



Langlade County Forest Trail
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Wisconsin County Forests Association

Strategic Plan

June 2016-June 2019

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Introduction

The Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) was founded in 1968 originally to “provide a forum for the consideration of problems, programs, and policies of county forests” throughout the state. Since then, it has become the leading organization in the world promoting responsible county forest management and sustainability. Its 29 county members manage a total of nearly 2.4 million acres of forest land. Since 2009, strategic plan development and implementation has become an important reason why the WCFA has matured as an organization and increased its support to those member counties and even in some cases to non-member counties.

Begun in December 2015 and completed in April, 2016 this latest WCFA strategic plan development process took place during a time of increasing change within the local and national forest industries. Like the organization’s initial two planning processes (the second being an update of the organization’s 2009-2012 plan), this latest effort focused on how to both improve the internal workings of the WCFA and set goals that will strengthen its position throughout the state.

Also similar to the organization’s other planning processes, county forest administrators from member counties, WCFA Board members, and the WCFA executive director took part in the meetings. Joining them for the first time was the WCFA assistant director, a position that was added in part to increase the capacity of the organization as it sought to implement its first ever strategic plan and become a more active player in the forest management world. A map of the state depicting the county members is on page 5 of this report and a list of those who participated in this latest WCFA strategic plan process immediately follows.

During the three planning sessions, participants identified their expectations, hopes, and concerns related to the planning process, identified accomplishments from implementation of the 2009-2012 plan, conducted an environmental analysis, reviewed and modified the organization’s mission statement, completed a stakeholder and SOAR+C¹ analyses, identified strategic issues the organization must address in the next few years, set and prioritized goals, and created action plans to achieve the prioritized goals.

Primary goals for the next three years are:

- ***What must the WCFA do to ensure mission driven, exceptional staff well into the future?***

¹ SOAR+C stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results, and challenges. This type of analysis focuses more upon the positive aspects of an organization (i.e. what is being done right), rather than its struggles and what is being done wrong.

- ***What must the WCFA do to ensure adequate funding?***
- ***What can the WCFA do to become an even more effective leader on forestry issues?***
- ***How can/should the WCFA provide more support to its county members dealing with non-timber related forest issues? (i.e. parks and trail management)***

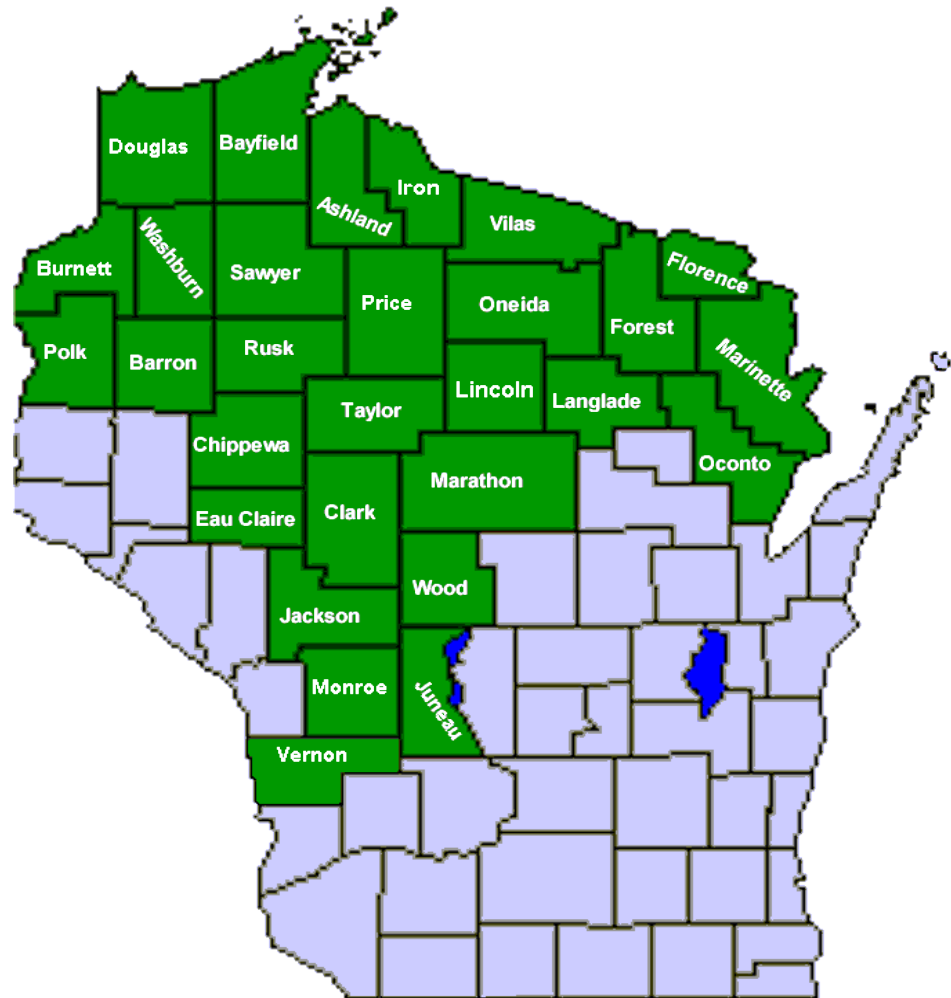
Basic action plans for each of these focus areas can be found beginning on page 32 of this report. Three other goals were identified but action plans were not developed for them. The organization lacks the capacity to directly address these goals at present, but will monitor if/when fulfilling a strategy for another goal helps to advance one of these three “parking lot” items.



Vilas County
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County Members

The map below shows which counties in Wisconsin are members of the WCFA. Currently, 29 counties belong to the organization.



Map courtesy of the WCFA website

WCFA Board Members, County Forest Administrators, and Staff

Below are the people who developed the WCFA’s new strategic plan. Although attendance at the planning sessions varied, those who participated in the three meetings were fully engaged, as is evidenced by the high quality of the plan and the newly proposed organizational mission statement. Besides those in the table below, Jane Severt, Executive Director, and Gary Zimmer, Assistant Director, participated.

