



Wisconsin County Forests Association

Strategic Plan Update

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Meeting designed and conducted by

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I. Introduction

Twenty – two people including Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) Board members, the organization’s Executive Director, a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources representative, and several County Forest Administrators met to discuss what has been accomplished from the WCFA 2009-2012 Strategic Plan. During the session, participants also updated the plan by stating what goals not achieved should continue to be pursued and what new initiatives should be undertaken. The conversation was facilitated by Art Lersch, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Lincoln County.

Key new suggested initiatives that were identified by participants during the meeting and that relate to addressing the three primary organizational issues listed in the 2009-2012 strategic plan are:

Issue	Proposed New Initiatives
<p>How do we educate the public and legislators about what WCFA does, what its goals are? (Including those that don’t have county forest programs in the southern, more urban part of the state).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promote creation of Forestry Advisory Committees at the county level; role of WCFA will have to be thoroughly discussed and determined ➤ Develop “true/false” trivia questionnaires about the WCFA to help teach County Board supervisors and the general public about the organization ➤ Increase where possible the instances of WCFA Board members making reports about the WCFA to fellow County Board supervisors ➤ Increase interaction with School Forest programs (WCFA becomes more involved contacts the LEAF Program-Learning Experiences About Forestry to help facilitate this.) ➤ WCFA should attempt to become more involved with Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association youth education events (poster sessions, etc.) Need to discuss at what level WCFA becomes involved. ➤ More closely follow forestry issues discussed through Wheeler Report items. Contact legislators to find out their opinions, to educate them about the issues, etc. ➤ Make certain that the 2013 spring meeting is held in Madison with opportunities for participants to talk with legislators and their staffers. Provide more

Issue	Proposed New Initiatives
	opportunities for this kind of interaction in the future.
<p>How do we remain proactive about issues that affect our industry? (Forest management; soil water conservation, recreation, etc.)</p>	<p>Note: These proposed new initiatives relate to the strategy “Keep up with technology and marketing.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Upgrade website (make it more user friendly) ➤ Work with a technical college (likely Nicolet) to add a forestry course; for promotion of sustainable forestry in the region ➤ Explore using social media to tell people about the WCFA. (This may require the hiring of additional personnel or contracted services to monitor and keep information current) ➤ Promote the development and use of online prospectus and timber sale bid packets, fillable bidding forms and updated GIS technology, i.e. loggers’ ability to access timber sale maps via smart phones, etc.
<p>How do we continue to demonstrate value of county forestland within county budgets, to townships, etc.? (What is the mechanism?)</p>	<p>Note: Since most of these items have not been implemented, participants agreed that they should be treated as proposed new initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Study and demonstrate implications of no timber revenue (reports) ➤ Provide breakdown of specific dollar amounts to counties and towns ➤ Study and demonstrate revenue/expenditure impacts of Managed Forest Land programs. (Comparison of MFL land to county forests? Who would want to know about these impacts? – Towns, etc.?) ➤ Identify and hire appropriate consultant firms/agencies such as UW-Extension to conduct impact analyses ➤ Educate town boards about all the benefits of timber sales ➤ Make presentations to town boards on sustainable forestry practices (and to other groups) ➤ Use the local media to highlight benefits of timber sales ➤ Give talks to school groups and parents ➤ Log-a-Load (communicate benefits from timber sales to charities like the Children’s Miracle Network)

Along with these new initiatives, ongoing or continuing tasks that meeting participants felt important to maintain are also listed in the section called “Review Plan Accomplishments” beginning on page 6 of this report.

II. Environmental Scan

The UW-Extension facilitator began the conversation by asking:

How has the internal environment (e.g. budgets, staff, etc.) in which the WCFA operates changed since the 2009 strategic plan was adopted?

Note: Many of these items can also be considered recent accomplishments.

Participants provided the following responses.

