WI LAND+WATER

HOST A LEGISLATOR

A HOW-TO GUIDE

Learn how to successfully host an elected official in your county

Getting on the Ground

Legislative tours are one of the most effective tools in our toolbox to educate and show legislators the work our county conservation departments are doing in our respective communities throughout the state.

As you are likely aware, Wisconsin's legislators serve 2-year terms in the Assembly, and 4-year terms in the Senate, meaning turnover can occur frequently. As a result, the “institutional memory” of our Legislature can be limited.

Thus it is critical for WI Land+Water, with the participation of our members, to continually engage in advocacy and legislator education efforts throughout the year.

Initial introductory meetings can take place in coffee shops, restaurants, the legislator’s office, etc. As the year goes on, set up different types of site visits for the legislator and his/her staff to visit and discuss priority issues and learn about conservation in your county.

This guide will provide step-by-step instructions for hosting a successful event. WI Land+Water is also available to help with your event at all stages, from planning to follow-up.

Together, we can advance locally led conservation.

Matt Krueger,
Executive Director

Planning the Event

When planning a tour, be creative. Brainstorm ideas but remain flexible and work with your legislator and his/her staff to create an event that fits everyone's needs. Keep in mind that your legislator may not have more than an hour or two for the event.

Step 1: Define Your Goals

- Identify the **ONE OR TWO MAIN POINTS** you want your legislators to take away from the visit. What is the main message you want to highlight, and why is it important to your community and their constituents.
- Use the **Key Messages Worksheet** to help outline your main messages and support points.

Step 2: Plan Your Agenda

- Create an **internal agenda** to coordinate the visit effectively.
- Include **clear timestamps** for each part of the visit. Elected officials are often on a tight schedule, so you want to be respectful of their time.
- List the **names of individuals responsible** for specific roles or presentations.
- Review our **Sample Agenda** for ideas on how to plan your event.

Step 3: Determine Your "Ask"

- Determine **ahead of time** what you want from you legislators. Is it funding? Support for a specific project or policy? Another form of assistance?
- Assign responsibility for the "ask." Who will **clearly and confidently communicate** your request? Ensure that this happens before the visit concludes.
- **Take note of the legislator's response** to the ask. This feedback is essential for follow-up.

Choosing A Site

Identify a site that would be appropriate to host, this could start at your local LWCD office, or perhaps a local farm, nature center, or other location of a project. Field tours are preferred, especially if you can demonstrate a recent project at completion. Don't limit legislative invites to solely legislative tours, send invites Keep in mind that a "good" project with excellent accessibility may be more effective to highlight than the "best" project that is difficult to access.

In choosing a site, consider what priority issues you want to highlight. For example:

- **Water resource protection**. Highlight how the LWCD has worked with the landowner to protect the community's drinking water for residents and businesses. A visit to a farm, especially one involved in a producer-led group, can be a great location to discuss conservation and water quality.

- **Farmland preservation**. Without county staff, important programs like Farmland Preservation simply would not function. You can show the legislature the benefits of conservation practices, and discuss the relationship with the LWCD and farmer.

The visit could involve a simple walk or something more substantial, depending on the legislator's interests and the opportunities available. For example:

- A tour of a farming operation
- Participation in an event or activity with your LWCD
- Rainfall simulator demonstration
- Grazing demonstration
- Conservation project site visit

When creating your event, remember to choose a site that provides the opportunity to tell a good story, is easily accessible, and will provide a good visual backdrop for the event.
It is best that the site is in the legislator's district.

Have a plan for inclement weather, before it arrives. Establish a rain date, or determine if you will go rain-or-shine. An on-site location out of the weather is also nice to have, if necessary.

IDENTIFY YOUR KEY MESSAGES

Think about what you want the legislators to take away from this visit. **Write down one or two main points that best summarize the purpose of the meeting.** These should be clear, specific, and easy to understand. You could highlight a pressing community issue, the success of a project, or the need for legislative support to accomplish a goal.

MESSAGE 1:

MESSAGE 2:

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE OR EXAMPLES

Gather evidence to support your messages, such as specific data or statistics,an impactful success story, or highlighting its benefits with their constituents. **For each main point, choose at least two pieces of evidence that make a strong case.** Be ready to explain how the evidence connects directly to your main points.

