

Wisconsin County Forests Association



Strategic Plan **(June 2009 – June 2012)**

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Executive Summary

Members of the Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) recently completed their first strategic plan. The Executive Director (the only staff) and Board members of the association undertook the project in hopes of focusing the association's limited resources, something that is even more crucial during recessionary periods like what was being experienced in the first quarter of 2009.

As is the case with most strategic planning projects, the in – depth conversations amongst the organization's stakeholders were clearly one of the great benefits of the process. Those discussions also helped to define the current status of the organization, its short – term priorities, the mandates under which it conducts business, and its partnerships and collaborations.

As part of clarifying the organization's current status, a subgroup, based on information from the entire body, modified the WCFA mission statement. It is expected that that clarified mission (page 16) and the plan detailed in this report (and subsequent action planning led by the organization's Personnel Committee) will provide the basis for the organization to within the near future establish a vision for its long – term growth.

The heart of this plan is the prioritized strategic issues that the Board, staff and county forest administrators belonging to the association identified. They are:

- **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).**
- **How do we remain proactive about issues that affect our industry? (Forest management; soil and water conservation, recreation, etc.)**
- **How do WCFA and its partners continue to demonstrate value of county forestland within county budgets, to townships, etc.? (What is the mechanism?)**

Suggested strategies to "answer" these questions are highlighted on pages 30 - 32 of this report.

What is perhaps most evident in this report is the way that each of the discussions throughout the planning process built on one another. The chosen priorities reflect this. They also reaffirm that the WCFA needs to strengthen the things that it is already doing well.

Introduction

The WCFA, consisting of 29 northern Wisconsin counties that own forestland, recently completed its first strategic planning process. Three half day meetings and a special mission statement development session were held over three months in early 2009. The strategic planning process was designed and facilitated by Art Lersch of the University of Wisconsin – Extension, Lincoln County. WCFA Executive Director Jane Severt asked Lersch to conduct the project. The entire 17 member Board, Severt, the organization’s Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources liaison (Jeff Barkley) and between three and eight county forest department heads, depending on the meeting, developed the plan.

WCFA Board members are also county board members. Their names and the county they represent are included in the table below.

Area 1

Counties: Marinette, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, and Florence

Directors: Louis Winkler, Director
William Walker, Director
Ed Kelley, Director

Area 2

Counties: Vilas, Taylor, Lincoln, Oneida, and Price

Directors: Wilbur Petroskey, Director
Jay Janssen, Director
Graham Rankin, Director

Area 3

Counties: Iron, Bayfield, Ashland, and Douglas

Directors: David L. Good, Director
John Robinson, Director
Tom Thompson, JR., Director

Area 4

Counties: Sawyer, Polk, Chippewa, Washburn, Barron, Burnett, and Rusk

Directors: Michael Larsen, Treasurer
Gene DuSell, Director
Norman Bickford, Director

Area 5

Counties: Clark, Marathon, Eau Claire, Juneau, Jackson, Wood, Monroe, and Vernon

Directors: Paul Lokken, Sr. V. President
 Elroy Zemke, President
 Beverly Larson, Director

Directors at Large

Directors: Robert Ebner, Past V. President
 James W. Barrett, Past V. President



County forest department heads who participated in the strategic planning sessions at varying degrees were:

<u>Ashland County</u>	<u>Barron County</u>	<u>Bayfield County</u>
Chris Hoffman	John Cisek	Paul Lundberg
<u>Burnett County</u>	<u>Chippewa County</u>	<u>Clark County</u>
Jason Nichols	Doyle Richards	Mark Heil
<u>Douglas County</u>	<u>Eau Claire County</u>	<u>Florence County</u>

Jon Harris	John R. Staszczuk	Patrick J. Smith
<u>Forest County</u>	<u>Iron County</u>	<u>Jackson County</u>
David W Ziolkowski	Joseph Vairus	James Zahasky
<u>Juneau County</u>	<u>Langlade County</u>	<u>Lincoln County</u>
Brian Loyd	Steve Jackson	Kevin Kleinschmidt
<u>Marathon County</u>	<u>Marinette County</u>	<u>Monroe County</u>
Tom Lovlien	John Scott	Chad Ziegler
<u>Oconto County</u>	<u>Oneida County</u>	<u>Polk County</u>
Robert Skalitzky	John Bilogan	Paul Pedersen
<u>Price County</u>	<u>Rusk County</u>	<u>Sawyer County</u>
Pete Bartelt	Paul Teska	Greg Peterson
<u>Taylor County</u>	<u>Vernon County</u>	<u>Vilas County</u>
Brad Ruesch	Adam Zirbel	Larry Stevens
<u>Washburn County</u>	<u>Wood County</u>	
Mike Peterson	Fritz Schubert	

The narrative below summarizes the work completed by the strategic planning group and highlights issue priorities and suggested strategies. Several action steps were recommended while identifying strategies. Action planning, the Board agreed, would continue under the auspices of the Board’s Personnel Committee.

