Advocates for locally led conservation

2014 - 2016
Strategic Plan
Mission

The Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association (WI Land+Water) shall protect, conserve, and enhance Wisconsin’s natural resources by serving and representing County Land Conservation Committees (LCC) and Departments (LCD) who operate under the authorities granted in Chapter 92 Wisconsin Statutes.

The long-term viability of Wisconsin’s economy and quality of life relies upon the conservation of its soil, water, woodlands and other natural resources. At its core, the mission assumes that locally led conservation is effective, accountable, necessary, and deserves support. The authorities stated in Chapter 92 do not guarantee state funding but they do provide a conservation charge that should be embraced as it provides legitimacy for local land conservation. Funding and related support of land conservation should be seen as a wise investment in the state’s natural resource infrastructure.

Background

For 62 years, WI Land+Water (and its earlier incarnations) provided local leadership and resources to landowners to improve the management of Wisconsin’s land and water resources. WI Land+Water became a new organization in March 2012, when the Land Conservation Committee members’ association, known also as the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association, merged with the Land Conservation Department employees’ association known as the Wisconsin Association of Land Conservation Employees (WALCE). The merged association combines the local political support and leadership of LCC’s with the local technical and administrative support of LCD’s creating an unmatched resource to aid landowners and others to implement conservation on their lands.

The State of Wisconsin and its counties are diverse in many ways. Most are rural, and some are highly urbanized. Land use varies from intensely agricultural, to forested, to metropolitan landscapes. All have

WI Land+Water achieves its mission by:

• Providing professional technical expertise to solve local natural resource concerns
• Providing political leadership and accountability to advance local conservation issues
• Providing outstanding public service directly to landowners, users, and citizens as conservation “boots on the ground”
conservation needs, often associated with soil conservation, water quality, and woodland management issues, and recently expanding to include the control of invasive species and changes to the landscape which require remediation such as industrial sand mining. Changes to land use and land management are a constant with potential impacts occurring very locally in most cases but extending to our Great Lakes, the Mississippi river and the Gulf of Mexico.

The ability to respond to local issues in an effective and politically acceptable and accountable way argues for place-based professionals who have the appropriate training and expertise to assist landowners and users in making environmentally responsible decisions. Land Conservation staff are hired by and accountable directly to Land Conservation Committees to deliver those conservation services. This is an important point of access for landowners and users, should they have an issue with the service they receive. They can resolve problems much more easily through their local officials than through higher units of government.

**Monitoring and Revising the Plan**
The WI Land+Water Board of Directors is charged with developing and maintaining the Strategic Plan for the association. By February 1st of each year, a review of the previous year’s implementation plan should be completed by the Legislative/Administrative Committee along with suggested revisions for the current year and any other elements of the Strategic Plan. These suggestions will be forwarded to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will provide a revised Strategic Plan along with a progress report to the Board of Directors at their March meeting.

**Dissemination**
The Strategic Plan will be distributed electronically to WI Land+Water membership and partners and will be printed for other networking and fundraising opportunities.

**Governance**
The Board of Directors approves the Strategic Plan for WI Land+Water and revises it annually. The Executive Committee directs the activities and priorities of the Executive Director to carry out the Strategic Plan for the association.
1) Achieve financial sustainability for WI Land+Water and its members
(Executive & Legis/Admin Committee)

- By end of 2014, develop fiscal policies to govern budget management activities
- Researching and sharing grant funding sources with goal of obtaining 1 million dollars for conservation programming
- Cultivate relationships with funders and partner organizations with matching grant opportunities
- Solicit associate members and sponsorships
- Work with partners and legislators to identify long term stable funding source (e.g. MN Legacy Fund)
- Strengthen internal lobbying capacity to minimize consultant fees

2) Improve statewide recognition of Wisconsin land and water conservation
(Outreach Committee, WI Land+Water Staff)

