

Self Guided Driving Tour Coon Creek Watershed

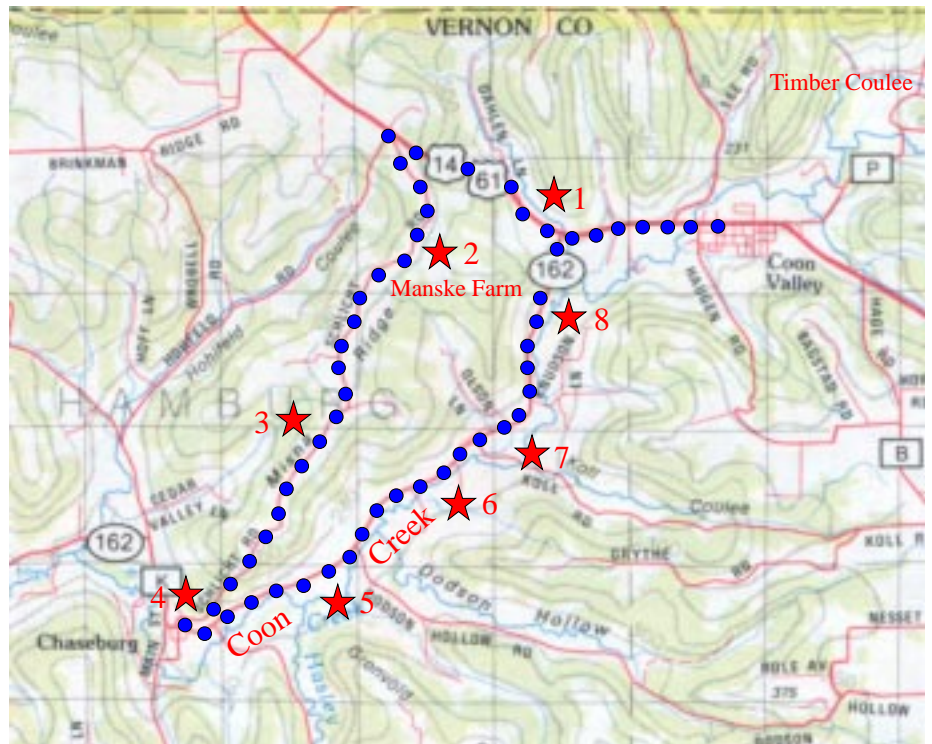
Nation's First Watershed Project - Coon Valley, Wisconsin

- ★ 1 Highway historical marker 1 mile west of the village of Coon Valley on Highway 14 in western Vernon County, Wisconsin.
- ★ 2 Go north on Hwy. 14 to the top of the hill and turn left on Schlicht Road (left fork). From this ridge you can see many of the contour strip cropped fields that were laid out by the early conservationists and farmers in the 1930's. Strips were the primary cropland conservation practice used, cutting erosion to one-third of the rate without strips. Photo on cover is Manske farm.



- ★ 3 At about 1/2 mile from Hwy. 14 you will find a scenic overlook on the left side of the road overlooking the main Coon Creek Valley. Coon Creek is not hilly. The bedrock is extremely flat. The valleys and hillsides developed as millions of years of erosion shaped the landscape. The soils are very young however, geologically speaking. They developed from wind blown silt that was deposited when the glaciers west of the area receded. This three to ten foot layer of parent material has developed a ten-inch topsoil over the last 10,000 years. This is the soil we farm. Early erosion has destroyed over one-half of the original topsoil. We now farm a layer of topsoil and subsoil mixed together.

- ★ 4 Follow Schlicht Road down the steep hill to Chaseburg. The bank on the left side of the road is extremely steep, so keep on the road! Take Hwy. 162 to the lower part of Chaseburg. This area is under 13 feet of silt that was deposited from recent farming. Look for the mill. HINT: Do not look too hard; it has been buried under the silt. All the topsoil from Stop 3 ended up in these low areas and the Mississippi River and on to the Gulf of Mexico. Today, conservation practices have reduced valley sediments 94% since the 1930s.



TAKE HIGHWAY 162 TOWARDS COON VALLEY

- ★ 5 1/2 mile out of Chaseburg notice the rock and shaping work being done along the creek. This is trout habitat being constructed by the DNR. The upstream branch of Coon Creek, Timber Coulee, is now the heaviest fished trout stream in Wisconsin and also the most productive. This is because upland soil conservation work reduced erosion, and allowed more rainfall to infiltrate into the soil, improving spring flow and providing better water quality.
- ★ 6 Anywhere along the route, look at the land use in the valley. The original conservation planners used land slope to separate land use. The flat bottoms were croplands if they did not flood otherwise pastureland. The sloping land from 2-20% was generally cropland with the 8-20% land in contour strips. The 20-30% land was fenced for pasture by the CCC crews, and the steeper land was used for woods. The same slopes were used on the ridge to separate land use.
- ★ 7 Anywhere along the route. Notice the woods. They have never been this thick before. After the glaciers the Native Americans burned back the trees to encourage forbs and grasses for deer and other grazers. Early settlers grazed cattle and burned the woods in the spring. The Coon Creek project discouraged grazing and burning. The result is the first natural stand of mature trees in probably 10,000 years. About 44% of the watershed is now forested. Ungrazed hillside woods can absorb rainfall at the rate of 17 inches per hour without runoff occurring.
- ★ 8 Along the route. Wildlife numbers have greatly increased. One of the reasons is the habitat created along the edge of the woods by the shrubs that grew. Another is the increase of wetlands along the creek. The early plans encouraged wildlife habitat plantings.
- ★ 9 Along the route. In the early part of the century, floods occurred every one to two years. Today the small storms do not even raise the water out of the banks, partially because the early silt deposits raised the creek banks. With upland conservation practices slowing runoff it now takes a very hard rain to cause excessive flooding in the valley.

RETURN TO COON VALLEY

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