Mandates

The following definitions were used for purposes of identifying formal and informal mandates.

Formal mandates are written laws, rules, procedures, and regulations etc. that the organization must or should abide by.

Informal mandates are those rules, procedures, and regulations etc. that the organization feels it must abide by even though they are not explicitly codified/written.”

The facilitator reminded the planning group that both formal and informal mandates can come from within the organization or from external entities.

Formal Mandates

- State Statute 77
 - SS 28 – 10 and 28 – 11 →also formal relationship with DNR
 - Charge & purpose; provided by Country Boards
 - 15 year plans, mandated policies & procedure and harvesting timber
- Mission Statement
- By-laws (just reviewed/changed)
- Comprehensive planning law (State)
- Non profit status/formal compliance
- Quasi-government entity
- Federal employment regulations (such as payroll taxes)

Informal Mandates

Many of the identified informal mandates related to working well with various partners throughout the state. Group members also felt that developing and maintaining partnerships is one of the organization's primary strengths.

- Forest Certification (Voluntary)
- Requirements of director; informal job description
- Work with the Department of Natural Resources
- Partnership with Professional Loggers Association
- Towns Association & Municipalities (Partnership)
- Work with legislature and legislators
- Subcommittees – such as Legislative; Personnel
- Working with/U.S. Forest Service
- Cooperation with Native Americans (many of their lands are along side of county forests)
- Interaction – environmental groups
- We have seats on other



- boards and committees of other various organizations – advocate on behalf of country forests
- Expectations that WCFA will be at table as largest public land owner in state
 - Association with Minnesota, Michigan, Ontario (Great Lakes Forest Alliance)
 - Five-year recreation plans (trails, parks, campgrounds, ATVs, snowmobiles)
 - ATV & snowmobile clubs, etc, horse clubs, lake associations, rivers
 - UW-Extension (collaboration)
 - Tourism related work
 - Working with water regulations people
 - Work with Wisconsin Department of Transportation
 - Need to testify in front of legislature (advocacy)
 - Collaboration with The Nature Conservancy
 - Best Management Practices
 - Educate people about us, our forest harvesting activities. Let people know why we do what we do.

Stakeholder Identification (including basic asset mapping)

For the purposes of stakeholder identification, the large group was divided into four work units. The instructions and questions below were provided to help guide work unit discussions. After the work units completed their lists, the large group was reconvened. A debriefing, along with refining the lists, took place. (Lists were combined to create a more concise report.)

“Stakeholder analyses often assist organizations as they determine which existing collaborations (and in some cases potential collaborations) can help further their missions. Identifying both internal and external stakeholders and how they interact with WCFA will help the organization determine the level of importance of each one of those relationships. When identifying stakeholders, think about the benefits they bring to WCFA through collaboration. Also, determine how WCFA helps those organizations (and individuals) it collaborates with on a regular basis. Please answer the following questions.

1. Who are the organization’s internal stakeholders?
2. What particular resources, talents, skills, materials etc. do these entities (both people and organizations) bring to enhance WCFA’s effectiveness?

3. What external stakeholders does the organization interact with on a consistent basis?
4. What particular resources, talents, skills, materials etc. do these entities (both people and organizations) bring to enhance the WCFA's effectiveness?
5. What external stakeholders should the organization be working with but is currently not?
6. What potential assets/resources might those stakeholders bring that in some way could benefit WCFA?
7. What benefits does WCFA offer to current and potential external stakeholders?"

Internal Stakeholders

<i>Executive Director Provides</i>	<i>Executive Director Receives</i>
Efficiencies in incorporation gathering (point of contact)	Paycheck – gainful employment
Industry knowledge	
Networks	
Administrative skills and rules	
Distributes information	
Contact point for external partners	
Coordinates information	
Provides organization	
Responsible for scheduling meetings, etc.	
Represents board of directors at meetings	
[Works with other] organizations and WCFA committees	
<i>County Forestry Committees Provide</i>	<i>County Forestry Committees Receive</i>
Support for organization	Information
Funding to enable the organization	Knowledge on current issues
Perspective	Bigger voice in state government
Knowledge on local forestry issues	
Guidance to Country Boards on forestry issues	Program protection
[Fish fries for Executive Director]	

