

Rural Living Guide

St. Croix County, Wisconsin

January 2013

Introduction

The rural areas of St. Croix County continue to experience growth as many people choose to live in a country setting while being close to the urban amenities of the Twin Cities. The County welcomes new rural residents. Over half the population of St. Croix County lives in the country. Living in a rural area, however, differs in many ways from an urban community. This Rural Living Guide has been developed to inform those who are considering purchasing a rural property and those that already have. It is hoped that this information will help people consider issues that may affect them when living in a rural area.

Emergency Services

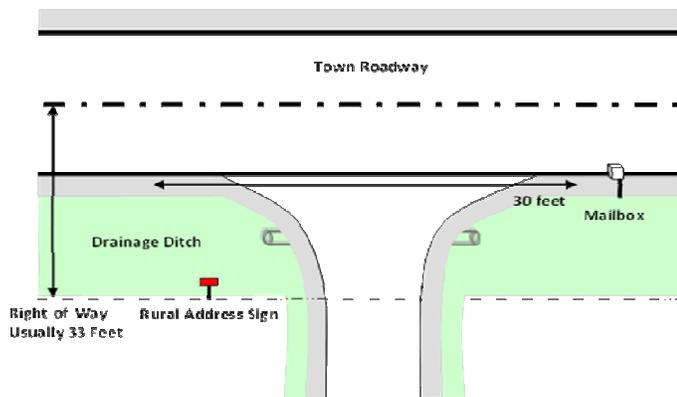
911

- In case of emergency dial 911. St. Croix County has Enhanced 911 (E911), which displays your address and fire/ambulance district to the dispatch operator.



Rural Addresses

- In order for responders to quickly identify the location of an emergency, St. Croix County utilizes a standardized system for road names and address numbers.
- Red and white address signs are to be placed to the right of the driveway, when facing the driveway from the road and at the highway right-of-way line.
- The signs should be kept clear of obstructions (snow), and be placed parallel to the road for visibility in both directions. See diagram.
- Addresses are assigned by the Community Development Department at (715) 386-4680, www.sccwi.us/cd.



Ambulance Service

- There are several public ambulance service areas in the County. Staffing is varied at each base to serve the needs of that area.
- Service may be affected by distance, weather conditions, and condition of public and private roads.



Fire Protection

- The County is served by several regional volunteer fire departments serving multiple jurisdictions.
- The level of protection and response time depends on the access to water, distance of a structure from a fire station, type and number of vehicles, and number of volunteers and training. These factors affect home insurance rates.



Law Enforcement

- The St. Croix County Sheriff's Department is responsible for law enforcement in areas outside of the cities and villages within the County.
- Response times tend to be longer than in urban areas and are affected by travel times, visibility of address signs, inclement weather, and road conditions.
- Police officers from nearby cities and villages may assist in certain situations.



Building & Development Permits



- Permits for construction, filling & grading, septic systems & other land use activities may be required by County, Town and State in order to assure compliance with ordinances.
- Contact the Community Development Department at (715) 386-4680 and your Town Building Inspector or Clerk prior to any construction or changing or adding to a use or structure on a piece of property.

Zoning and Subdivision

- Zoning regulations determine land uses, lot sizes, as well as setbacks from roads, property lines, and other features such as bluff lines along the St. Croix River. Subdivision regulations determine how land may be divided into smaller lots and new roads.
- Zoning and subdivision regulations promote orderly development, minimize conflicts between incompatible land uses and protect property values and resources.
- Most towns in the County have adopted the County Zoning Ordinance. The Town of Hudson has its own zoning. The Towns of Cady and Forest do not have general zoning. However, County Shore Land and Floodplain Zoning, Sanitary, Animal Waste, and Non-Metallic Mining Ordinances apply to all towns within St. Croix County. Contact the Community Development Department at (715) 386-4680.

Wells and Drinking Water



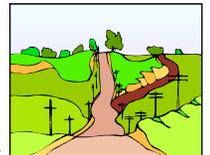
- Drinking water for rural houses comes from private wells. State regulations only require that the water be tested for bacteria at the time of construction. Thereafter it is the responsibility of homeowner to test their water periodically.
- Water testing kits are available at the Community Development Department, Hudson; Land & Water Conservation Department, Baldwin; Public Health Department, New Richmond; or through private labs. A cost payable to the private testing lab will apply.
- Groundwater within portions of the Towns of Hudson and Star Prairie has been contaminated by petroleum solvents. Special well construction requirements and/or hook up to city water may apply in these areas.
- The most common contaminant in St. Croix County wells is nitrate, which comes from animal waste, soil fertilizer, or failing septic systems. Contact the Wisconsin DNR at (715) 684-2914 or Resource Management Division at (715) 531-1930.