WCFA Board Members	
Greg Sekela, Area 1, Oconto County	Bill Schradle, Area 4, Polk County
Al Mans, Area 1, Marinette County	Phil Schneider, Area 4, Rusk County
Ed Kelly, Area 1, Florence County	Norman Bickford, Area 4, Burnett County
Tom Rudolph, Area 2, Oneida County	Paul Lokken, Area 5, Eau Claire County
Carl Vander Sanden, Area 2, Lincoln County	Joe Waichulis, Area 5, Clark County
Charles Zenner, Area 2, Taylor County	Beverly Larson, Area 5, Juneau County
Tom Thompson Jr., Area 3, Iron County	Mike Luedeke, At – Large, Washburn County
L.H. “Skip” Fiedler, Area 3, Ashland County	Henry Schienebeck, At – Large, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association
John Robinson, Area 3, Douglas County	
County Forest Administrators	
Chris Hoffman, Ashland County	Tom Lovlien, Marathon County
John Cisek, Barron County	Pet Villas, Marinette County
Jason Bodine, Bayfield County	Chad Ziegler, Monroe County
Jason Nichols, Burnett County	Robert Skalitzky, Oconto County
Mike Dahlby, Chippewa County	John Bilogan, Oneida County
Rick Daily, Clark County	Jeremy Koslowski, Polk County
Jon Harris, Douglas County	Eric Holm, Price County
Josh Pedersen, Eau Claire County	Paul Teska, Rusk County
Patrick Smith, Florence County	Greg Peterson, Sawyer County
David Ziolkowski, Forest County	Russ Aszmann, Taylor County
Eric Peterson, Iron County	Andy LaChance, Vernon County
James Zahasky, Jackson County	John Gagnon, Vilas County
Brian Loyd, Juneau County	Mike Peterson, Washburn County
Erik Rantala, Langlade County	Fritz Schubert, Wood County
Kevin Kleinschmidt, Lincoln County	

Expectations (Hopes and Concerns for the Process)

During the initial planning session, attendees were asked what their hopes and concerns were for the process. Their answers were to help the facilitator tailor sessions more toward the current and future needs of the organization.

Hopes

- That more ways are identified to make the WCFA more visible to the public.
- That whatever plans are developed will be implemented. (That we have the capacity to do that).
- That prioritization takes place.
- That there is consensus on what directions to head.
- That the plan is simple and that it guide the organization to become more responsive.
- That a list of issues to be addressed is identified.
- That the new plan is flexible.
- That the new plan provides direction, focus, and structure to the director/staff.

Concerns

- Staff time/burnout.
- Becoming more proactive. How do we get ahead of more issues such as new legislation?
- Will we have enough funding to complete goals outlined in the plan?
- Will there be enough human capital in the organization to achieve planning goals?
- Externally, will there be enough markets for forestry products in the future?
- How do we measure progress?
- Will we be able to recruit enough new board members?
- Can enough mentoring be provided to new county forest administrators?
- What will be our baselines for measuring progress?
- How can we maintain our focus on helping to improve other organizations that interact with the WCFA?

Accomplishments Since 2012 Plan Update

Staff and board members discussed what occurred as a result of implementing the organization's original strategic plan and its updated version. The planning goals listed below were developed in 2009 as part of the organization's first ever comprehensive strategic planning process. Information about accomplishments also helped those who participated in the 2015-2016 planning process identify potential priority areas for the future.

Goal #1: How do we educate the public and legislators about what the WCFA does, what its goals are?

- WCFA took the lead in organizing the spring 2013 forest administrators meeting and arranging an Assembly committee informational hearing on forestry issues. Another meeting like this is planned for the spring of 2017 with once again the WCFA as lead organizer.
- WCFA organized and/or participated in a number of "Come and See Tour" for federal and state legislators. This was a proactive step in helping legislators understand more about forestry issues and the positive effects of the forest industry in Wisconsin. They learned that responsible forestry management activities bring substantial revenue and help protect forests.
- WCFA and individual county forestry departments have met with Wisconsin Towns Association members to educate town boards and residents about the benefits of county forest revenue to towns and how it is garnered.
- Over the last few years, the WCFA substantially increased its use of media (radio, wild turkey video, Discover Wisconsin, local press releases, etc.).
- The WCFA is seen as an expert on forestry issues. Legislators are now calling the organization, for input. The WCFA now helps develop information rather than reacting to it. WCFA's information is recognized as being credible.
- The people asking for the information are starting to promote the WCFA without any encouragement. (With this comes more work because additional information is being requested).
- Jane Severt and Henry Schienebeck lead Wisconsin's Council on Forestry. WCFA presence at important tables like the Council is an effective form of promotion in and of itself.

- Jane has increased the frequency of presentations to county boards.
- The board is becoming more active.
- Counties are still continuing to buy forest land and are increasing their participation in responsible forest management activities.
- The WCFA has increased its general public education about county forests. (The organization still needs to become more knowledgeable about the potential effects of the Good Neighbor Authority legislation on national forests).
- WCFA and Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLPTA) were awarded a \$600,000 legislative grant during the 2013-2014 state budget process to conduct Wisconsin's Forest Practices Study.
- The WCFA has greatly increased its social media presence over the past few years.
- The organization has increased its interaction with school programs (e.g. LEAF).
- WCFA has strengthened ties with the Wisconsin Land and Water Association.
- Jane taught a forestry course at University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

Goal #2: How do we remain proactive about issues that affect our industry?

- The WCFA needs to become more involved in terrestrial invasive species issues. These issues have indirect effects on what the WCFA promotes (i.e. responsible, sustainable forest management practices).
- Jane is now a registered lobbyist. Continue this role.
- WCFA members are sitting on other committees that help coordinate and monitor forest management practices. (I.e. Wisconsin Silviculture Guidance Team, Wisconsin's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality Advisory Committee, Wisconsin's Woody Biomass Guidelines Advisory Committee, etc.)

- A new Silviculture Guidance Team now exists with WCFA members participating on the guidance team itself and on technical committees developed to produce chapter updates.
- The WCFA has published several position papers (continue this practice).
- Website is up-to-date, more user-friendly and informative.
- WCFA identified legal counsel that can assist if necessary with specific issues. (A resource to tap into if the need arises).
- WCFA marketing materials such as the display and brochure were updated.

Goal #3: How do we continue to demonstrate value of county forestland within county budgets, to towns, etc.?)