- Find and work with at least six potential legislative champions
- Foster statewide cohesiveness between individual county programs
- Increase landowner and public understanding of WI Land+Water and its member organizations
- Increase recognition of the role and function of WI Land+Water and its members from agricultural coalition members (e.g. Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, and Cooperative Services) as well as Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants.
- Incorporate media outreach into awareness building actions
- Evaluate WI Land+Water Brand annually

3) Advocate for local conservation leadership
(Legis/Admin & Outreach Committee)

- Keep abreast of legislative processes and regulatory rule changes to provide commentary on locally led efforts and emerging issues

Photo Credit: Robert Queen
Goals and Objectives

• Support Land and Water Conservation Board efforts to expand long-term funding
• Promote locally led conservation projects through various media outlets
• Recognize importance and diversity of all statewide resources
• Encourage land conservation partners to advocate with us for conservation

4) Maintain high level of public service
(State Interagency Committee (SITCOM))

• Provide leadership for SITCOM
• Explore funding sources to support expanded training opportunities
• Evaluate and improve quality of annual conference content
• Promote and expand educational opportunities for both supervisors and staff

5) Educate the public to protect Wisconsin natural resources today and for future generations (Youth Education Committee)

• Kick off a new Youth Education Committee
• Provide youth education opportunities

6) Develop a non-agricultural conservation strategy

• Explore funding strategies beyond Joint Allocation
• Promote our work to other private/non-profit conservation organizations
• Expand relationships with DNR to increase implementation of non-agriculture components of Land and Water Resource Management plans

7) Support the new efforts of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River committees

• Provide support to new committees as initiatives are developed

Additional Actions Items

• Host Conservation Observance Day event
• Conduct annual survey for emerging issues (suggestion box at annual conference)
• Assess workload of WI Land+Water programming against available staff time
• Encourage member involvement on committees and other activities
• Provide forum for voicing member perspectives
**Short-term Goals and Objectives**

- Develop workload estimates for activities needed to achieve goals and objectives
- Prioritize goals and objectives
- Develop a work plan that utilizes staff and other resources to reach priority goals and objectives
- Maintain communication with membership via the Board of Directors (BOD) and Committee meetings
- Conduct a meaningful and educational annual conference
- Conduct constructive Spring and Fall County Conservationist’s meetings to disseminate and refine strategic plans
- Conduct well attended Area Meetings to advance Strategic Plan elements
- Lobby for $9.3 million in base funding for county land and water conservation staffing
- Lobby for meaningful adaptive management legislation which could become a significant source of funds to counties
- Lobby DATCP for needed changes to ATCP 51 at direction of BOD
- Establish legislative contacts that will champion adequate budgets and important initiatives
- Develop or improve partnerships with state, federal, and other local agencies
- Provide membership with information and training on Adaptive Management/Trading options to implement water quality improvement projects
- Maintain on-going presence on DNR’s Nutrient Reduction Framework development teams
- Through the SITCOM, continue to develop a sustainable system for delivering high quality training for local conservation staff and supervisors
- Fulfill DATCP grant requirements to develop Nutrient Management training
- Develop a “brand” for WI Land+Water
- Develop local “success stories” that show the range of resource management issues addressed by counties.
- Publish conservation success stories in various media formats
- Revamp WI Land+Water brochure
- Revamp the WI Land+Water annual report
- Revamp the LCC training session
- Develop strategies to engage LCC members

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**Indicators of Success**

1. Greater public awareness and legislative support for land and water conservation
   - Improved agency funding of county staff and WI Land+Water staff
   - Improved NGO/corporate funding of WI Land+Water and county projects
2. Meet fundraising goals
3. Increased participation and funding for youth education programs
4. Establishment of a sustainable conservation training program for supervisors and staff
5. Progress on long range environmental goals
   - Demonstrated improvement in water quality in lakes, streams, and groundwater
   - Improved shoreland management
   - Improved woodland management
   - Preserved farmland
   - Conserved wetlands and wildlife habitat
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**Critical Obstacles**

The following obstacles hinder progress in achieving WI Land+Water’s strategic goals and objectives.

