

Public Involvement Process

The public involvement process was accomplished via four different avenues. Indirect input issues central to the development of the Forest Legacy Program, such as important values and location, was obtained through the Statewide Forest Assessment effort the Land Legacy 2050 state land planning effort. Direct input on the program was solicited through news releases, articles and news features, and through direct mailing to counties and organizations.

Prior to the start of this project the State began an assessment of the forest resources on the State based on the forest inventory data. During the compilation of this Forest Assessment public input was gathered on what the public valued in the forestlands of Wisconsin. While this effort focused on the forests, in general, much of the material documentation and public awareness was essential in the production of this document.

At roughly the same time, the State also began a planning process for public lands called, ironically enough, the Land Legacy study. The purpose of this study was to set the direction for the WDNR's land acquisition program for the next 50 years. Meetings were and are being held to gather information on the characteristics of the land that are important to consider when the Department purchases land for conservation and recreational use. Eventually, the team in charge of this project will develop criteria to be used to identify lands for acquisition. Because the aims of this study was so similar to the Forest Legacy Subcommittee's efforts (although this project will not be completed in the same time-frame), two of the member of the Land Legacy Team also served on the Forest Legacy Subcommittee. The FLP Subcommittee was thus able to have access to data and information gained from the Land Legacy effort.

Because the Forest Assessment and the Land Legacy projects involved public meetings and both names and purposes were close to what the FLP was doing, our communications specialist advised against having yet more public meetings with a similar name and purpose. Instead, we used the information from the other groups meetings, which pertained, and enhanced the public input with additional feedback mechanisms. We sent out a state-wide news article which many of the services picked up, soliciting input on defining what were environmentally important forests in Wisconsin. A letter was also sent directly to all county planning and zoning officials, environmental groups and landowner organizations. Copies of the letter, news release and a summary of responses can be seen in Appendix C.

Once draft definitions of the goals, environmentally important forest definitions and associated values, and threats to these forests were developed, this information was shared internally and with the FSP Committee for comment and sharing with the organizations they represent. The definitions and criteria for FLAs were discussed and modified numerous times before being accepted as part of Wisconsin's AON.

A draft of this document was then prepared and sent to all DNR private lands foresters, all counties governments, all groups who responded to the first input process, all consulting foresters, all FSP committee members, the Governor's Council on Forestry, as well as individual landowners and associations. Responses were incorporated into this final document.