Direction	
Comments/concerns	
Policy	
<i>County Boards Provide</i>	<i>County Boards Receive</i>
Platform for transfer of important issues	Information
Money to enable organization	Timber sale revenue
Supervisors (WCFA Board membership)	Dollars from recreation fees
Organization policies	
Money from land sales	
Salaries	
Transaction education	
Equipment	
<i>County Forest Administrators Provide</i>	<i>County Forest Administrators Receive</i>
Knowledge	Information sharing (community issues)
Expertise to county committees	
Forest management education	
Technical input	
Point of contact	
Information to directors	
<i>WCFA Board of Directors Provide</i>	<i>WCFA Board of Directors Receive</i>
Direction/guidance to Executive Director	Information for operation of county forest
Committees (to carry out specific objectives)	Information for county forestry committees and County Boards
Develops organization budget	
Decision making body	
Knowledge about and perspective on forestry issues	
<i>Foresters Provide</i>	<i>Foresters Receive</i>
Technical input	Collaboration and education
<i>DNR County Forest Specialist Provides</i>	<i>DNR County Forest Specialist Receives</i>
Legal services	Services from Executive Director acting as a liaison between WCFA and WDNR
Financial [advice; grants, etc.]	

County forest group certification manager/coordinator	
Conveys information from the DNR (laws, regulations, rules)	
Expertise in particular areas; insect control; forest disease, water, recreation, fire prevention/suppression	
Grant facilitator	
<i>Taxpayers Provide</i>	<i>Taxpayers Receive</i>
Dollars	Education
Support	Information
	Dollars
	Recreation
	Access to roads, recreation, and employment;
	Fire suppression
<i>County Forest Office Staff Provides</i>	<i>County Forest Office Staff Receives</i>
Distribute information	Communication/information

External Stakeholders

	<i>WCFA Provides</i>	<i>WCFA Receives</i>
<i>State Legislature</i>	Expertise	Laws (knowledge)
	Suggestions/Needs	Regulations
		Grant/cost share
		Expertise
<i>Wisconsin County Association</i>	Knowledge	Support – Law Changes
<i>Towns Association</i>	Liaison w/forest issues	Liaison w/the counties
	PILT (30 cents per acre of county forest; WCFA provides advocacy for	

	PILT payments on county forest land)	
	10% stumpage payment	
GLTPA	Mutual Expertise/Support	Training – record keeping
	Forest Certification – land base for revenue	Staff training
		Markets
Snowmobile Council & AWSC	Land base for trails	Grants
		Organized users
ORV Council and WATVA	Land base for trails	Grants
		Organized users
FSC/SFI	Expertise for management	Expertise
	Dollars/land base	Advice for Improvement
		Increased market opportunities
Wildlife Organizations -- i.e. Ruffed Grouse Society, Wild Turkey Federation, etc.	Improved habitat for more wildlife	Funding
	Hunting access and acres	
Tribes	Education	Information
	Gathering rights	
	Land base for gathering	Knowledge
	Rights in the ceded territory	Cultural knowledge
	Partnership	Partnership
APHIS	Funding	Resource protection
Loggers	Timber	Money
	Raw Material	Ability to practice forestry through harvesting
	Employment opportunities	Dollars
	Knowledge/Information	Knowledge/information

Mills	Timber	Money
	Steady supply of raw materials	Markets
	Employment opportunities	Employment
S.A.F.	Members	Training & information sessions
	Money	Policy statements
Recreational Users	Land	Time
	Trails	Dollars
	Grants	Information/suggestions/demands
	Training	
Wisconsin DNR	Technical assistance	Technical assistance – county forest liaison
	Headaches/kick in the butt	Money
	Trail corridors	
	A lot of knowledge	A lot of knowledge
		Recreational trail connections
Other County Departments	Land base	Assistance
	Timber sale revenue	Manpower
	Raw materials	
Local Business	Land uses	Information
	Dollars for local economy	
	Information	
United States Forest Service	Comments on proposed projects	Expertise & training
	Support for management activities	25% fund provides revenue to towns
		P.I.L.T. provides revenue to towns
Environmental Groups	Education/knowledge	Perceived public values
	Land base	
Log a Load	Site	Forum

Education	Information	
LCC Committee	Forestry expertise and technical assistance	Land conservation, land information, and technical expertise
Legislature	Input on forestry issues	Supportive forestry related legislation

Potential Partner Organizations

- Law enforcement (timber theft, recreational vehicle violation, illegal dumping)
- Comprehensive plan (Land development, plans/county stakeholders)
- Adjoining land owners (private landowners within county forest)
- Non-metallic mining companies
- Mining interest (exploration)
- Cranberry growers (could impact through operation and their land acquisition)
- Air National Guard
- Paper mill industry subsidiary companies (selling of land; want county to buy land?; could counties buy the land?)
- Economic development organizations
- Tourism organizations
- Power/utility companies (OEI);(biomass & rights of way issues)

Mission Statement Review & Development

The group used the following (current as of 4/30/09) mission statement to help guide its discussion.

“The primary purpose of this corporation is to provide a forum for the consideration of problems and policies of concern to the committee of the County Board of each county in the state responsible for forestry programs of the county, including those programs



carried out under S.S.28.10 and Chapter 77 of the Wisconsin Statutes.”