- Change in office location (Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association building) has also provided the organization's Executive Director with much needed clerical support. This allows her to concentrate on more of what is truly important.
- Overall, WCFA is receiving more recognition especially at the county level. Part of this is the successful implementation of strategies and the pursuit of goals outlined in the 2009-2012 strategic plan. The WCFA is for the most part recognized in all 72 counties, including those that do not have county forests or are not members of the WCFA. Some of this greater exposure comes from the organization participating more in meetings/conferences with the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA), including a presentation to WCA's Environmental and Land Use Committee.
- Communication about forestry topics between the organization's Executive Director and Board members has improved greatly over the past few years.
- The Board Treasurer receives monthly financial reports every quarter outlining all three months of activity. This allows the Board Treasurer to more easily compare financial activity from month to month, increasing the organization's overall accountability.
- WCFA Board members and the director regularly provide written information on forestry issues to County Board members. This improves the flow of information between WCFA Board members and their County Board colleagues.
- The WCFA office now has more direct communication with county forestry departments.
- The WCFA has changed how it approaches national forest issues. It is more proactive in its advocacy for, dissemination of information about, and education regarding sound forest management practices especially as they pertain to national forest lands. It has successfully involved legislators in this conversation. WCFA has become increasingly involved in this issue as forest based businesses continue to struggle due to the weak economy.

- WCFA staff and Board are more active in youth education events. The Executive Director is teaching a class at UW-Stevens Point. The organization now provides financial support to the Trees for Tomorrow program in Eagle River, WI. The WCFA Executive Director also provides information and has helped produce forest related episodes of the “Into the Outdoors” (Discover Mediaworks) television program for children.
- The WCFA is also helping develop the curriculum for an upcoming Teacher Forestry Education Camp to be housed on the Marinette County Forest and serves as a sponsor of the program.
- The WCFA Executive Director regularly makes presentations to County Boards and forestry committees highlighting what the organization does and has accomplished.

Next, the facilitator asked:

How has the external environment (e.g. economy, forestry practices, mandates, county politics, etc.) in which the WCFA operates changed since the 2009 plan was adopted?

- State of the local economy has forced several mill closures. A mill that is closed cannot bid on timber and other bids that come in could be lower due to less competition. All this could potentially affect county forestry departments’ bottom lines.
- State of the local economy has forced several logging company closures.
- Mills and other forest related businesses are increasingly filing for bankruptcy. Even if they survive, they will not be able to expand their operation, adversely affecting many aspects of the forestry industry.
- The state’s Department of Natural Resources, along with its Division on Forestry, continues to undergo restructuring. The restructuring has resulted in fewer DNR resources, including financial support, flowing to the WCFA and organizations like it. This has strained the relationship between the WCFA and the DNR.
- Forest Certification has led to new policy development, particularly relating to green tree retention and biomass harvesting guidelines. These policies/guidelines require additional time and resources from counties without necessarily helping to promote responsible forest management practices.
- Act 10/removal of collective bargaining has affected the morale of some forestry department administrators, county personnel and DNR personnel.

- Silica/Frac Sand mining is beginning to encroach on forest land. The WCFA should provide information about the potential side effects of frac sand mining on forest areas.
- Deer management issue keeps going full circle. WCFA is interested in regenerating the forests.
- DNR liaison to the WCFA with a great deal of institutional knowledge recently retired. He was replaced by an extremely competent individual, but it will take him some time to become thoroughly aware of exactly what the WCFA does and what role it has in promoting responsible forest management.
- Counties now have forest stewardship dollars available to them for land acquisition. WCFA has recently taken a more active role in ushering counties through the stewardship grant application process. It also is now involved with ranking forestry land acquisition projects for the stewardship program. (The WCFA should seek to remain involved with this effort. This is also a recent accomplishment of the organization.)
- Changes to federal, state, ATV and wetlands laws that affect forest management, etc. WCFA should educate people about what the changes mean and advocate for changes in the laws when it makes sense.

Participants next provided their insights based on the following.

What environmental changes (internal or external) do you expect to occur that could potentially affect the way the WCFA operates in the future? (What may need to be done to address those changes?)

- Towns are increasingly asking for additional compensation to help repair roads damaged by logging trucks. This particular issue has also become more prevalent in areas where it did not exist in the past.
- Issues pertaining to forest health, especially the adverse effects of invasive species such as the emerald ash borer.
- Increased privatization of some county forestry services could affect forest management practices, and in turn this might change how the WCFA helps educate people about forest management. Will this cost counties more in the long run?
- Boiler regulations/mills. Proposed new federal regulations could force mills to perform extremely costly upgrades to their boiler systems. Mills are increasingly looking for the WCFA to provide information/advice on the issue and more specifically how these regulations might affect local forest products markets.

- The potential for increased biomass production due to the WE Energies project and others could affect forest management and utilization.

III. Review Plan Accomplishments

During the review, participants also identified suggested areas where the WCFA should concentrate its efforts in the coming years. Those suggestions are listed below in bold.