How do we move forward in a positive way to remove these obstacles?

What actions should be undertaken, and what resources are needed to resolve the problems?

Which issues are the most significant and can be handled with least cost?

Are we doing things that are counter-productive?

Are we sometimes in our own way?

- Statutory authority for local land conservation and associated rules and state budgets have seen declining support over the last 15 years under control of both political parties
- Land and water conservation is not a top priority for most legislators and land users
- Poor public awareness of performance standards and of LCC/LCD role
- Lack of support from many agricultural groups
- Weak enforcement mechanisms of existing rules
- Conservation is now a partisan issue
- Inadequate funding of county programs
- Inadequate coordination with conservation partners
- Effects of merger (change is hard, perception that the parent organization is diminished and that an individual voice means less)
- Effect of changing funding sources
- Difficult financial times polarize the association and leads to infighting
- Harping on unfunded mandate fuels notion that LCDs are primarily interested in self-preservation rather than public service
- In a number of agricultural organizations and among some key legislators, there is an impression that Land Conservation offices offer many problems with few solutions
- The diversity of the counties, while often a strength, is also a significant weakness which can lead to infighting and very parochial thinking

**Infrastructure Assessment**

1. Identify existing workload, staff capacity, and available resources so Executive Committee can prioritize short and long term objectives

2. Allocate funds in the budget to develop a media campaign and other priorities

3. Evaluate the following roles/activities:
   - Guiding principles/charge
   - Communication with BOD and membership
   - Coordination of priorities and membership
   - Activities of WI Land+Water Committees:
     - Legislative/Administrative Committee
     - Professional Improvement Committee
     - Technical Committee
     - Outreach Committee
     - Youth Education Committee
     - Great Lakes Committee
     - Mississippi River Basin Committee
### Implementation Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>2015</strong></th>
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<th><strong>2016</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3-6 months</strong></td>
<td><strong>6-12 months</strong></td>
<td><strong>Explore possible 2017-19 biennial budget initiatives that promote the WI Land+Water mission</strong></td>
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<td>Conduct advocacy/lobbying efforts on Biennial Budget</td>
<td>Help counties determine role in P “variance” scenarios</td>
<td>Evaluate and revise Strategic Plan for March 2017 Conference</td>
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<td>Conduct lobbying efforts on ATCP 51 (February thru April)</td>
<td>Develop agency support for county role in adaptive management</td>
<td><strong>Assessment of long-term funding alternatives for WI Land+Water</strong></td>
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<td>Conduct March 2015 Annual Conference and Business meeting</td>
<td>Connect LCC/LCDs with municipalities and other point sources</td>
<td><strong>Explore possible 2017-19 biennial budget initiatives that promote the WI Land+Water mission</strong></td>
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<td>Begin exploration of long-term funding alternatives for WI Land+Water</td>
<td>Advocate for county role and funding in Wisconsin River TMDL program</td>
<td><strong>Evaluate and revise Strategic Plan for March 2017 Conference</strong></td>
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<td>Begin development of a “Northern County” (non-ag) strategy for staff and program funding</td>
<td>Explore possible linkage between “Ag Certainty programs and Adaptive Management”</td>
<td><strong>Assessment of long-term funding alternatives for WI Land+Water</strong></td>
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<td>Assess capacity of WI Land+Water staff and members to implement this work plan</td>
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<td><strong>Explore possible 2017-19 biennial budget initiatives that promote the WI Land+Water mission</strong></td>
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<td>Conduct Wisconsin Envirothon, Poster and Speaking contests, and Conservation Camps</td>
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<td>Evaluate and revise Strategic Plan for March 2017 Conference</td>
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[www.wisconsinlandwater.org](http://www.wisconsinlandwater.org)

Cover Photo: Robert Queen, Managed grazing can safely allow pasturing next to streams.

Back Photo: Robert Queen, Lion’s Den Gorge, Ozaukee County.