Group members were also instructed by the facilitator to use the following information and questions while reviewing WCFA’s current (as of 4/31/09) mission statement.

“A **mission statement** is generally one or two sentences. It usually conveys the most critical purpose of the organization in the **present**. It answers the question “why does the organization exist?” Mission statements, although succinct, are not slogans. Normally a good mission statement mentions who the organization seeks to serve, the primary goal it wishes to reach, and the geographical area in which it is working. Mission statements are fluid and should be reviewed periodically and particularly throughout strategic planning processes. They often let people know why the organization is unique. Good mission statements help to provide guidance so that an organization can focus on what is truly important.

1. What are the organization’s current primary core values?
2. Does the current mission adequately describe WCFA’s primary purpose and reflect its core values?
3. If not, how should it be changed?”

Primary Core Values

- Members of organization
- Integrity
- Leadership
- Mutual Respect
- Land Stewardship
- Honesty
- Income (Financial stability)
- Communication (Good & Stable)
- The Director
- Our partnerships

General Comments on Mission Statement (Does the current mission adequately describe the organization’s purpose? If not, how should it be changed?)

Group members suggested specific word changes, as can be seen in the comments below.

- "Problems" could perhaps be changed to "Issues"

- "Consideration" perhaps changed to "Solve" (Is this negative connotation?)
- Needs to convey integrity (Core Value)
- Throw whole thing out; does not adequately convey proactive purpose of the organization
- Should convey "longevity"—we are here to stay
- Why do we do what we do and for what purpose?
- Like "Conservation's wide and multi use"
- Chapter SS28 (Does this have to be in the mission statement? Some counties that don't belong to Country Forest Law/WCFA does not represent)
- Make reference to Michigan, Minnesota (Associates don't abide by 28.11. Wide "Great Lakes area")
- Is our interest global?
- We are much more than a "forum"

Prior to the entire Board meeting for the third and final strategic planning session on May 1, 2009 a group of seven Board members, forestry department heads, and the WCFA director gathered to develop a new organizational mission statement. The group was instructed by the facilitator to use input obtained February 6 from the entire Board, staff, and county forestry department heads about the organization's core values and suggestions that were made on how to rework the existing mission statement to better reflect the organization's primary purpose.

The facilitator split the mission subgroup into two smaller work units. Each work unit developed draft mission statements based on the February 6 input. They were:

"The primary purpose of the WCFA is to provide positive direction and leadership to members of our organization and forestry related programs within the lake states area. Our primary focus is to ensure the long – term health and sustainability of forest ecosystems."

"Provide a forum for members to discuss forestry and resource issues of common interest and concerns and to provide a conduit for the sharing of information, views, goals and leadership within the larger forestry community."

After comparing and contrasting the draft statements and some wordsmithing, the subgroup developed the statement in the box below. The statement was presented to the entire planning group at the May 1 meeting. The Board may choose to adopt or not approve the statement as written either as part of its sanctioning the entire strategic plan or as a separate process.

"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."



Situation Analysis Using the SOAR Model

The following explanation of the SOAR model and instructions were provided by the facilitator before the group identified WCFA strengths.

- "(S) Strengths/assets of the foundation as they now stand
- (O) The most important and viable opportunities that are available to the foundation from organizations or individuals within and outside it. (What can the group take advantage of? Refer back to the discussion that took place during the stakeholder analysis and asset mapping)
- (A) Aspirations/dreams: a vision of the group's preferred future.
- (R) Results: Primary expected outcomes

The SOAR analysis is meant to keep reinforcing and building upon what was discussed in previous sessions, primarily focusing on positive aspects. Please use the following questions as the basis for your discussion.

1. Has the general environment in which WCFA works changed significantly within the last several years? If so, how?
2. What are the current strengths of the organization?
3. What are potential opportunities that the organization can take advantage of in the coming few years?
4. What are WCFA's aspirations?
5. What might be the ultimate long-term results of WCFA's work?"

Strengths

- Executive Director
- Membership (Experienced, strong, active, Board, county commitment)
- Forests (2.3 million acres + .8 million Michigan, Minnesota; WCFA Acreage; our forests are certified; sheer size of the forests does bring us respect)
- Jeff Barkley – DNR County Forest Specialist
- One of the few state organizations that represent the North
- Participation
- Knowledge base (forestry; forestry operations)
- Expertise of county foresters (department heads)
- Internal networking/sharing information (helps provide opportunities to other counties; best practices)
- Legal ability to work with legislature (free to work with – We can educate and persuade).
- Credible – Reputable source of information
- Wide pool of resources (Unique organization that includes county representatives; works together)
- Only organization like this in US – unique to country
- External partners
- Preserve something for future – for grandchildren (sustainable forest; ties to organizations; longevity)

Opportunities

The following definition of “opportunities” was used to help group members frame their discussion.