Septic Systems



- Private on-site wastewater treatment systems (POWTS), commonly called septic systems. Conventional, At-Grade and Mound systems are three common types. A soil test determines the type of septic system for your property.
- State law requires all POWTS to be inspected every three years, and most will need to be pumped at that time. Maintenance and care of these systems are the responsibility of the landowner. However, St. Croix County sends reminder postcards once every three years to remind homeowners to maintain systems.
- Improper use, or failure to pump your septic system could lead to premature failure of the system, expensive repairs, and contamination of your well water.
- For more information see "*Care and Maintenance of Septic Systems*," University of Wisconsin—Extension publication B3583. Or contact the Community Development Department at (715) 386-4680.

Roads and Driveway Access



- Most rural roads are under public ownership and maintenance is the responsibility of the Town, County or State. Maintenance of private roads/joint driveways is the responsibility of the owner(s).
- A driveway permit is required for access to public roads and highways. Standards for driveway locations vary depending on jurisdiction. For town roads contact your Town Board; for county roads, contact the St. Croix County Highway Department at (715) 796-2227; for state highways contact WisDOT at (800) 991-5285.
- All driveways shall be designed and maintained by the owner(s) to allow reasonable access by emergency vehicles. Based on standard International Fire Code, every driveway should have 12 feet of horizontal clearance and 13.5 feet of vertical clearance for ingress/egress by emergency vehicles. Utility companies recommend 18 vertical feet of clearance.

Private Property Restrictions

- There are private arrangements in addition to government regulations that may affect what you may do with your property.
- Easements may require you to allow construction and maintenance of roads, utilities, storm water facilities, etc. across your land.
- Many rural housing developments have home owners associations with deed restrictions and covenants that restrict outbuildings, outdoor storage, and building design. These restrictions may be recorded with the property deed, or with the plat. Check these issues carefully. Contact the Register of Deeds at (715) 386-4652.

Government Services

Town Government

- All unincorporated areas are governed under "Town" government. In many other states, including Minnesota, this unit of government is called a "township." "Towns" are not the same as small cities or villages, although they may have the same name.
- Services offered by town government vary. Town governments are rural in nature and do not provide a full range of services. Historically, a town government's primary responsibilities have been road maintenance and snow plowing. More populated towns have added additional services for their residents.
- Town government in Wisconsin has an element of direct participatory democracy through the Annual Meeting each April at which residents vote on policy and budget issues.
- Information on individual town governments is available at www.sccwi.us, click "Communities" tab.

Snow Plowing

- Snow plowing takes longer to complete in a rural area. Your road may not be plowed before you have to leave in the morning. Major roads such as state highways and county roads get first priority.
- If you live on a private road or joint driveway, snow plowing is your responsibility. Talk to your neighbor before it snows.



K-12 Public Schools

- There are nine public school districts in St. Croix County. Each district has its own policies regarding bus service.
- The boundaries of the districts are extremely irregular. School district maps may be found at www.sccwi.us/cd. Click on "Land Information", then "Maps".

Garbage and Recycling

- Garbage collection and recycling programs vary from town to town. Contact your Town Clerk for details.
- Special collections for hazardous waste, appliances, and tires are held periodically each year.
- Information about special and difficult to dispose of wastes can be found on the A-Z Recycling and Disposal Guide at www.sccwi.us/recycling or call the County Recycling Specialist at (715) 386-4675.
- The St. Croix County Recycling Program is now on Facebook. "Like" us at www.facebook.com/sccwirecycling.



Animals & Wildlife

Driving

- Enjoy "grilled venison?" You may get some if you don't pay extra attention when driving. Each year thousands of deer are killed and injured by motor vehicles. Extra caution is needed when driving, especially at night. During the mating season, early October through November, deer activity increases through all hours of the day and night.



Horses, Pets and Stray Animals

- The number of horses or other livestock allowed on your property is regulated. Commercial kennels are also regulated. Contact the Community Development Department at (715) 386-4680.
- Just like in cities, dogs need to be licensed and have their rabies vaccinations. Animals must be under control at all times. Bears, coyotes, and other animals may injure or kill your pet if you do not protect your pet.
- For information about dog licensing and control of stray animals, contact your Town Clerk.