Goals and strategies from the 2009 to 2012 strategic plan provided the framework for this discussion. Accomplishments identified by the group are listed under each goal and strategies section.

Participants noted that overall internal and external communication has improved greatly since strategic plan adoption. This increased communication has meant that the WCFA is perceived by other stakeholders more often as a participant in forestry issues rather than just an outlier. The organization is now seen as being more proactive.

Accomplishments: Goal #1

How do we educate the public and legislators about what the WCFA does?

- Focus on county boards
- Focus on general public
- Focus on legislators

Strategy #1: Focus on County Boards (Accomplishments)

- WCFA presentations to Boards and county forestry committees (primarily done by the Executive Director).
- Providing educational/promotional information about the WCFA to County Board supervisors.
- WCFA is helping counties to acquire additional stewardship dollars for purchase of county forest lands and helps determine forestry project rankings related to the stewardship program.
- Some WCFA Board members are providing WCFA monthly reports to their fellow County Board supervisors.
- Some WCFA Board members continue to help provide annual County Board forest tours (Oconto, Juneau, Eau Claire). (Note: The tradition of providing such tours in some counties began well before the WCFA strategic plan was approved.) Other counties are

likely not going to begin this practice because of the prospect of not getting enough people to attend.

Suggested Points of Focus in the Coming Years

- **Continue director's County Board and county forestry committee presentations**
- **Continue to provide educational/promotional information about the WCFA to County Board members**
- **Continue when feasible to hand deliver severance payments to towns**
- **Promote creation of Forestry Advisory Committees at county level; role of WCFA will have to be thoroughly discussed and determined**
- **Develop "true/false" trivia questionnaires about the WCFA to help teach County Board supervisors and the general public about the organization**
- **Increase where possible the instances of WCFA Board members making reports about the WCFA to fellow County Board supervisors**

Strategy #2: Focus on General Public (Accomplishments)

- Upgraded WCFA displays.
- Financial support for Trees for Tomorrow program (also provides youth outreach).
- WCFA Executive Director is teaching a course at UW-Stevens Point (also provides youth outreach).
- Curriculum development for the Teacher Forestry Education Camp program.
- Executive Director provided information for and assisted with editing of "Into the Outdoors" program.
- WCFA involved in Log-a-Load events (logging and forestry demonstrations for youth).
- The WCFA Board hosts students at the annual WCFA Spring Administrators meeting.

Suggested Points of Focus in the Coming Years

- **Continue involvement with Trees for Tomorrow program**
- **Continue involvement with Teacher Forestry Education Camp program**
- **Continue involvement with "Into the Outdoors" programs**
- **Continue hosting students at the annual meeting**
- **Executive Director should continue appearing on local news broadcasts, etc.**
- **Upgrade WCFA website**
- **Increase interaction with School Forest programs**
- **WCFA should attempt to get more involved with Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association youth education events (poster sessions, etc.)**

Strategy #3: Focus on Legislators (Accomplishments)

- WCFA has increased its work related to national forest issues. Largely because of this, it has developed more ongoing working relationships with legislators.
- Spring 2011; WCFA informational packet developed and sent to new legislators.
- WCFA Executive Director is arranging to have the organization's 2013 spring meeting take place in Madison. The primary purpose is to increase contact between legislators, forestry administrators, and WCFA Board members. (The event will be somewhat similar to Superior Days.)
- WCFA representatives have increased the frequency with which they give testimony on forestry issues to legislative committees/full legislature. New people have recently provided testimony. (Convey positions on bills).

Suggested Points of Focus in the Coming Years

- **Continue newer emphasis of working on national forest issues**
- **Continue sending new legislators WCFA informational packets**
- **Continue WCFA representatives' testimony before legislative committees/legislature**
- **More closely follow forestry issues discussed through Wheeler Report items. Contact legislators to find out their opinions, to educate, etc.**
- **Make certain that 2013 spring meeting is held in Madison with opportunities for participants to talk with legislators and their staffers. Provide more opportunities for this kind of interaction in the future.**

Accomplishments: Goal #2

How does the WCFA remain proactive about issues that affect our industry?

- Interact with partners and players
- Keep up with technology and marketing

Strategy #1: Interact with partners and players (Accomplishments)

- Improved communication with partners - e.g. Executive Director now vice chair for the Council on Forestry.
- New office has facilitated stronger partnership with the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association.
- President of the WCFA Board is now on the Public Lands Committee, National Association of Counties.