“The most important and viable opportunities that are available to WCFA from within the organization or outside it. What can the organization take advantage of?”

- Utilize stewardship funds for land acquisition beginning July 2010 (statute change)
 - Also allows for regeneration of cut over forests (previously owned by land or investment companies)
 - Ease of management; block your properties
 - User friendly for public (all types of recreation)
 - Wildlife preservation: hunting/fishing
 - Provides funding for land acquisition (helpful to county in tight budget time)

- Jane's [WCFA Executive Director] position on the Council on Forestry. WCFA can send communication/message up to council → leads to state powers/governor; messages sent from top down to counties (somewhat unique, etc. take advantage of this). Council on Forestry gives conduit to the Wisconsin Governor.
- Superior Days: Opportunity to present local views on issues to legislators and WDNR Secretary. Take advantage through stakeholder groups.
- Forest certification can be an opportunity. Biomass; Wisconsin already has guidelines to harvest bioenergy sustainably. This could lead to more federal dollars to promote bioenergy
- Eau Claire; mountain bike, snow shoe races; partner with these organizations on a more wide scale to gain revenue etc. Also, biomass harvesting can provide much needed revenue.
- County Board partnership, etc. Use to help prevent unwise/unplanned cutting. Education should be provided to help County Board members understand that counties must abide by the allowable cut figures and proper silviculture.
- Continuous education of County Board members to help mitigate the effects of turnover on boards.
- When it comes to biomass policy, county by county decisions must take place. One way won't fit all. Each county is unique. Biomass policy and decisions must be very site specific based on soil types and other factors. One general policy or set of guide lines won't fit all. [WCFA needs to provide some guidance to help counties make good policy decisions related to biomass].
- Opportunity to advise public what we are doing. Communicate reasons for different forest tree cuts. WCFA can do more education → is it lumber, biomass? Be more proactive to communicate these things using documents, tours, etc. Much of this education should relate to best management practices. Promote best management practices to the public. We also have the opportunity to do more to send the message that regeneration is vital.
 - More continuing education.
 - Legislators, tours.

Also educational

Overview general articles put out by/distributed by WCFA. Make them more related to current hot issues. Each county modifies the general articles to suit their own unique situations. WCFA should issue more opinion white papers. Use these white papers as a conduit for information. Opportunity for WCFA to grow and to make others more aware of what we are doing.

- WCFA members should participate on other forestry related committees, organizations, etc. to spread the word about what WCFA does and forestry issues.
- County Forestry Advisory Committees represent various organizations. WCFA should collaborate more with them. They have connections with other organizations.
- The organization has the opportunity to establish subcommittees to address hot topic issues as (or even before) they come to fruition.
- Opportunity to work more with mills so they reach out to us in tough market times.
- Explain to the public that we aren't just "timber beasts." We also promote recreation, forest related education, etc.
- Continue to communicate WCFA issues, etc. to US Forest Service, more opportunities.

Aspirations

The following definition of aspirations was referenced by group members during the discussion.

"A vision of the organization's preferred future."

The large group was split into four smaller work units to discuss the following scenario.

"You have been asleep for five years. You awaken to find that forestry related miracles have occurred as a result of WCFA activities. The organization's capacity/resources changed little over the five year period. What do you see happening that is new, positive or different?"

Dominant aspiration themes that cut across all of the work units were:

- a. Strengthening relationships with Great Lakes counties in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota and with partners like the GLFA and GLTPA, etc.).
- b. Being more proactive in helping to frame, advocate for and develop policies and legislation that will benefit forest related matters.
- c. Explore and develop biomass, alternative energy strategies that lessen WCFA counties' dependence on traditional fiber based activities for revenue generation. (Diversify revenue sources).
- d. Maintain what we already have. (Strengths, forest land, relationships, etc.)
- e. Education of public, elected officials, etc. about what WCFA does and important forestry issues.

Lincoln County's Logging Heritage

The following list of aspirations was identified.

- Increased recognition and understanding of county forest issues by public/ elected officials. Education of county board members that would sell it all, etc.,
- Proactive on forestry issues and policy development.
- Maintain WCFA's financial stability and staffing.
- WCFA possesses more interactive learning tools on its website. More interactive technology can assist in communicating our message. Public web conferencing should be an option, etc.
- Further alliance with Great Lakes counties in Minnesota, Michigan, and within own state.
- Communication between Ontario, Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin.
- More prominent player in fiber products and alternative energy products.

