Division of Forestry Education and Outreach Assessment:
Partner Evaluations

Prepared for:

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This report summarizes education and outreach (E&O) evaluations contributed by 38 Division of Forestry partners: five from other divisions within the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and 33 from external organizations (partners responded in October and November of 2012). The goals of this effort were to introduce these partners to Forestry's E&O strategic planning effort, ask them for feedback on six questions, and prepare them for involvement in next steps. Members of the Division's Assessment Team (A-team) telephoned each partner to ask for their help, and then sent the six-question evaluation form. Respondents had two weeks to consider their responses, gather input from others in their organization if possible, and return the form to their A-team contact. Brief summaries of responses to each question follow.

1. **What is working well in the partnership between DNR forestry and your program/organization/agency with regard to Education and Outreach efforts? Please consider all of the Division's programs you interact with on education and outreach, and offer examples and reasoning for your evaluation.**

Many partners said that ***communication*** with Division of Forestry personnel was not only working well but was important. They cited one-on-one and small group educational contacts (e.g., landowner meetings related to the Conservation Reserve Program, seminars, and work groups), Forestry's carefully researched and prepared publications and videos, its efforts to identify new E&O resources and develop creative public education programs, and its special outreach to unengaged private landowners.

Many partners cited ***collaboration*** as especially important, in particular the sharing of information and ideas, responding quickly and precisely to requests for assistance, and aligning on organizational goals. Some partners said that they appreciate opportunities to participate on Forestry committees, and welcome Forestry's participation on their committees as well. One academic partner offered a comprehensive review of their relationship with the Division, noting that historically the University of Wisconsin System and DNR have collaborated to address critical gaps in the forestry knowledge base, and have worked together on research projects, pilot implementation projects, professional training, and community education. They noted that as a consequence of these partnerships, critical information has also been made available regarding the investment of State monies in forestry education and training at post-secondary institutions. Partners also cited Forestry's work on many programs ranging from financial assistance (e.g., Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program) to technical assistance (e.g., CRP, non-industrial private forest landowners).

In addition to communication and collaboration, Forestry's ***expertise*** was cited as important, especially in the training it offers through motivated/passionate Forestry personnel (e.g., in prescribed burn courses and one-on-one problem solving), input it provides for planning and implementing teacher professional development programs (e.g., with LEAF), technical help with grant applications (e.g., for the Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc.), and in the production and dissemination of high-quality technical information (e.g., through publications of research findings and industry trends, press releases, and website design and maintenance).

2. **What is not working well in the partnership between DNR forestry and your program/organization/agency with regard to Education and Outreach efforts? Please consider all of the Division's programs you interact with on education and outreach, and offer examples and reasoning for your evaluation. If you think that everything is working well or are unsure, please indicate that.**

Of the 38 partners who provided an evaluation, 10 said that things are generally working well or they have no E&O related problems. Of those who discussed problems, several focused on ***communication issues***, and one was disappointed that a Forestry team they had participated on had been disbanded, thus eliminating "an important venue for learning and sharing." Lack of clarity regarding Forestry expectations of partner programs was also cited, as was failure to share results or outcomes with partners. One program noted that *continuous* communication was important for keeping landowners

informed of new management techniques (e.g., by personal contact, newsletters, email), or to remind them of their stewardship responsibilities. One partner felt they had often been overlooked or included late in planning for education initiatives.

Cited *errors of omission and shortcoming* included lack of recognition—failing to properly acknowledge the efforts of private sector foresters and support them, failure to create a broad public understanding of the need for and benefit of proper tree care, and failure to adopt proper tree care processes on public forest land (i.e., a failure to lead by example). Problems between Forestry and its academic partners were also noted, including the need for Forestry to (1) provide feedback on how input solicited had been used, (2) formally recognize services rendered, and (3) support sustainable management through investments in staff positions where E&O is a primary, not add-on, responsibility. Partners also cited the need for more flexibility in scheduling to reach private landowners after hours, better prioritization of workloads, and the streamlining of program housekeeping (e.g., Managed Forest Law). Promotion of arborists certified by the International Society of Arboriculture may also be inadequate, and recognition of good private sector firms is lacking as well.

Several UW-Extension respondents described *structural problems*, the most basic of which may be goal or mission misalignment. Other partners commented on the lack of uniformity in commitment to E&O across DNR administrative regions, and a lack of coordination between State and national forest lands management. Other partners noted that E&O seems to be low priority, and that Forestry staff cannot participate in even higher-level activities like planning a conference. Other partners noted that foresters are highly restricted in their workload priorities, that limits on their travel and time plus work directives make coordinating with them more difficult, and that younger Forestry employees do not seem to appreciate the value of partnerships, and do not commit sufficient time to their development and maintenance.