Living with Wildlife

- To attract wildlife and improve habitat contact Wisconsin DNR at (715) 684-2914 or <http://dnr.wi.gov>.
- The DNR or US Fish & Wildlife Service may conduct controlled burning of grassland to improve wildlife habitat.
- Living in a rural area requires a lot of consideration of wildlife. Deer, although beautiful, can ravage a garden or expensive plants. Carefully consider which plants you will use in your landscaping or garden. It's not the deer's fault that your expensive hosta plants taste so good.
- Bears and other wildlife are attracted to garbage and bird feeders as a food supply. Secure your garbage to prevent problems.
- Wood and deer ticks are parasites that suck blood from people and animals. The deer tick spreads Lyme Disease. Symptoms can vary in degree and may include a bulls eye bite and fatigue. It is usually treated with antibiotics but can linger. Awareness is key and tick checks should be done daily on people and pets.



Fire Danger

Housing in Wooded Areas

- Living in the woods is very rewarding. However, when building or purchasing an existing home, maintain a buffer between your home and the forest to reduce the fire danger to your home. Contact the DNR office at (715) 684-2914 or visit <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ForestFire>.
- Uncontrolled wildfires happen most often during the months of April and May. A primary cause of these fires is debris burning.
- Permits are needed for all outdoor debris burning whenever the ground is not snow covered. Burning permits may be obtained from the Town; then inform emergency dispatch at (715) 386-4701. No permit is needed when the sole purpose is for cooking and warming.



Burn Barrels

- The DNR strongly discourages the use of burn barrels.
- The only items that may be burned are leaves, plant clippings, paper, cardboard, and clean, untreated wood.
- Burning materials such as tires, plastic, and rubber is prohibited because they generate toxic air emissions and hazardous ash residue. For more information see <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/openburning>.



Agriculture

Farm Operation

- Agriculture is an important part of the St. Croix County economy. Farm operations have both legal rights and regulations.
- Farmers often work around the clock, and farm operations commonly include dust, noise, odors, and farm chemicals. These typical farm activities may affect adjoining property owners.



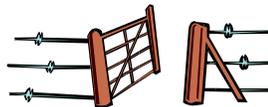
Slow Moving Vehicles

- Farm vehicles are allowed on all roads and may back up traffic. Please watch for, and be patient with, slow moving vehicles. Most drivers of slow moving vehicles will wave you through when it is safe to pass.



Fences

- State law (Chapter 90 of State Statutes) states that if livestock is present on one property, a fence must be maintained on the property line by **BOTH** property owners. Other accommodations can be made if both parties agree. See the "Country Acres" publication from University of Wisconsin Extension for more information.
- If a fence line is under dispute, contact your town board. <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Country-Acres-A-Guide-to-Buying-and-Managing-Rural-Property-P93.aspx>



Manure

- Manure is an inevitable and valuable by-product of livestock production. Unfortunately the odor does not smell like money to some people.
- Most farmers follow a nutrient management plan which is based on soil tests and crops grown to maximize crop yield while minimizing run off.
- St. Croix County has a manure management ordinance which regulates the storage and spreading of animal waste. Contact Resource Management Division at (715) 531-1909 or www.sccwi.us/resourcegmt.



Recreation

Hunting, Fishing and Trapping

- Hunting, fishing and trapping are rural traditions. There is a season for many species, some of which are open the entire year. Most hunting however is done in the fall. Wisconsin has hunter harassment laws that make it a crime to interfere with legal hunting. Respect those who partake in these activities or join a local sportsman club to learn how to participate yourself. See <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/outdoorrecreation> and put St. Croix County in the search field for a listing of public hunting lands.



County Parks

- St. Croix County has a park system. For more information contact the Parks Division at (715) 531-1930 or www.sccwi.us/parks.



ATV Use

- Within St. Croix County ATV use is allowed on your own private property and some town roads. Check with your town officials for more information.
- There are no designated public ATV trails within the County. Be considerate and respect your neighbors.



Snowmobile Use

- St. Croix County has a system of public snowmobile trails. For more information contact the County Parks Division at (715) 531-1930 or see www.sccwi.us/parks and choose Snowmobile Trail System.

Trespass

- You are criminally trespassing on private land unless you get permission from the owner. Land does not have to be posted with signs unless it is adjacent to public land (includes private forest lands open to public hunting/use). Respect private property and ask before you use.

Conclusion

- This information is by no means all inclusive. There may be issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked. Look for the unexpected and surprises when purchasing rural property.



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