants to help support our educational efforts and projects
- By facilitating dialogue and collaborative efforts with LWVs in other sections of the country and along the Middle and Lower Mississippi River Regions through our mutual connections to the LWV-US.
- By facilitating discussion, study and action among pairs or groups of LWVs in particular water sheds (as an example, the LWV of Jo Daviess County, IL and the LWV-Dubuque share the Apple Plum Watershed)
- By creating opportunities and means to exchange information
- By capitalizing on our ability to develop regional positions on river resource issues and serve as an advocate of the Upper Mississippi River states' collective interests before Congress and federal agencies.
- By facilitating and fostering cooperative planning and coordinated management of the region's water resources

- By encouraging our governmental and educational institutions to share data and collaborate ^[1]How will an Upper Mississippi River ILO benefit your LWV?
- It will facilitate sharing education and advocacy models and materials developed among our local LWVs in the ILO saving your LWV time and money.
- It will allow us to showcase and mutually adopt successful programs developed by local or state LWVs within the ILO to help us all focus our efforts and become more effective.

Why is nutrient pollution a good issue for us as an ILO?

- 1. It is an issue that transcends political boundaries and affects the entire Upper Mississippi River Watershed (the region within our ILO boundaries).**
- 2. Whether a LWV is urban, rural or suburban; their members and their communities can take actions to reduce nutrient pollution since the excess nitrogen and phosphorus comes from a myriad of sources.**
- 3 Nutrient pollution is an issue that is not as yet well understood by the general public and needs education.**
- 4 Each of our states has been charged with the task of developing and implementing a nutrient loss reduction strategy that we can all work to implement in our states and communities.**

So, what does that mean in terms of an action plan? I like the America's Watershed Initiative's suggestion to "spread the word, grow collaboration, and focus on action."

How might our ILO do that?

- 1. To "spread the word" about nutrient pollution, we can do things to educate ourselves and our communities on what nutrient pollution is, what contributes to it, and what the best management practices are to control or alleviate it. This may be done by the materials we share on our website, Facebook page, newsletters, and in suggested programming for local LWV meetings. I would suggest a power point presentation with some video/audio that we could produce. (As an example, the LWV-Lake Michigan Region ILO secured a grant for the power point presentation and supporting materials they did for their education piece on green infrastructure and how it can help manage stormwater.) We can share these programs among our member LWVs and with others in our communities. Once we share such a program with local member LWVs, we can invite our member LWVs to further explore how and where their community contributes to nutrient pollution. We will be initiating conversations about the problem in their areas and encouraging them to share their stories about where and how they and their communities contribute to nutrient pollution.**
- 2. To "grow the collaboration" we can reach out to other organizations within the region and across state lines to share our educational programs. A good example of this already is the use of the Water Shed Game. The game is provided by a**

Minnesota-Wisconsin educational partnership and as an ILO we are bringing it to audiences in Illinois and Iowa. The Best Management Practices suggested by the game are easily relatable to the problem of nutrient pollution and can be a follow up to the educational piece we might do on nutrient pollution. We can encourage our member LWVs to do meetings where the game is played. Again, we invite our member LWVs to think about how they might want to use the game. Might they organize playing the game in their schools? With their local office holders? With other service or environmental organizations?

Our local LWV has learned that as we have worked on these issues, many opportunities have presented themselves for collaboration.

3. Now we come to the “focus on action.” Here are my thoughts.

For our ILO, I think the “spreading the word, growing the collaboration” part of our work will eventually lead to some specific actions. I base that belief on the experience of our local LWV.

Actions taken may be related to what a local LWV determines to do based on what they learn after the conversations our programs stimulate in connection with their local situations. For example, Beth reported on the issue of the fertilized potato fields in Minnesota. In Des Moines, the issue is the cost of nitrate removal from the city’s water supply resulting from fertilizer runoff upstream. In the Chicago suburbs, the issue may be the funding of phosphorus removal from community sewage treatment plants. In Cedar Rapids and Dubuque, flood control is important. All of these issues are related to how excess phosphorus and nitrogen end up in the watershed we share.

Our local LWV’s most recent involvement with ground and surface water issues started with our examination of the issues involved with a contentious battle over the siting of two 5000 head dairy CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations). Subsequent to that, we saw the need to bring people together from all sides to further examine the issues and involve our community in a more constructive and less contentious process to help us plan ways to manage and protect our water resources and be good stewards of our land and water. It was during this process that we learned about nutrient pollution and how it affects our county’s water and what we are doing locally that affects the resulting problems downstream. We have learned together, come to consensus on goals and objectives, and are just beginning to identify the action plans to enact those goals and objectives. We have put five years of work into this and are now in a better position to begin actually taking actions that will improve our water shed. The education and collaboration have paid off in that we have many more people in the community interested, informed and committed to the work.

I don’t expect that every LWV will do what we have done but in sharing our

story we may inspire others to pursue their own action plans or perhaps copy parts of what we have done. I definitely see our ILO as a “clearinghouse” of sorts for good ideas and model programs.

I think that as an ILO, we may become aware of other opportunities for “taking action” as advocates for legislation, regulation, or funding in our communities and states. For example, I’ve been following what’s been happening in Iowa with a proposal by Governor Branstad to use a portion of sales tax in Iowa for water projects. This has come from the issues related to the high levels of nitrates that need to be removed from the Raccoon River, the source of Des Moines’ drinking water. Might we “take action” doing letters to the editor, contacting Iowa’s legislators, investigating that approach for our other states, or eventually advocating for that particular source of revenue for our other states? In the case of the issue in Iowa, we as the ILO board would need to discuss the issue with our IA LWVs to determine what position, if any, we would want to take.

So these are my thoughts. I look forward to your comments, our continued conversations and some good planning. I’m so glad that we will be meeting again soon in Madison.

**- Bonnie Cox, LWV Jo Daviess County and a founder of LWV UMRR
April 2016 email to LWV UMRR Board Members**