- Become even more interactive with the Wisconsin Towns Association, especially in the southern part of the state. More education is needed on the positive impacts of county forests on the state economy.
- A GLTPA member testified on forestry issues to a Congressional committee. WCFA staff assisted with the drafting of this testimony.
- Jane made a presentation to members of the Wisconsin Towns Association.
- June 2015 issue of the Wisconsin Counties magazine featured forest management. The WCFA was prominently mentioned. The organization also provided relevant information. This was good public relations for the WCFA because the magazine is widely distributed.
- More interaction with the southern part of the state. The WCFA is now a resource for many of these counties.
- Jane made a presentation to the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) steering committee on environment and land use.
- Board has been more interactive at WCA events.

- Successful results of forest certification. WCFA received ample media coverage. It has an even higher level of interaction with local forest administrators. Keep expanding this type of positive media coverage.
- DNR economist completed economic impact studies for each county.
- Reaching out to southern counties seeking more information on WCFA and Wisconsin County Forest Law. WCFA has made presentations to county boards and county committees in several southern counties regarding the possibility of establishing a new county forest. This has been done in conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).
- WCFA participated in developing the format used in economics training for WDNR foresters.

Environmental Analysis

Early in any strategic planning process it is recommended that stakeholders identify what has changed the way the organization approaches its work. The two questions immediately below helped frame that conversation.

- a. *What internal changes have taken place over the past few years that affect how the WCFA conducts business?*
- b. *What external changes (including for example state laws/mandates) have taken place over the past few years that affect how the WCFA conducts business?*

Internal

- Hired an assistant director.
- New board members with fresh ideas.
- New forestry administrators with fresh ideas and that have to be educated about the WCFA.
- Developed (2009) and updated (2012) strategic plan that provided direction to the organization.
- Executive director is now a registered lobbyist providing more credence to the WCFA.
- Located legal counsel to help with forestry and organizational issues if needed.
- Quarterly conference calls for forest administrators. Improved committee idea from WCFA.
- Board became more structured and active.
- The WCFA Personnel Committee has strengthened its role improving the organization's internal operations. It provides more direction to the executive director (strong relationship with). It developed personnel and executive director evaluation policies.

- The organization's Executive Committee is used more often which streamlines the decision making process.
- Maintaining funding.
- Funding: Counties may have to increase commitment to the WCFA if state support continues to wane.
- By-laws changes now allow board vacancies to be filled from other counties (e.g. if there is no interest in serving from within a specific WCFA geographic area, a board member can be chosen from a different area to serve as a member of the WCFA Board of Directors).
- The executive director is more frequently using email to communicate to board members and to send information.

External

- Climate change – effects on forest management. What people are saying and doing about this.
- Social perceptions related to what we do have improved over the past few years.
- The inventory of uncut sales is expanding. There are fewer contractors bidding on sales. The WCFA needs to take a look at what if anything it can do about this. Be an advocate for the industry.
- Lack of stability in markets.
- County sales are becoming more expensive to undertake (stumpage prices are high, etc.).
- The emergence of the Wisconsin Young Forests Partnership. (This is a new partner for the WCFA).
- The WCFA is now often asked to help develop statewide forest policy and legislation.
- DNR operations based on Division of Forestry's Strategic Direction have changed especially recently. (This in some instances was forced by budget cuts).
- It has become more difficult and costly to transport raw forest products.
- The Endangered Species Act and its effects on forest management practices.
- County budget constraints became more severe.
- Stewardship reauthorization.
- Northwoods and Waters of the St. Croix. Organizations providing misinformation to other stakeholders/organizations about forestry management. WCFA opposes this misinformation.
- WCFA/DNR partnership is much stronger now. County forest departments are a high priority for the DNR. However, the DNR is stretched even more now. This could begin to adversely affect the WCFA.
- More terrestrial invasive species issues now affect forest management.
- WCFA relationship with national forests is weaker than it was a few years ago.
- Forest certification standards lead to more work for the WCFA.
- Criteria changes for internal audits.
- The recreation demand of the public. People are always looking forward to doing something new in the forests. WCFA needs to monitor this more closely.
- EPA and Army Corps of Engineers; forest management costs have risen based on increased regulations.
- Wheeler Report now communicating more about proposed forest related legislation.

- Good Neighbor Act and federal forest lands.
- Tribal issues (i.e. night hunting of deer) have increased.
- State funding cuts to the WCFA.

Mission Review and Modification

The entire group reviewed and discussed the following two mission statements included on the WCFA website. Below those statements are the questions participants were asked to think about when reviewing the statements.

“Our Mission: Sustaining WI’s economy and our forests through responsible management of a renewable resource.”

“Our 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.”

- a. *Why two mission pronouncements?*
- b. *What is the WCFA’s primary current purpose? (Does it match what is stated above?)*
- c. *What are the WCFA’s core values?*
- d. *If the primary purpose and the core values are not reflected in the statement(s), how should it/they be changed?*
- e. *Do we need a separate subcommittee to work on developing a modified statement?*

There was consensus that the WCFA needs only one mission statement and that neither of the two current statements satisfied the conditions outlined in the questions above. Participants then identified organizational core values to help them think about what elements should be included and/or implied in a revised statement.

- Representing all 29 member counties.
- Partnership.
- Economics and business promotion.
- Promote responsible sustainable forest management.
- Balance economic, ecological, and social concerns (counties that do this are successfully managing their forests).
- Stewardship of all resources (Wisconsin is unique because it has one of the largest county forest systems in the world).
- Controlled by local decision makers.
- Advocacy.
- Public land.
- Serving as a model for practical forest practices.

Based on further discussion and the identified core values, one meeting participant suggested the following statement.

“The Wisconsin County Forests Association’s purpose is to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of forest eco systems.”

The group then decided that a subcommittee would be developed to complete a new draft of the statement to be considered by the entire body at a future date. Those who volunteered for the subcommittee were:

- ✓ Mike Luedeke
- ✓ Kevin Kleinschmidt
- ✓ Henry Schienebeck
- ✓ Gary Zimmer
- ✓ Tom Lovlien
- ✓ John Cisek

During the mission statement development meeting, the facilitator divided the subcommittee into two groups. Using information from the large group discussion, each group developed draft mission statements. Looking for common points made in each of the draft statements, the subcommittee then finalized one to present to the WCFA Board. It is recommended that the board formally review and vote to approve the statement in its current form or as an amended version.

Group #1 developed the following draft statement.

“The Wisconsin County Forests Association provides leadership ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of forest ecosystems while balancing economic, ecological, and social concerns of member counties.”

Group # 2 developed the following three draft statements.