LEAVE A LASTING IMPRESSION

Finally, summarize your "ask" into a polished, concise statement that incorporates your main points and key evidence. This summary should be easy to share and persuasive enough to leave a lasting impression.

Inviting Your Legislator

If you already have a relationship with your legislator, contact him/her directly to discuss the event and what he/she would like to see in the district. Be sure to have some suggestions in mind.

If you do not yet have a working relationship with your legislator, call their district office and ask who handles scheduling in the district. You will likely work with the legislator's staff at first, and may or may not end up talking with the legislator directly during the planning process.

You may be asked to put your request in writing. In the request, include highlights of the planned event but **emphasize your willingness to adapt** the event content, duration and timing to the legislator's needs.

Include pictures and maps; they are great motivational tools. You may still need to follow up with a phone. **Be timely with all replies.**

If you are planning the event with your LWCD or other groups, **it is helpful to identify one point of contact** for the legislator's staff.

When choosing possible dates for the event, make sure to see when the legislature will be in session.

TIP: *Be sure to welcome and cultivate relationships with legislative staff! They are important allies. Always be polite and prepared to leave any contact information requested.*

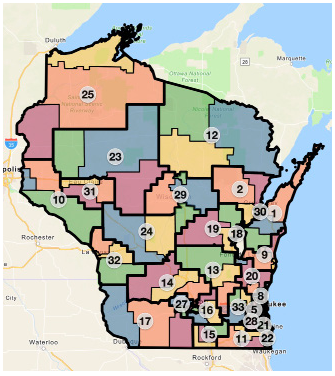
TIP: *WI Land+Water, your LWCD, or your county lobbyist can all assist with the visit.*

Sample Email Template:

The _____ LWCD/LCC invites you to attend an information session (or tour) on (date) at (time). The event will take place at (location). Approximately (number) elected officials and interested organizations will be joining the _____ LWCD/LCC to discuss county's (activities, accomplishments, and goals.) We anticipate ending the meeting at (time). Please reach out to RSVP and dicuss any on joining us for this important.

We would love the opportunity to discuss the event agenda and details with you to ensure it aligns with your schedule. Please feel free to reach out to us by (date) at (phone number) to coordinate.

Thank you for considering this opportunity,
(Your Name, Title, Contact Info)



TIP: *Find your legislator at maps.legis.wisconsin.gov*

Who Else to Invite?

You want your legislator to see the breadth of support for conservation but you don't want so many voices that that your ask becomes muddled.

Here are some participants to consider:

Farmers and landowners in the district. Concentrate on farmers with compelling stories who can clearly articulate how they work with county conservation staff.

Members of your board or staff who have a personal relationship with the legislator. Be sure to mention them in your initial scheduling request!

Other local elected officials. This is a great time to include town and county leadership or other local civic leaders.

Local Media. They're always looking for interesting stories to cover This is an excellent opportunity for both the elected officials present as well as your county. Consider print, radio, television, or other local publications like blogs or magazines. Draft a media advisory to send to press contacts twice: one week before the event, and then again two days before the event. **If any media accepts the invitation, you will want to inform the legislator's staff.**

Neighboring Land and Water Conservation Departments. State Legislative districts don't adhere to county lines, so if legislators' districts are in other counties, be sure to work with those other LWCDs.

TIP: *WI Land+Water can help with your media advisories or possibly attend the event to take photos. Reach out to our Communication Director, Kristin Teston.*

Day of the Event

Think through the event from the guests' point of view from beginning to end. Do they have clear directions, know what time to be there, and understand what kind of physical demands and clothing are required? (Remember that legislators are often coming from and going to other events/meetings so they won't always be dressed for the outdoors.) Is parking clearly marked? Are there handouts you want the legislator and their staff to have? How about water, snacks, bug repellant, sunscreen, etc.? Always know where the closest restroom facilities can be found.

Here are some tips to consider to make the day successful:

- **Develop a clear itinerary and stick to it!** You will work with the legislator to determine the amount of time they can spend on site. Make sure to create an agenda with time and accessibility constraints in mind.

- **Handouts, Maps, Photos**. Maps of the property and surrounding area can be a helpful way to start a tour. Keep all handouts simple. Legislators and their staff may not be as accustomed to looking at maps or other as you are and it can take time to acclimate. Be prepared to answer questions. Suggested handouts can be found in the WI Land+Water Advocacy Toolkit, wisconsinlandwater.org/advocacy-toolkit.