- Some WCFA Board members serve on forestry, natural resources, etc. state and national boards such as the National Association of Conservation Districts and the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association.
- WCFA is now actively involved in discussions about ATV trail expansion.

Note: Participants agreed that all the following tasks listed under this strategy are ongoing and therefore should continue to be implemented over the next several years. Those tasks are:

- **Continue to serve on external boards/committees in the effort to increase WCFA's exposure**
- **Work with a technical college (likely Nicolet) to add a forestry course; for promotion of sustainable forestry in the region**
- **Deeper and broader communication with NRCS, DATCP, NRB, GLTPA Board, and the Master Loggers**
- **Deeper and broader communication with the Council on Forestry, invasive species BMPs, water quality BMPs, those who set and know about biomass harvesting guidelines, the DMV committee, WCA, and the Great Lakes Forest Alliance**
- **Deeper and broader communication with legislators and county board members**
- **Deeper and broader communication with recreational users of forests (ATV, snowmobilers, hikers, hunters, fishers, skiers, horseback riders, and bikers)**
- **Keep identifying who the players are to communicate with**

Strategy #2: Keep up with technology and marketing (Accomplishments)

- WCFA works at bringing information to foresters/forest administrators on how the use of new technology is becoming more related to effective forest management.
- WISFIRS has advanced much since the strategic plan was approved. Much of this is due to the efforts of individual county forest departments/administrators working with WDNR, not so much the WCFA. As a result of this effort, the speed with which timber sales are conducted has improved.
- WCFA regularly participates in forestry administrator conference calls. WCFA input helps the administrators keep up with current forestry issues.
- WCFA has increasingly used conference calls for Executive Committee meetings and some Board meetings, saving mileage costs, etc.

Suggested Points of Focus in the Coming Years

- **Continue using teleconferences**
- **Upgrade website (make it more user friendly)**
- **Explore using social media to tell people about the WCFA**

- **Promote the development and use of fillable bidding forms, online prospectus and timber sale maps (bid package) and new GIS technology that may allow loggers to access maps online**
- **Keep informed about new tools and technology available for increased efficiencies and accuracy in forest management**

Accomplishments: Goal #3

How do we continue to demonstrate value of county forestland within county budgets, to townships, etc.?

- Demonstrate impact of timber sales on employment, local economy, etc. (to county, state and federal stakeholders)
- Demonstrate recreational impact in dollar terms of county forest related tourist activities

Strategy #1: Demonstrate impact of timber sales on employment, local economy, etc. (Accomplishments)

- WCFA links to DNR data on its website.
- WCFA has begun interacting with counties in the southern part of the state; ongoing attempts to recruit counties that have county forestland.

Note: Meeting participants agreed that most of the following tasks listed in the strategic plan under this strategy should still be done.

- **Continue to promote ATV and UTV trail development in county forests and state lands where it makes sense.**
- **Study and demonstrate implications of no timber revenue (reports)**
- **Provide breakdown of specific dollar amounts to counties and towns**
- **Study and demonstrate revenue/expenditure impacts of Managed Forest Land programs. (Comparison of MFL land to county forests? Who would want to know about these impacts? – Towns, etc.?)**
- **Identify and hire appropriate consultant firms/agencies like UW-Extension to conduct impact analyses**
- **Educate town boards about all the benefits of timber sales**
- **Make presentations to town boards on sustainable forestry practices (and to other groups)**
- **Use the local media to highlight benefits of timber sales**
- **Give talks to school groups and parents**
- **Log –a- Load (communicate benefits from timber sales to charities like the Children’s Miracle Network)**

IV. Mission Statement Review

Participants were asked to consider the organization's current mission statement.

“The primary purpose of the Wisconsin County Forests Association is to provide a forum for direction and leadership to members of our organization. Our focus is to collaborate with partner groups to ensure the long – term health and sustainability of forest ecosystems.”

The facilitator asked the group the following questions.

- a. Has the WCFA's primary purpose changed since 2009? (If so, how?)
- b. Has the WCFA's core values changed since 2009? (pg. 15 of plan; If so, how?)
- c. Is the current mission statement out of date and, if so, how?
- d. What words/phrases, if any, would you keep from the current mission statement?
- e. What words/phrases, if any, would you add to the current mission statement?

Following a brief discussion, by consensus participants agreed that the current statement should not be modified.