“WCFA provides a forum for member counties to unite in their common cause to provide economic, ecological, and social stability for local citizens while setting a positive example from which state, national, and global leaders can draw knowledge for the enrichment of lives worldwide.”

“The primary purpose of WCFA is to provide leadership to all county forests in the area of sustainable forest management, while balancing economic, ecological, and social concerns.”

‘WCFA represents the united interests of and supports local decisions to manage all Wisconsin County forests. WCFA actively advocates for long-term stewardship for all Wisconsin forest owners.’

The following themes were identified by the subcommittee as being present or implied in the draft statements.

- Being a leader
- Balancing economic, ecological, and social concerns (needs and wants of public)
- WCFA: best in the world serving a local county forest system
- Support local counties so they remain globally competitive
- Responsible, sustainable forest management
- Promote and protect local decision making
- Leadership role statewide
- Serving county forests

Missing themes that were discussed in the planning sessions were “leadership” and “serving as a “national/worldwide model.”

Following discussion and the development of several additional drafts based on the identified themes, by consensus the subcommittee endorsed the following statement.

“The Wisconsin County Forests Association provides leadership uniting the interests of the world’s largest county forest program while ensuring long-term forest health and sustainability.”

As part of the third planning session, the entire body discussed and approved by consensus the statement. As previously indicated, the entire body will vote to ratify the statement at an appropriate time.

Stakeholder Analysis

The stakeholder analysis was conducted using the questions below.

- a. *Who are the organization's internal stakeholders?*
- b. *What particular resources, talents, skills, materials, etc. do these people bring to enhance the WCFA's effectiveness?*
- c. *What external stakeholders does the organization interact with on a consistent basis?*
- d. *What benefits does the WCFA offer to current and potential external stakeholders?*

Internal Stakeholders

- County Forestry Committees (provide)--
 - Provide administration for WCFA (board members)
 - Provide dues to the WCFA
 - Set county policy
 - Have a wealth of knowledge about responsible, effective forest management practices
 - Hire county forest administrators

- WCFA staff (provide)--
 - Coordination
 - Leadership
 - Foresight
 - Structure
 - Common voice
 - Continuity
 - Organization (of events)
 - Executive director coordinates operations
 - Representation

- County forestry administrators (provide)
 - Expertise
 - Education
 - Links between WCFA and county committees

- Professionalism
- The reason why WCFA exists
- Positive personalities/energy
- WCFA Board (provides)--
 - Guidance to staff (overall guidance of organization)
 - Budget/fiscal oversight
 - History/context about forest issues
 - Conduit to local county boards and legislators
 - Sets policy for the WCFA; decision makers
 - Knowledge and always support

External Stakeholders:

- DNR (provides)—
 - Funding
 - Technical assistance (specialists)
 - Forest certification
 - Fieldwork
 - Services and personnel/e.g. fire protection
 - Legal services (provide advice)
- Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (provides)
 - Work with them creates synergy
 - Ability to “vent” to one another
 - Mutual support for legislative initiatives
 - Office space
 - Training
 - Bring different perspective on forest management; work together to solve problems
- State: provides legal authority to county forest program
 - County forest law defines entire county forest operations; defines purpose of county forests

- Society of American Foresters (provide)—
 - Professional association/networking
 - National and global perspectives on forestry
 - Legislative support
 - Accreditation>certified foresters; and university programs that certify foresters

- Public/user groups (provide)—
 - Support
 - Funding
 - Deer population control
 - Requests and demands
 - Recreation
 - Loggers/forestry industry (mills)

- Snowmobile and ATV/UTV trail groups (provide)
 - Volunteers provide maintenance, upkeep of trail systems
 - Big influence on what happens locally
 - Public safety challenges
 - Grant leverage; in kind support
 - Strong advocates for forest management (but would like more support from them at times)

- Universities/tech schools (provide)
 - Educational opportunities to foresters
 - Opportunities to teach college classes

- Member institutions (provide benefits to the WCFA which indirectly helps the organization)

- UW Extension (provides)
 - Strategic plan process design and facilitation

- Federal and state legislators (provide)—

- Support-bring WCFA message to their colleagues
- Tribes (provide)—
 - Cultural and historical knowledge about the significance of forestry sites
 - User group like the public
 - Sometimes challenging relationship between WCFA and tribes
- Ruffed Grouse Society; National Wild Turkey Federation; Wisconsin Land & Water Association; Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (all provide)—
 - Funding
 - Support for common interests
 - Promotion of county forests
 - Diversify land uses

SOAR+C Analysis

SOAR+C stands for strengths (internal), opportunities (external), aspirations (vision for the organization), results (indicators of success), and challenges. This type of analysis focuses mostly on building from the positive aspects of an organization. In this regard, it is often more effective than the traditional SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis which can tend to force groups to think more about how to address only the problems an organization faces. Many of what turned out to be the group's identified strategic priorities were first mentioned during this exercise.

Strengths

- Staff/Executive Director
- 29 member counties (unified but independent at the same time)
- Expertise; professionalism
- Credibility
- Money/funding
- External partnerships
- Diversity (users, products, income sources)
- Networking (information providing)

- Promotion
- Common voice/collective strength
- Legislative connections
- Industry connections
- Recognition of others on benefits to users
- One of a kind, unique
- Largest public forest landowner in Wisconsin
- Education and training
- Proactive
- WCFA promotes local decision making
- Leadership
- “Go to” organization
- Efficient
- Experience
- Longevity of the organization (historical strength)
- Well known and respected
- Dedicated stewards
- Adaptive (able to meet challenges)
- Knowledgeable WCFA Board
- Politically engaged members
- Increasing presence
- Advocacy of organization is broader (focus not on single issue)
- Talent
- Passion and belief for what our profession is doing
- Model for profession
- Grounded and focused
- Involved
- Communication
- Informed decision making and action
- Diversity – county board members working with administration

- Networking; internal and external
- Well balanced
- Respected
- Solution based; bring solutions to the table