Problems with partnerships also arise due to *resource shortages* (structural problems were sometimes implied), including staff positions, time, and program support. One partner noted that technology transfer is suffering, and that there's an unmet need for publishable articles, as priorities seem to have shifted due to budget cuts. Several partners cited shortages that prevent better delivery of services, and one noted that loss of Wildland-Urban Interface specialists has been notable and *not* overcome. One Urban Forestry consultant lamented the suspension of fall workshops for small communities, many of which don't have a forestry department or dedicated expertise on staff.

3. **Considering your program's/organization's/agency's education and outreach partnership with the Division of Forestry over the last several years (including all of the Division's programs you've interacted with on education and outreach), how could this partnership be best improved?**

Partners who thought that *communication* is a problem want it improved. One internal (to DNR) partner wanted more formal and informal check-ins, given that a Forestry team it had participated on had been disbanded. Partners also wanted more sharing of information about what Forestry is doing, more "learning from one another and, possibly, the sharing of resources." Other suggestions for improvement included: clear and simple guidance given to Forestry staff, strong communication and creative problem solving, a clearer set of expected outcomes to help partners meet Forestry expectations (e.g., x% increase in unengaged landowner contacts), regular meetings between partnership staffs, improved

website organization, periodic emails, and more one-on-one interaction "…especially at the local level and with regard to emerging issues."

Collaboration was also cited for improvement, and one internal (to DNR) program offered a detailed plan for using state forests to accomplish E&O goals. Specifically, educational efforts within each forest could address topics of relevance to the forest and its mission, and could involve neighboring communities in the master planning process; a travelling naturalist could also be hired to serve smaller properties. Several external partners called for explicit recognition of partnership importance, and consistent maintenance despite changes in DNR administrations and budget constraints. One partner called for greater sensitivity to partner needs, and several others made requests for building personal relationships and developing trust.

Improvements in bureaucratic *structure, policies, and procedures* were also suggested, including standardization (at a state-wide or regional level) of private landowner walk-throughs, and summaries to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these communications. One external partner wanted higher priority for E&O, and for incorporating some E&O activities in each DNR forester's position description, work plan, and annual evaluation. Another external partner wanted to train Forestry office and front line staff on recreation use regulations, and to include private sector participants in some Forestry training sessions as well. Other partners wanted more leeway for local DNR staff to determine or direct their E&O efforts, as well as more travel funding, more staffing (e.g., more WUI specialists), and improvements to the Forestry website. Better outreach to elected officials was also cited, as well as encouragement for cities, towns, and villages to collaborate (e.g., through Forestry's support for and hosting of regional workshops). Another partner thought that more support should be given for E&O, and that it should be made more consistent across all Forestry staff levels.

4. **With regard to forestry related education and outreach, in what ways does your organization/agency excel? This might be certain activities, reaching certain audiences, or something else.**

Partners with a strong membership focus said that they excelled at *understanding their members and serving them*, and at helping the Division of Forestry reach them through sponsored events such as meetings and conferences (e.g., Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association), or through lists they provided for one-on-one contact. Some of these partners also identify and monitor their members' knowledge or awareness gaps and communicate these needs to Forestry personnel.

Academic partners cited their *education and outreach expertise* as strengths, and their capacities to engage in a full range of E&O activities ranging from needs discovery, to educational program design and development, to delivery (e.g., UW-Extension, UW-Stevens Point, and LEAF). One UW-Extension partner offered provocative advice to inform Forestry's thinking about its role in these partnerships: "Education and outreach is the mission of UW-Extension…and is the one area where I would urge WDNR to consider how they do what they do, as there already is a state agency charged with Education and Outreach…There are opportunities for each organization within their mission to consider its role as it relates to the charge of the legislature, as well as the constituencies that they serve. Collaboration and thoughtful consideration to what each organization brings to the table and how we can best work together would be beneficial to all." Another partner noted

its excellence in training pre-service and licensed Pre-K through 12 teachers at low cost (i.e. Project Learning Tree), and one described its efforts to train a wide range of young people and adults in sustainable management (i.e., Trees for Tomorrow).