- **Capture the Event**. Designate someone to take lots of pictures and take notes on the legislator's remarks and items that will require follow-up. These events can make great material for your newsletter or website. You can share the photos with your legislator when you send a follow-up thank you.

Make sure you are prepared for anything with some of these pack list items.

- ◯ Water, granola bars, or other snacks so folks have something to eat/drink while outside. This is important especially on hot summer days.
- ◯ LWCD pamphlets, literature, or reports. Copies of Annual Reports are always good resources for officials.
- ◯ Printed itineraries and paper maps, if you're moving locations.
- ◯ Clipboard, pens/writing utensils, notepads. You will want to take notes!

SAMPLE ITINERARY

On Site Project Tour

8:30am - Light Refreshments (Coffee, donuts, etc.) and networking. Start right at the first stop on the tour, and plan for the weather, including pop-up tents to provide shade.

9:00am - Welcome & Introduction

- Do a quick round of introductions, include your name and connection to conservation.
- Provide brief overview of the work your LWCD does. Be sure to share any relevant handouts.
- Talk about the need for funding conservation staff, the need for staff retention, and other recommended talking points from your LWCD or WI Land+Water
- Thank everyone for showing up.

9:15am - Provide confirmed officials an opportunity to address the crowd. If you have many officials, try to be cognizant of time. Give more time to the higher level officials, less to state, and do not give local officials time unless it's a mayor or county executive wherever the event is taking place. If there is a local official, encourage them to describe the benefit of the local project you're demonstrating.

9:45am - Begin tour of your first site. Appropriate enough time to where it's useful, but not so long to where officials feel like their time is wasted. Use your best discretion. Be sure to allow time for the legislator to ask any questions. Try to include them in the conversation as much as possible. NO SHOP TALK!

10:45am - Arrive at second site. If going to a second location, the second location should be where you host your lunch if you plan to eat during the visit. Try to keep sites limited so there isn't too much traveling between spots.

11:30am - Lunch. Be sure to include vegetarian, vegan, or other dietary needs.

12:15pm - Discussion - Include staff members so they can talk about their programs/projects. Allow for a Q&A, so that officials can ask questions and learn more about specific topics. This is a great time to make or reiterate your ask.

1:00pm - Conclude event. Be sure to thank everyone!

EVENT ROLES:

- ◯ Point of Contact for Leg Office: _____
- ◯ Staff Photographer: _____
- ◯ Note Taker: _____
- ◯ Who will make "the ask": _____

After the Event

Following up after the event is a crucial step to maintain momentum. It provides an opportunity to thank attendees, reinforce key messages, and address any questions. It also you to document and track the outcomes of the event, such as commitments made or next steps identified. By staying engaged with participants, especially legislators and decision-makers, you can build stronger relationships and keep your priorities on their radar. Effective follow-up ensures that the event has a lasting impact and sets the stage for continued collaboration.

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SEND THANK YOU EMAILS

- ○ *Send thank-you emails to your legislator and his/her staff members for making time for the event and any help they provided in the planning process. Make sure everyone you've worked with receives a thank you. Send them pictures, too.*

FOLLOW UP WITH LEG STAFF

- ○ *Begin to pursue any needed follow up, such as requests for further information. If they requested specific information that you do not have reach, please reach out Matt Krueger so we can help answer any questions.*

SHARE WITH WI LAND+WATER

- ○ *Connect with Executive Director Matt Krueger so we can know what happened. You can provide valuable information that could help us at the Capitol. This will help us track our engagement with elected officials.*

DRAFT A PRESS RELEASE

- ○ *Draft a press release to share with local media, especially if they were unable to attend. Kristin Teston, Communications Director, can help with drafting or distribution. Plus, we can share it with statewide outlets and in our newsletter.*

UPDATE YOUR COUNTY

- ○ *Be sure to include details about the event in your next committee agenda, annual report, or newsletter. Highlight the purpose of the visit, key discussions, and any outcomes. This helps build trust and transparency with your community.*

SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- ○ *Post on social media, include any photos from the day, be sure to tag the accounts of any officials present, this will boost your reach. If your county does not have social media, consider asking your county's main account to share.*