Opportunities

- Potential to better define water quality benefits
 - Listed waters in heavily forested versus southern agriculture landscapes
 - St. Croix watershed stewards; contribution of county forests within the watersheds
- Continue to educate about recreational benefits provided by county forests
- Help improve recreational activities in forests
- Enlist/recruit more new counties to enroll in county forest programs and to join the WCFA
- Continue and increase interaction with and presentation to WCA and WTA
- Advocate for benefits provided by local control. Identify program areas that afford leeway
- Expand/continue lobbying efforts
- Expand knowledge of technical and administrative guidelines
- Buy raffle tickets (KCs)
- Continue to provide information to CFAs and county forestry committees – re: important legislative issues
- Opportunities for public education and raising awareness of the county forest program
- Opportunity to improve media outreach including timber sale revenues and their impact on the local tax base
- Watershed management opportunities (i.e. dam improvements, etc.)
- Continued implementation and improvements with forestry BMPs for water quality
- Increased logger training opportunities – i.e. regarding county forest bidding and bond practices
- Better and improved communication between county forestry committees and Land and Water Conservation Committee
- Continued involvement and communication with forest industry to maintain and improve markets
- Increased participation in weed management areas and invasive species control at the WCFA level
- WCFA booth at the GLTPA’s Logging and Heavy Equipment Expo
- Continued involvement with Florence Sustainable Forestry Conference
- Continued education of youth and educators regarding sustainable forest management
- Continued participation by forestry college students at WCFA spring meeting

- Information regarding increased pollinator populations incentives

Aspirations

For this portion of the meeting, the group was divided into four work units. Each group used the question and scenario below to identify their aspirations for the WCFA.

What aspirations do you have for the WCFA over the next 10 years?

- *“You have been asleep for 10 years. You awaken to find that forestry related “miracles” have taken place as a result of the WCFA’s activities. What do you see happening that is new, positive and different in both forestry and the WCFA?”*

Work units had very similar conversations. Primary themes were:

- Increased membership in the WCFA; more counties/forest acres; new partners become members
- WCFA is the “go to” organization for people wanting to know more about responsible forest management and other forestry issues (natural resources and recreation)
- There is additional WCFA staff
- The WCFA is a national model
- WCFA has achieved stable and sustainable funding
- Changes in forest certification program; it is more profitable; WCFA may coordinate the program. Perhaps no need for certification; practices are recognized as ones that always work
- Institutional knowledge is carried forward even when personnel changes

Work Unit #1

- WCFA is the organization that legislators consult on the front end
- WCFA is the primary contact for outdoor experiences
- Leader in forestry management education. Professionals on staff to provide the education
- Should/could WCFA cooperate more with other counties that don’t have county forests (be an advocate for them)?
- Ability to work with the Department of Natural Resources on how mill [dollars] are allocated
- Public education [on forestry issues] has increased in schools

- Have partnerships with SAF and other consulting foresters
- The WCFA is part of the decision making process on NHI additions; species guidance
- Aspire to continue cooperation with Towns and Counties Associations
- Mill tax pays 100% of the executive and assistant director positions; both full time with benefits
- Continued strong leadership following retirement of the current executive director; person with professional forestry degree

Work Unit #2

- Retained institutional knowledge
- Maintained adequate participation in the organization. There is competition for leadership posts such as Legislative Committee and the Board of Directors
- New members are adequately “mentored” so that the organization benefits from historical perspective and is equipped for success
- WCFA will have effectively minimized/reduced divergence with technical (agency) management decisions and social, public, non-science demand
- WCFA will be recognized as the leader and technical expert on conservation, recreational use, and management of natural resources
- There are 29 county forests totaling nearly 2.4 million acres
- Management of county forests is generally regarded as sustainable (certified or not). [WCFA is instrumental in making this happen]
- Active forest management adapted to changes
- Proactively implemented (successful) principles of co-management/region aligned

Work Unit #3

- Expanded membership (county members, town members – could be associate members)
- Additional acreage in county forest system
- Forest certification on privately logged lands
- WCFA is the “go to” organization for invasive species management on forest lands in Wisconsin
- WCFA is nationally recognized for its efforts/work
- WCFA is recognized as the advocate for Wisconsin’s forest product industry
- Expanded WCFA staff (10 year hopes and needs)

Work Unit #4

- Staying current with forest management practices
- Be the “go to” organization for accurate information relating to forest management and recreation
- Other states and their organizations model their programs on the WCFA
- Increased public awareness and education of forestry practices as a result of the WCFA’s outreach and actions
- WCFA will have its own certification program, resulting in more money and recognition coming from the organization
- WCFA will be primary catalyst for solving or improving local needs (i.e. roads, etc.) through legislation
- WCFA is financially secure
- Twice the membership
- Increase forest acreage of individual counties by an average of 10%
- WCFA is restructured to invite additional partners (i.e. private woodland owners)

The following two were mentioned in the large group setting during debriefing of each work unit’s discussion.

- The WCFA has a full – time lobbyist
- WCFA is instrumental in helping to stabilize timber markets

Results

Expected results were identified within the large group setting. The following question was used as a basis for discussion.

What tangible, expected results should the organization achieve over the next three years?

- Stable funding
- Actively recruit new members
- Successful audits (forest certification) should continue; WCFA should be promoting that success
- WCFA members “compete” for leadership positions on WCFA Board and forest related legislative committees. County Board members on the WCFA Board take the lead in recruiting their replacements. Fall conference can also be used as a recruiting venue
- Meeting agendas should be even more of a recruiting tool; more socialization should take place; summer tour
- WCFA should help market the timber and timber products of its member counties. Stamp the “locally grown” or “from Wisconsin county forests” labels on the wood and wood products

- Begin organizational succession planning to ensure smooth transition into new leadership when the time comes (look for people with forestry degrees). Seek to fund positions with mill tax
- Host Wisconsin Woodland Owners Conference on county forestland to showcase what the WCFA does. Show that this type of forest management is adaptable to private forestlands
- Increased partnerships with other professional forestry organizations
- Develop/have more public service announcements
- Develop a marketing committee to discuss and implement ways to help promote and stabilize local timber markets (work with partners to do this)
- Spring meeting in Madison. Continue to have public hearing. Very effective outreach to legislators

Challenges

Those in attendance were given the following to ponder.

What internal and external challenges must the WCFA address over the next three years?

- Succession issue
- Financial issue. Can counties fund more WCFA staff with timber proceeds? This could create more county buy-in. Is it possible to receive more of the mill tax proceeds? Need to discuss balance of funding with the counties and the DNR
- Maintaining dual forest certification. Time and expense are high. People talking about going to one certification. Right now, this is a local, county – based decision
- Stabilizing the industry
- Meeting the public's demands for county forest recreation, products, use of local roads, etc.