Other partners said they excel at various ***partnership building and nurturing*** activities—for example, reaching out to other organizations (e.g., WDATCP), expanding partnerships and providing seed money for special projects (e.g., US Forest Service), providing opportunities to build trust based relationships with landowners and the public (e.g., Driftless Forestry Network), and partnering with diverse groups to offer training in specialties such as kiln drying and lumber grading (e.g., North Central Technical College).

5. **With regard to Education and Outreach, in your view, in what ways does the Division of Forestry excel? This might be certain activities, reaching certain audiences, or something else.**

Many partners said that the Division of Forestry excels at ***one-on-one contact***, and four of 38 programs cited Forestry's work with woodland owners in particular. This type of contact is highly regarded, but is also becoming a cause for concern. For example, one partner complained (mildly) that Forestry is becoming known for its enforcement of the MFL program, because it is the only time a landowner sees or hears from the Division. They also noted that in the past their organization appreciated the technology transfer the Division provides, whether in the form of articles for newsletters, presentations at workshops and conferences, or in-the-field contact at chapter events or annual meetings; lately, this seems to be happening less and less.

Forestry also excels at ***group contact and educating broad audiences*** on issues of concern—for example, by getting the word out regarding emerald ash borer or wildfire prevention. At the nuts-and-bolts level, Forestry also gets high marks for managing continuing education requirements (e.g., Cooperating Forester Program), and for enforcing the MFL.

Forestry is valued as a ***structure provider, planner, and facilitator***—for its ability to bring diverse players together into partnerships and to distribute or manage E&O funds that are raised through taxes and grants. For example, one partner noted that Forestry has "…the unique trust of managing the funds raised through the forestry mil tax," and commended its collaboration with partners to underwrite activities they could not achieve on their own. Forestry is also valued for its high quality work—for example, for disseminating information based on sound science, developing and distributing high quality publications and presentations, providing dedicated passionate mentors, maintaining an excellent website, and for effective use of social media. Forestry is also valued for its help in planning and collaborating on workshops and conferences, not just for presenting.

Forestry E&O personnel are known for their ***innovation and leadership***. One partner cited the Urban and Community Forestry Program for "…being innovative and pioneering in the development of outreach and education approaches to reach a diverse audience." Another partner noted that Wisconsin DNR is well positioned to facilitate change and advance urban forestry through its education, outreach, and technical support efforts, and that it has the personnel, structure, and established partnerships to touch all sectors of urban forestry (e.g., individuals, private businesses, communities, townships,

counties). DNR was also cited for its capacity to bring together and mobilize agencies and/or organizations external to state government to solve common problems, and to investigate new approaches to problem solving. Another partner said that the Division excels at mobilizing forces and resources when there is a recognized need (e.g., messaging related to emerald ash borer preparedness).

6. How does your organization/agency evaluate its education and outreach efforts?

Partner evaluation practices vary greatly, but often focus on how well target audiences are reached or satisfied with information or training. Less often, changes in audience awareness, attitude, and/or behavior are evaluated. Still less frequently, these changes are formally compared to goals of the education or outreach effort. Evaluation also varies in terms of rigor, precision, and timeliness.

At a very ***basic level***, one partner evaluates its efforts through level of follow-up contact by attendees at presentations. Some government agency partners measure volumes of trees and/or species planted over time, but don't say if they consider other factors beyond education and outreach (e.g., drought and/or economic conditions and events). This highlights a general weakness of this evaluation type: the failure to account for other-than E&O influences. Several state agencies measure return on outreach spending—for example, website traffic counts, media calls per press release, and/or column inches per topic in newspapers. Such approaches measure market coverage and, perhaps, penetration of E&O, but do not measure awareness, attitudes, or behavior effects.

An ***intermediate level*** uses simple metrics to capture program impact. These are typically collected through participant and partner surveys. Another partner noted that evaluation consists of the favorable responses its instructors get from program recipients, and good questions and answers that reveal whether intended messages are getting through. These are obviously qualitative measures that are difficult to generalize, but they are useful approaches nonetheless.

At an ***advanced level*** another partner, Waste and Materials Management, measures public awareness, attitudes, and behaviors before and after implementing program changes, and also researches where its audiences get their information. It uses survey research and Internet resources, and also tracks hits on traditional media releases (e.g., print, radio, and TV). Similarly, UW-Extension crafts its programs using a logic model approach, where changes in knowledge and behavior are defined in short, mid, and long term goals. It evaluates its efforts based on these goals and whether it achieves desired outcomes in target audiences or groups. It uses various techniques that include session evaluations, impact surveys, depth interviews, and focus groups, and has highly trained staffs that are dedicated to practicing these approaches.