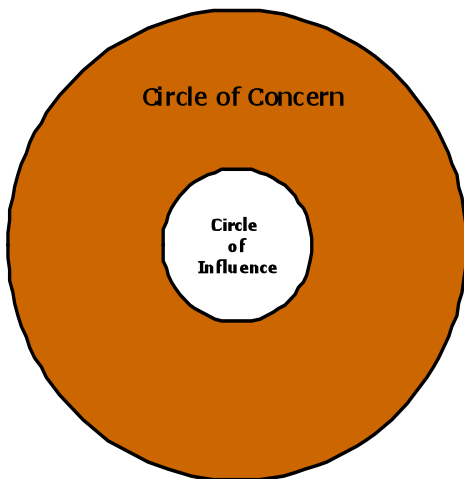


- Maintain current county forest acreage and help it to grow.
- Larger roll in all aspects including legislative, education and all items that include wood, water, air, recreation, and soil.
- Closer ties to organizations with similar interests. Wisconsin Woodland Owners Assoc. and Michigan, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLPTA) of Wisconsin and Michigan.
- Increase revenue by biomass harvest, alternate energy sources, carbon credits etc. Back out of traditional fiber based revenue generation. Provide more ecosystem services.
- Maintain current strengths.
- More productive legislatively. Work together to advocate for policy enhancements that will benefit forest initiatives and preservation.
- Stronger partnerships, state-private-townships-counties-federal-timber industries.
- Speakers will buy a round.
- Communication from and respect for organization. More public involvement/cooperation in the organization.
- Help address the increased needs of the public.
- Better acceptance of our profession.
- Greater relationship between mills and WCFA. Mills should not go elsewhere to help them meet market demands. Local timber will be bought even in bad economic times.
- Continue to work with (pressure) forest service to increase timber harvest.
- WCFA needs to continue to be role model for proper resource management.

Circle of Influence

To get group members to think more deeply about capacity issues, the facilitator briefly discussed the Covey concept of focusing on what matters the most and on what can be influenced. The diagrams below illustrate the benefits of focusing on only those things that can be influenced. The circle of concern shrinks and the circle of influence expands when organizations focus their efforts on what they can do something about. This creates more effective organizations. The conversation that ensued also helped those present to frame anticipated organizational results and challenges facing the WCFA in the coming years.

Focusing on things you can't control



Source: 7 Habits of Highly Effective People Signature Course Power Point; Franklin Covey Institute



Results

The following questions were used to help frame the discussion about results.

“What outcomes do you expect the organization will (or must) achieve in the next few years? Also, what are some “ultimate” long – term outcomes to pursue?”

- Maintain/grow the county forest system.
- Generate revenue.

- Grow public support; and maintain financial support to WCFA and county boards.
(Specific Strategy) Show townships that growing county forests won't negatively impact tax base. WCFA should advocate for aid able revenue formula.
- Ensure that county forests never become liability to counties.
- Conduct and distribute study to show benefits of recreation on county forest land (county by county or statewide).
- WCFA must fight use of forestry mil tax to help balance the state budget. WCFA attempts to ensure tax is used only for forest enhancement (stewardship debt).
- Aspirations and results overlap; many are similar.
- Place value on land use for trails in forests; under recreation study (previously stated) prove to counties that land being used for better use.
- Stay abreast of all issues that affect forestry.

Challenges

The following question was posed to group members.

"What are the greatest external or internal challenges facing WCFA in the coming years?"

- Forest health issues, financial stability
- Limited time of internal staff, board, department heads/administrators. They often don't have time to get proactively involved. Without that time, they find it difficult to influence policy, etc.
- Currently various forestry related funds can be raided to balance the state budget (like the mil tax).
- Contracting out 1/2 time for county forest administrator duties. This could very well become a major trend because of county budget pressures. That will mean that there will be no person dedicated to conducting county forest related duties.

- Timber markets in general are currently poor. This is cyclical, but it is always a challenge to overcome this.
- Increased urbanization makes it more challenging to educate folks about the importance of maintaining forest land.
- Forest certification. Costs of time and money and so far there appear to be few benefits. Currently, the state is picking up direct costs to support acres being placed in the program. But it is a challenge to stay certified.

Identifying Strategic Issues

The facilitator provided the following information to help frame the strategic issues discussion.

“Strategic issues are fundamental policy questions or critical challenges that affect how an organization does business and/or its ability to achieve goals meant to further its mission.”¹ It is vital for the organization to identify issues that it can do something about (capacity), that are important (can address over time during normal planning cycles), and that might be urgent (that must be addressed in a short period of time). Issues or potential issues can also be evaluated based on their levels of unpredictability. Unpredictable issues are often important and can also be urgent. We will be creating strategic issue questions as part of the process. When thinking about strategic issues, ask yourself two fundamental questions.

1. What particular opportunities can and should WCFA take advantage of in the coming few years?
2. What particular challenges must the organization address in the coming few years?”

Attendees were also instructed to put their suggested issue statements in the form of questions, a simple technique that will help group members develop meaningful strategies in the attempt to “answer” the questions.

The following strategic issue questions were identified.

- A. How do we get younger people involved in WCFA?

¹ University of Wisconsin – Extension Strategic Planning Course Manual.