Strategic Issue Identification

Based on discussion held throughout the planning process, group members identified the most important strategic issues the WCFA should address over the next few years. As a precursor to that exercise, the entire group was asked to name things the WCFA must do to remain viable.

- Continue to keep abreast of changes in forestry regulations made by the state legislature (MFL, etc.)
- Continue to develop stronger relationships with legislators
- Continue to show value to member counties
- Don't miss opportunities to expand membership
- Continue to educate the public. Keep sending the message that county forestry departments with WCFA as a partner are managing forests properly rather than indiscriminately clear cutting. Communicate with school forests
- Resolve any conflicts with ORV and snowmobile clubs
- Increase staffing capacity
- Find suitable replacement; county DNR public forest specialist

Next, the stakeholders were once again divided into four work units. Using all the information compiled thus far, each group was asked to identify the five most important strategic issues the WCFA should address during the three year plan implementation period. At this point, the issues were not listed in order of importance. Some of the issues included potential action items as identified by the work units.

Work Unit #1		Work Unit #2		Work Unit #3		Work Unit # 4 <i>Note: This work unit also commented that "if these thoughts are implemented in the next three years, we will have made good progress!!"</i>
Make a determination of what the organization's actual staffing and financial		Increase collaboration/cooperation with internal and external partners and build new		Develop stable funding that would maintain/expand staff		Develop a plan for funding stability

needs are		partnerships			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Complete a workload assessment defining unmet needs and analyzing outcomes from investment of resources</i> 					
Maintain or increase public outreach		Expand WCFA membership		Continue WCFA's influence at the legislative level	Develop a more collaborative relationship with the state recreation council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>County level recreation</i> • <i>Strengthen relations with external recreation groups</i> • <i>WCFA to help resolve issues</i>
Maintain active involvement in groups or initiatives aiming to reduce or eliminate issues that affect forest products and the outdoor recreation industry		Increase funding support		Continue educating the public regarding forest management (WCFA)	Establish a staff transition plan
Achieve active participation from all member counties		Broaden and strengthen relationships with state and federal legislators		Take more of a leadership role so as to be considered the "go to" organization when it comes to setting forest policy and addressing forestry issues	Broaden the WCFA membership

Actively support efforts to maximize sustainable supply of raw material		Develop and implement a communications plan		Actively recruit new members		Continue educating citizens and elected officials
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The facilitator identified primary themes that were found across all four lists. He also created a list of other major discussion topics that were not reflected in the lists.

Themes

- Relationship building (strengthening partnerships)
- Funding (creating sustainable funding streams)
- Staffing levels (succession planning and increasing staff)
- Membership (increase; continue to strengthen relationships with existing members)
- Education/communication/outreach (What the WCFA does; forest issues; forest management practices)

Not Mentioned

- Help to stabilize markets (communicate what supply will be; certification; communicate that product is from county forests)
- Non – timber issues (Note: Recreation was mentioned in one list; park management, trail management, etc.)
- “Go-to” organization (Note: Was addressed in a general way in one list)

After discussion, the group and facilitator consolidated the strategic issue ideas mentioned in the table above, under the themes, and when it made sense using the “not mentioned” items. The following strategic issue questions were developed. Questions were developed because it is easier to action plan by attempting to answer them rather than to comprehend the meaning of sometimes nebulous statements. A few potential action items mentioned by the group were listed under the questions to make sure that they would be considered during the action planning portion of the group’s final meeting. These questions were not listed in any particular order of importance. And, some of the language contained in the questions was modified throughout the remaining portion of the planning process.

A. What can the WCFA do to become an even more effective leader on forestry issues?

- Demonstrate/communicate through forestry audits
- Continue to educate the public

- B. How can/should the WCFA provide more support to its county members dealing with non-timber related forest issues? (i.e. parks and trail management)**
 - Proactively identify and deal with emerging issues before they become too difficult
- C. What must the WCFA do to ensure adequate and qualified staffing well into the future?**
 - Develop a succession plan
 - Complete a workload assessment defining unmet needs and analyzing outcomes from investment of resources
- D. What steps must be taken to secure more county members for the WCFA and to more fully communicate what the organization does for its current county members?**
- E. How should the WCFA increase collaboration with internal/external partners and build new partnerships?**
- F. What must the WCFA do to stabilize its funding?**
- G. How can the WCFA's county members remain competitive in a global timber industry?**
 - Collaborate with partners to create and implement effective strategies

Strategic Issue Prioritization

Since many organizations lack the capacity to address a large number of strategic issues at once, prioritization of those issues must occur. Prioritization breeds focus which leads to tangible, meaningful results. For an organization like the WCFA which has limited staff and funding, it is recommended that it address three to five strategic issues during a three year strategic plan implementation period. Depending on the complexity of the issues, it may be more appropriate to address only three rather than five.

Toward the end of the second planning session and following the strategic issue identification exercises, the group briefly discussed which of the issues are the most important to address in the coming years. After discussion, those in attendance completed a ranking of the issues. Nineteen people completed the ranking exercise. Criteria used were:

- (Most important); How important is it that the organization addresses this issue in the next few years?
- (Most urgent); How urgent is it that the organization addresses this issue in the next few years?

- (Most unpredictable); Must begin in the next few years to explore how the issue’s potential outcomes might affect the organization – the higher the unpredictability, the greater the likelihood the issue should be addressed).
- (Most capacity); To what extent does the organization have the capacity – or have the ability to create the capacity – to do something about the issue?

The cumulative results with rankings and averages are below.

Rank	Strategic Issue Question	Total Points Out of a possible 380 points	Average Score Out of a possible 20 points
1	<i>What must the WCFA do to ensure mission driven, exceptional staff well into the future?</i>	325	17.1
2	<i>What must the WCFA do to ensure adequate funding?²</i>	306	16.1
3	<i>What can the WCFA do to become an even more effective leader on forestry issues?</i>	273	14.4

² The wording of the first and second questions in the table was modified during the last planning session. To avoid confusion, that wording is used here even though this exercise was completed during the second session.

