The Merger of WALCE & WLWCA...Six Years On

COUNTY CONSERVATIONISTS MEETING
JULY 20, 2018

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Outline

1. History/background
2. Merger goals
3. Evaluation purpose
4. Evaluation process
5. Survey results
6. Going forward
1. History/background

- Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association (WLWCA)
  - Formed in 1953, shortly after all counties created Conservation Districts (per national model)
  - Purpose: provide local oversight/direction of District (NRCS) programs

- Wisconsin Association of Land Conservation Employees (WALCE)
  - Formed in 1980 shortly after 40 counties employed County Conservationists (state grants)
  - Purposes: information exchange, professional improvement, allow CC input in programs

- WALCE/WLWCA merger
  - Discussed in 2001 (WALCE), 2004 (WLWCA - Western Area), and completed in 2012 (joint committee)

- Why merge?
2. Merger goals

1) Make better use of limited human resources available to devote to state associations due to downsizing of LCCs and LCDs.

2) Develop one stronger association from two weaker ones

3) Improve cross-training between staff and elected officials (tours, workshops, committees, conferences, etc.)

4) Improve policy influence abilities of the association
3. Evaluation purpose

1. Reflect on accomplishments and challenges since the merger
2. Evaluate where we can improve as an organization
3. Prepare for a transition to a new Executive Director
4. Update the WI Land + Water Strategic Plan
4. Evaluation process

- On-line surveys
  - Internal (LCCs and LCD staff)
  - External (partner agencies and organizations)

- One-on-one or group/area meetings
Current status of evaluation

- Worked with UW Extension to develop a survey that was distributed via email to membership in late January 2018.
- Some county cons printed copies that they distributed to their committee members
- Translates to...a work in progress.
  - Looking to learn from in-progress results
5. Survey results

- Highlighting some results, have discussion on selected topics where there wasn’t agreement; results categorized by merger goals.

- Major caveats:
  - Results incomplete – process still ongoing
  - Results skewed toward staff (92% of responses submitted)
  - Low participation – 13% response rate, of those, only 8% LCCs
  - 22% of respondents weren’t involved with either WLWCA or WALCE at time of merger
  - Some thoughtful written responses, which won’t feature much here
  - ‘Fast and loose’ analysis
Survey results - demographics

Experience with WLWCA/WALCE

- 0-10 years – 30%
- 11-20 years, 24%
- 21-30 years, 32%
- Over 30 years, 13%
Merger goal 1: make better use of limited human resources

- Improve efficiencies/avoid duplication in providing training, and in legislative work.
- Avoid staff burnout/LCC push-back involved in LCDs working with both associations or attending events from both.
- Create a well-defined and empowered committee structure to better focus limited resources.
Merger goal 1: Survey results

- WLW has become more efficient w/limited resources: 70% agree or strongly agree
- WLW has avoided duplication in legislative work: 73% agree or strongly agree
- Committees are empowered to do their work: 77% agree or strongly agree
- Committees have well-defined missions and guiding principles: 71% agree or strongly agree
- Committees are adequately meeting expectations: 73% agree or strongly agree
Merger goal 2: develop one stronger association from two weaker ones

- Expand expertise
- Maintain multifaceted functions of the two association (legislative advocacy, training, administrative information sharing, and environmental education).
- Improve value of services provided.
- Build a sustainable financial model as one organization.
- Increase association staff support for association functions versus “volunteers” from counties.
- Encourage more participation by LCCs and LCDs.
Merger goal 2: Survey results

- WLW provides good value: 93% agree or strongly agree
- Sups more engaged: 34% agree or strongly agree, 47% neutral or don’t know, 18% disagree or strongly disagree
- Staff more engaged: 57% agree or strongly agree, 35% neutral or don’t know, 7% disagree or strongly disagree
- Supervisors and staff work better as team: 38% agree or strongly agree, 52% neutral or don’t know, 10% disagree or strongly disagree
Merger goal 2: Survey results (cont’d)

- WLW staff are meeting my expectations: 88% agree or strongly agree, 11% neutral or don’t know
- Merged Board of Directors is meeting my expectations: 64% agree or strongly agree, 35% neutral or don’t know
- Merger has met my expectations: 64% agree or strongly agree, 31% neutral or don’t know
- WLW works better than WALCE or WLWCA did independently: 62% agree or strongly agree, 34% neutral or don’t know, 4% disagree or strongly disagree
Merger goal 3: Improve cross-training between staff and elected officials

- Tours
- Workshops
- Committees
- Conferences
Merger goal 3: Survey results (cont’d)

- WLW has improved training opportunities: 81% agree or strongly agree, 18% neutral or don’t know
- My Area Association is working better: 31% agree or strongly agree, 61% neutral or don’t know, 8% disagree or strongly disagree
Merger goal 4: Improve policy influence abilities of the association

- Leverage WLWCA political knowledge and abilities with WALCE administrative/technical knowledge and abilities.
- Streamline policy decision-making process with one association.
- Avoid “divide and conquer” (WALCE/WLWCA) practiced by outside interest groups.
- Improve our influence with WCA and the LWCB.
Merger goal 4: Survey results

- WLW adequately advocates for members on budget, policy, and legislation: 81% agree or strongly agree
- Policy influence improved at state level: 69% agree or strongly agree, 30% neutral or don’t know
- County input to development state policy improved: 60% agree or strongly agree, 38% neutral or don’t know
- County concerns are better addressed at state level: 57% agree or strongly agree, 39% neutral or don’t know
- County better able to implement conservation: 36% agree or strongly agree, 59% neutral or don’t know
Looking to the future of WI Land+Water, what is needed most to help your county improve land and water resources?

1) Advocating for county staffing & legislation/policy advocacy – 50%
2) Member training/education – 20%
3) Funding for programs/projects/practices – 7%
4) Supervisor member engagement – 5%
5) Partnership/cooperation with outside groups or agencies – 4%
6) Addressing resource concerns of specific regions (e.g. North, urban areas) – 4%
6. Going forward

- Incorporate survey questions into WLW strategic planning process this fall
- Redouble efforts to get LCC representation
- Make use of interviews and surveys of key stakeholders and partner groups