- B. 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).
- C. How do we maintain and increase WCFA financial support? (Study should be conducted to illustrate the organization's impacts).
- D. How can we maximize our revenues using various ecosystem options using practices that promote sustainability? (Diversification of revenue sources).
- E. How do we ensure involvement of all the members and their resources including time/expertise so WCFA can be as effective as it can?
- F. What can WCFA do to help ensure forest health? (Invasive species, etc.)
- G. Does the burden of forest certification justify itself? Should WCFA continue to advocate for or comply with forest certification?
- H. How do we remain proactive about issues that affect our industry? (Forest management; soil and water conservation, recreation, etc.)
- I. How do WCFA and its partners continue to demonstrate value of county forestland within county budgets, to townships, etc.? (What is the mechanism?)
- J. How do we adequately educate new WCFA and County Board members about the organization and what we do?
- K. How do WCFA and its partners maximize/strengthen our already good relationships with legislators?

Prioritizing Strategic Issues

For the purpose of identifying priorities, the large group was split into four work units. Using a decision matrix (scale below the matrix, page 27) each work unit evaluated the strategic issue questions. To keep the process as simple as possible, the criterion were weighted the same. The combined results are depicted in the table on the next page. The top three rankings are highlighted.

➤ **How do WCFA and its partners continue to demonstrate value of county forestland within county budgets, to townships, etc.? (What is the mechanism?)**

Although an imperfect instrument, the decision matrix provided some insight on which issues the organization should address first during the three year this plan is in force. The results, however "subjective," did accurately reflect the major themes of discussions throughout the three strategic planning sessions.

Just because an issue is ranked low within the matrix does not mean it should not be addressed at some point during the three year period or beyond. The issues that rose to the top are already being addressed to a certain degree by the organization.

For the three top issues, the work unit total scores were quite close indicating a good degree of consensus. Through the matrix, Board members and others in the planning group reaffirmed how important it is for the organization to focus its efforts on these top issues and explore new ways to address them.

There was some variation in scores pertaining to issue question E (How do we ensure involvement of all the members and their resources including time/expertise so WCFA can be as effective as it can?). One group gave the issue 19 total points. The other three groups gave the issue between 30 and 35 points. Those groups that scored the issue higher asserted that the organization can accomplish very little unless its entire membership, including Board members, are fully engaged. The group that gave the issue 19 points believed that members are already engaged and that because of this there is virtually no issue.

There was also some variation in the scoring of issue F (What can WCFA do to help ensure forest health?). Total scores were 35, 25, 34 and 29. Three of the four groups felt that WCFA possesses only a moderate level of capacity to deal with the issue either on its own or with its partners. However, the issue seems to be very important and urgent to many Board members and forest administrators, thus its relatively high overall ranking (fourth). It is also a major element of fostering forest ecosystem sustainability, a focus area identified in the organization's new mission statement. Also stated in the mission is that WCFA should help to ensure the health of forest land. For all these reasons, the organization needs to keep looking for opportunities where it can perhaps take the lead or at the least be involved in meaningfully addressing the issue in the coming three years.

There was little consensus across the work units about K as well (How do the WCFA and its partners maximize/strengthen our already good relationships with

legislators?). The scores based on criterion, however, were virtually equal, a big reason for the issue's relatively high ranking (fifth).

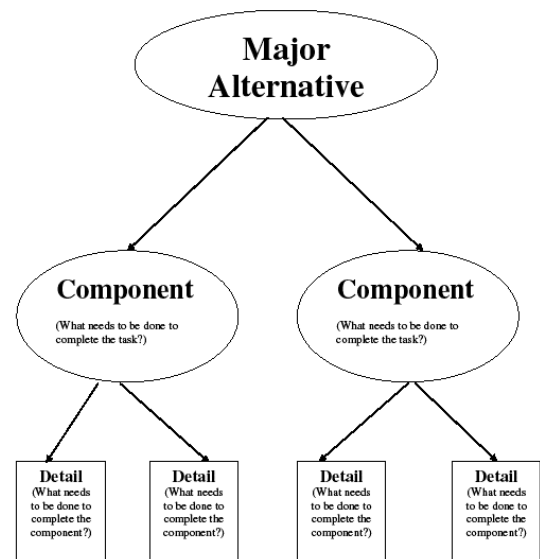
There was widespread agreement that A (How do we get younger people involved in WCFA?) was by far the least important issue for the organization to address. Several on the planning group asserted that this issue should not be directly addressed in the coming few years because it is likely that the WCFA Board's makeup of county board members who are mostly older, retired people would not change anytime soon. Youth are not likely to have much direct contact with the organization. At the same time, a few Board members said that educating youth about the multiple uses and value of county forests was still important.

Strategy Identification

Using the "Major Alternative, Components, Details" method, meeting attendees identified and organized primary strategies and the components of those strategies that will help the organization address the three primary issues. Directly below are definitions/instructions and a diagram that helped attendees through the process.