4	<i>How can/should the WCFA provide more support to its county members dealing with non-timber related forest issues? (i.e. parks and trail management)</i>	266	14
5	<i>How should the WCFA increase collaboration with internal/external partners and build new partnerships?</i>	265	13.9
6	<i>What steps must be taken to secure more county members for the WCFA and to more fully communicate what the organization does for its current county members?</i>	225	11.8
7	<i>How can the WCFA's county members remain competitive in a global timber industry?</i>	195 Note: One person who completed all the other lines did not complete this one. Thus, the average score in the next column is based on 18 completed assessments.	10.8

Action Planning

The table below includes goals, strategies, suggested initial tasks, and lead parties for the four goals achieving the highest ratings. The remaining three goals are listed as “parking lot” items and are included underneath this table. No action planning was done at this time related to those items.

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
<p><i>I. What must the WCFA do to ensure mission driven, exceptional staff well into the future?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Widespread recognition of what we do (increased presence and positive statements about impacts in various media outlets; more people involved with WCFA sitting on other organizations’ committees) ✓ Multiple, qualified applicants for WCFA positions (staff and leaders) ✓ Increase in the number of requests to sit on other committees, to provide information 	<p>a. WCFA Board members and current staff identify and recruit people into the organization who might be qualified and interested in becoming a staff member in the future (get them to build relationships with WCFA stakeholders; ask them to participate in informal roles to begin with)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better orient new WCFA Board members to the organization • Recruit more WCFA county members to bring in additional revenue that will help attract exceptional individuals to WCFA staff (start with Sauk, Adams, and Waushara because they have expressed interest) • Re-evaluate potential uses for available reserves (possibly use to help create additional staff position or recruit staff replacements when the time comes)³ • Re-evaluate amount of county member dues (a committee currently exists to do that) 	<p>WCFA staff, board members, and county forest administrators to take lead (efforts should begin with board members)</p> <p>Committee to evaluate dues level</p> <p>Staff</p> <p>Staff and WCFA Board members</p>

³ Note: As of April 2016, there was about \$120,000 in the reserve fund.

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
	and opinions to media, to make presentations on forestry issues (How many times does our opinion matter?)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the value of the WCFA even more with County Boards (this will have to be done even more in the event an increase in membership dues is being contemplated or is enacted) 	County forest administrators, WCFA Board members, and staff
		b. Provide adequate staffing levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to employ an assistant director • Add a clerical staff person, provided there is enough funding (meant to free up time for director and assistant director) • Explore partnerships/collaborations with other nonprofits to share clerical functions; could be county forestry offices, etc.) 	<p>Staff to take the lead</p> <p>All stakeholders should be involved in helping to raise more dollars</p> <p>County forest administrators and WCFA Board members should forward possibilities to the staff</p>
		c. Define qualifications of current and potential future staff positions from an experience and educational perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and if necessary make changes to existing job descriptions for staff (align job descriptions to changing needs) • Review and if necessary modify leadership descriptions for board members 	WCFA Personnel Committee and staff take the lead on all tasks

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
		d. Make the organization even more committee driven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and if necessary make changes to the organization’s existing committee structure. Modify that structure based on the organization’s needs. Review existing, change, and develop when needed committee responsibilities descriptions 	
II. What must the WCFA do to ensure adequate funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Annual sustainable budget by the end of the three year plan implementation period is increased from \$150,000 to \$200,000 ✓ Cultivated 2-3 additional ongoing revenue sources to help cover expenses ✓ Implement at least one way to share overhead costs with another office (perhaps through 	a. Acquire additional county members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue cultivating relationships with good prospects that have expressed some interest such as Sauk, Adams, and Waushara counties Arrange to publish the WCFA annual report in the Wisconsin Counties Magazine. Make certain that information about how much revenue counties make on timber sales with WCFA assistance is part of the story. Current county members can write about how they became members of the WCFA and what benefits they enjoy as members 	<p>WCFA Board members help cultivate relationships with fellow county board members in these counties, during Forestry Committee meetings, at WCA events, etc.</p> <p>Note: The tone of these conversations should be “Why is joining the WCFA important to your county?”</p> <p>WCFA staff (interaction with WCA) and forestry administrators to contribute articles</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
	relocating)			
		<p>b. Continue to work with the state to locate other potential state funding sources (e.g. mill tax pays 100% of the executive and assistant director positions. Work with the Department of Natural Resources on how mill [dollars] are allocated).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore mill dollars options to support more of staff salaries and benefits • Continue to educate legislators about the WCFA • Formally lobby for state to reinstate the \$50,000 that was cut from the WCFA in the last state biennial budget • Hold next WCFA spring meeting in Madison (near legislature; already scheduled for the spring of 2017) 	<p>Staff, Board members, county forest administrators</p> <p>Executive Director (registered lobbyist)</p> <p>Staff to organize</p>
		<p>c. Establish more collaborations and partnerships (primary aim is to cultivate sponsorships for WCFA led events, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact existing partners and collaborators to gauge their willingness to make a financial contribution • Ask existing collaborators and partners what organizations they work with that might be willing to also collaborate with WCFA • Contact those new prospects 	<p>Staff to take the lead on all tasks</p> <p>WCFA Board members and county forest administrators can do the asking when appropriate</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for other prospects online (contact them) 	
		<p>d. WCFA Board members and current staff identify and recruit people into the organization who might be qualified and interested in becoming a staff member in the future (get them to build relationships with WCFA stakeholders; ask them to participate in informal roles to begin with)</p> <p>Note: This strategy and accompanying tasks can also help the organization achieve Goal I.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit more WCFA county members to bring in additional revenue that will help attract exceptional individuals to WCFA staff (start with Sauk, Adams, and Waushara because they have expressed interest) • Re-evaluate potential uses for available reserves (possibly use to help create additional staff position or recruit staff replacements when the time comes) • Re-evaluate amount of county member dues (a committee currently exists to do that) • Re-evaluate amount of county member dues (a committee currently exists to do that) 	<p>WCFA staff, board members, and county forest administrators (efforts should begin with board members)</p> <p>WCFA Board and staff</p> <p>WCFA Personnel Committee and staff</p> <p>Committee to evaluate dues level</p>
		<p>e. Explore whether the WCFA should apply for a different IRS tax designation (one that</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact CPA or attorney for details and opinion • Explore obtaining sponsorships and 	<p>Staff to take lead</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
		could allow for donations and financial sponsorships)	<p>donations without 501c3 status (Is this possible?; What are the regulations?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make change if possible to IRS status that would allow more of this type of revenue into the organization 	
<p><i>III. What can the WCFA do to become an even more effective leader on forestry issues?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Track how many meetings are attended by WCFA stakeholders ✓ Annual summer tour includes fieldwork (already being done but must continue; what did people learn and how will they use what they learned?) ✓ One county not on WCFA member list will attend the annual summer tour each of the three years of plan implementation (WCFA Board 	<p>a. County forest administrators continue their current roles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop talking points about WCFA for county forest administrators to use with forestry committees and other county board members (work with WCFA Board members to develop the points) • Look into establishing “answer groups” to discuss local forestry issues. Tie in local forestry committees; create summaries of these conversations and distribute them to WCFA stakeholders – forestry administrators can be instrumental in these groups 	<p>Staff with WCFA Board members assisting</p> <p>County forest administrators</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
	<p>members will mentor them)</p> <p>✓ A total of 100 more county board members will attend the summer tour over the entire three years than attended in 2015</p>			
		<p>b. Find ways to involve WCFA member counties that don't normally participate in WCFA meetings/events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forestry administrators create more dialogue with county representatives • Develop a set of talking points that should be used in such conversations (e.g. your county is paying dues and need to participate for this reason; the benefit of the WCFA network is that information is passed throughout the entire 29 county membership) • WCFA staff meet more frequently with counties now wanting to stay involved 	<p>County forest administrators (in counties that are not involved)</p> <p>Staff (assistant director to take lead)</p> <p>Staff (assistant director to take lead)</p>
		<p>c. All WCFA leaders (staff, WCFA Board members, county forest administrators)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication methods wherever possible between WCFA staff, WCFA Board member, and county forest 	<p>See strategy; a collaboration of internal stakeholders for all tasks</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
		<p>monitor and communicate to staff legislation that affects forest management</p>	<p>administrators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen relationship with WCA to more effectively monitor legislative changes in forest management, etc. • Maintain registered lobbyist position WCFA executive director; helps to enhance funding • Continue to invite legislators to WCFA events 	
<p><i>IV. How can/should the WCFA provide more support to its county members dealing with non-timber related forest issues? (i.e. parks and trail</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Number of Facebook and website hits; establish baseline and then steadily increasing number of hits over the plan implementation period ✓ Improved relationships with ORV, snowmobile councils, etc. (exhibited through survey results) 	<p>a. Educate about and promote conservation in county forests (big picture opportunities that will likely grow over the years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get involved in habitat conservation plans for endangered species • Recruit WCFA stakeholders to sit on other committees that help develop conservation plans • Act to connect wildlife biologists and others that study forest ecosystems to each other, forest administrators, WCFA Board members 	<p>Staff, WCFA Board members for all tasks</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
<p><i>management, roads management, invasive species management)</i></p> <p>Note: Besides the strategies listed with their tasks, other strategies were mentioned with no tasks or lead parties being assigned. They were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>WCFA does more to engage regional planning commissions in the effort to incorporate more information about forestry issues in outdoor recreation and comprehensive plans</i> ➤ <i>Continue to work with other organizations to help ensure that county forest amenities don't become too restrictive (an example would be the WCFA's recent work on helping to improved storm water permitting processes-template developed for use</i> 	<p>provided by ORV, club/council members, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Item above helps lead to more grants being awarded to individual WCFA member counties for trail development and management of county forests ✓ Testimonials of outcomes (How did forest management practices, for example, help protect species like the wood turtle?) 			