Ask yourself: How do we answer the strategic issue question?

- Major Alternative/Primary Strategy: a broad, complete solution idea which, if implemented, would on its own achieve the identified purpose.
- Component: a broad solution idea that is not in itself a complete solution (combine with other components to produce a major alternative).
- Detail: an idea that is part of a broader solution (action step).



The facilitator instructed group members not to worry about breaking down what is a component or a detail. That can be done later during action planning. He

divided the large group into three smaller work units, each tackling one strategic issue.

Below is a summary of suggested primary strategies and components/details for each of the issues. Since a more detailed plan was developed around strategic issue B, and since there was consensus that it is the most important issue to be addressed in the coming years, it is recommended that the organization focus most of its efforts on it in the immediate future.

Issue	Major Alternative/Primary Strategy	Component/Detail (recommended)
<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>	<p>a. <u>Focus on county boards</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand deliver severance payments (relates to issue I.; demonstrating the value of county forestland to towns) • Develop and distribute information packets about WCFA, county forests, etc. • PowerPoint presentations for County Board members, especially where there are new members. • Provide County Boards with monthly updates (also annual plan approval from committee chair) • Develop more annual tours of county forests for County Board members (on a local basis)
	<p>b. <u>Focus on general public</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade WCFA information displays for events like Farm Progress days, fairs, festivals, etc.) • Develop and send more press/news releases related to WCFA work and forest issues • "Advertise" WCFA through a billboard (find funds; determine location; develop message) • Develop and deliver public service announcements • Help counties to participate more in school forest programs • Promote and develop more college internships within/for county forests • Work with partners to develop forestry related student scholarships • Apply for county forest sustainability grant
	<p>c. <u>Focus on legislators</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile individual county forest reports into annual accomplishment summary for legislators

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue and increase where feasible testifying on forestry issues during statewide hearings • Convey WCFA positions during various hearings (develop positions; determine who will present them) • Develop and convey primary organization message to local legislators • Invite state assembly/senate members to forestry committee meetings and WCFA functions like tours • Superior Days related activities (communicate WCFA issues to participating staff; WCFA Board member or forest administrator to participate in issue identification sessions; use trip to Madison to discuss forest topics with key committees and legislators)
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Issue	Major Alternative/Primary Strategy	Component/Detail (recommended)
<p>How do we remain proactive about issues that affect our industry? (Forest management; soil water conservation, recreation, etc.)</p>	<p>a. <u>Interact with partners and players</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
	<p>b. <u>Keep up with technology and marketing</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WisFirs (continued upgrades and development of uses) • Forest certification methods • Attend industry shows • Possible purchases of other useful technology • Educate ourselves about new marketing possibilities (technology and non-technology based)

Issue	Major Alternative/Primary Strategy	Component/Detail (recommended)
<p>How do we continue to demonstrate value of county forestland within county budgets, to townships, etc.? (What is the mechanism?)</p>	<p>a. <u>Demonstrate impact of timber sales on employment, local economy, etc. (to county, state and federal stakeholders)</u></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 • Identify and hire appropriate consultant firms/agencies to conduct impact analyses • Approach UW – Extension for economic impact analyses • Educate town boards one at a time about all the benefits of timber sales • As part of this, 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) <p>(Note: Bullets four through the end are potential details of components stated under the first three bullets.)</p>
	<p>b. <u>Demonstrate recreational impact in dollar terms of county forest related tourist activities</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar components and details as listed under a. <p>(Note: Additional components and details may be needed to complete this strategy.)</p>

Conclusion

Any strategic planning effort is incomplete without defining action tasks to implement strategies, who will be responsible for performing those tasks, and when the tasks will be completed. During the last strategic planning session, the WCFA Board decided to let its Personnel Committee take the lead on action planning. Besides containing strategies, the tables above also include some suggested action steps that may be utilized. It is recommended that the Personnel Committee define and evaluate those steps early on in the action planning process. Many if not all of the steps in their current or modified forms should be included in the action plan.

As is the case with many organizations, the WCFA does not have the capacity to address many critical strategic issues at once. Even three may be too many. There is considerable overlap, however, amongst the organization's prioritized issues. For example, adequately addressing the issue of demonstrating the value of county forestland to various stakeholders can also help to educate them about what the WCFA does and forest related matters in general. It will be helpful for the Personnel Committee and the entire Board to identify these linkages in the attempt to create action tasks that help address multiple issues, perhaps even some that were not identified as short – term organizational priorities.

Perhaps most important, the strategic planning process has helped WCFA Board members, county forest administrators, and staff begin meaningful dialogue about how the organization can remain viable into the foreseeable future. The formal approval of this plan by the Board will reaffirm how important it is to continue that dialogue and the strategizing that will inevitably come with further discussions.