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
➤ <i>Provide leadership on legislative and legal issues (such as ADA compliance in county forests)</i>				
		<p>b. Monitor more closely county forest withdrawals</p> <p>Note: Normally, the WCFA does not get involved in one county issues. It was implied during discussion that a one county issue may be important enough to get involved in because it could have implications for other member counties in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a system for efficient monitoring including gathering information from other WCFA stakeholders • Assign interns and/or staff members to maintain the information 	<p>Staff (possible area for intern to contribute)</p>
		<p>c. Work with partners to promote forest health issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCFA members become active in forest health committees of other organizations (e.g. invasive species) • Educate various audiences about these issues through WCFA led events • WCFA helps convene more of a regional discussion about invasive species (get together to compare what member counties are doing to control invasive 	<p>County forest administrators and WCFA Board members to take lead on most of the tasks</p> <p>Staff takes lead in educating public and attempting to combine resources with other organizations to create clerical efficiencies</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
			<p>species especially in county forests)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for ways to combine more resources between the GLPTA and WCFA, etc. (share clerical type responsibilities and costs, etc.) 	<p>Executive directors of both organizations to take the lead</p>
		<p>d. Assist in the implementation of county forest trail passes (more revenue)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach and work with trail clubs, ORVs, to develop pass design, fee, etc. • Negotiate revenue distribution with trail clubs 	<p>County forest administrators to take lead; ask for WCFA assistance where appropriate</p>
		<p>e. Continue to promote non-timber, recreational uses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place more information about county forest issues on the WCFA Facebook page • Help to develop SCORP plan (statewide outdoor recreation plan) and to incorporate some of its forest related provisions in county outdoor recreation plans • WCFA website includes links to county websites (e.g. links that list trail conditions, invasive species issues, forest conditions, 	<p>Primarily staff for all tasks</p>

Goal	Goal Indicators	Strategies	Suggested Initial Tasks	Lead Parties
			etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore Department of Tourism grants that may help promote county forests • Continue interaction with Governor’s Conference on Tourism to better connect public land with destination marketing organizations 	

Parking Lot Goals

It is suggested that these goals be reviewed during an evaluation meeting about half way through plan implementation.

- How should the WCFA increase collaboration with internal/external partners and build new partnerships?*
- What steps must be taken to secure more county members for the WCFA and to more fully communicate what the organization does for its current county members?*
- How can the WCFA’s county members remain competitive in a global timber industry?*

Conclusion

The Wisconsin County Forests Association had a high level of success implementing its first ever strategic plan that was in effect from 2009 through 2012. The organization has used the last almost four years to build on the successes that resulted from that initial strategic plan implementation period. This new plan takes that a step further.

As is the case with all strategic plans, this plan is meant to be a flexible framework upon which the WCFA can become an even more relevant player in helping to set responsible forest management and conservation policy that applies to all forestland throughout

the state. Implementation of the first plan helped set the WCFA on this trajectory. Now, it is a recognized leader throughout the state and nation in the forest policy arena. This new plan, if its implementation is taken seriously, will help solidify the organization's standing in the forest management industry.