

# Conserving Wisconsin's Biological Diversity



## OUTCOMES

**Champion:** Mary Jean Huston, WI State Director, The Nature Conservance

**Lead Facilitator:** Peggy Compton, UW Basin Educator

**Total number of participants:** 60

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### **Four Desired States:**

- 1) Reliable science-based information about biological diversity is available and includes components of inventory, monitoring, analysis, and assessment. This information drives conservation practices and decisions.
- 2) Public policies, plans, and actions support conservation of biological diversity as an integral part of long-term ecological and economic health.
- 3) Wisconsin's citizens value the conservation of biological diversity and recognize it as an essential part of sustainable forest management and productivity, as well as tourism and recreation.
- 4) The State of Wisconsin has a long-term vision (for timeframes of more than 50 years into the future) that anticipates challenges to biological diversity, even though these challenges may be beyond our direct control, and initiates actions that will minimize damage.

### **Priority Actions**

We have listed the priority actions chosen for each Desired State. Although small break-out groups met to develop more detailed plans of action (including individuals, timelines, and obstacles), this information has been collated separately in greater detail.

### **Desired State #1:**

Reliable Science-based Information about biological diversity is available and includes components of inventory, monitoring, analysis, and assessment. This information drives conservation practices and decisions.

### **Associated Actions:** (listed in order of priority)

1. Establish an inventory and monitoring program, integrated with forest certification requirements, but not limited to certified lands. Inventory and monitoring efforts should include obscure but important groups of organisms, and consider genetic diversity.
2. Develop a representative system of reference areas to function as baselines for monitoring changes in biological diversity.
3. Build upon existing plans, such as TNC's Ecoregional Planning, DNR's Land Legacy, Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans, and State Natural Areas, and develop conservation strategies for areas of conservation importance (moving from science to action).

## **Desired State #2:**

Public Policies, plans, and actions support conservation of biological diversity as an integral part of long-term ecological and economic health.

### **Associated Actions:** (listed in order of priority)

1. Provide incentives for managers and landowners to conserve biological diversity.
2. Develop a representative system of reference areas, including but not limited to State Natural Areas, that provide refuge for the most disturbance-sensitive elements of biological diversity.
3. Manage working forests within a range of natural variability.

## **Desired State #3:**

Wisconsin's citizens value the conservation of biological diversity and recognize it as an essential part of sustainable forest management and productivity, as well as tourism and recreation.

### **Associated Actions:** (listed in order of priority)

1. Work to make private landowners and the general public stakeholders.
2. Change the perception that biological diversity is antithetical to forest management and economic sustainability.
3. Provide incentives for citizens to manage their land to conserve biological diversity.

## **Desired State #4:**

The State of Wisconsin has a long-term vision (for timeframes of more than 50 years into the future) that anticipates challenges to biological diversity, even though these challenges may be beyond our direct control, and initiates actions that will minimize damage.

### **Associated Actions:** (listed in order of priority)

1. Develop landscape-scale management plans and involve all stakeholders and economic, social, and ecological perspectives in creating the vision or desired state.
2. Use adaptive management principles for implementing plans, and for taking action on threats. Create more flexibility in management approaches, improving resiliency.
3. Implement actions to control or mitigate effects of the following threats:
  - Invasive non-native species
  - Continuing habitat loss and degradation
  - Land ownership trends toward continuing parcelization and development

## **Participant Comments:**

- “There’s this perception that biological diversity is pure conservation and forest management is pure exploitation...that’s not true”
- “There’s got to be more channels to recognize local people doing good for the entire state.”
- “We’ve gone from a conifer landscape to a deciduous one.”
- “Wisconsin is unique in the Midwest in not having any large reserves where you might have more success in restoring these kind of processes [fire]”
- “I think we’re missing the boat on some of this stuff...So what?...Why does diversity mean something to me on my property and how am I going to benefit?”
- “How do we draw in supporters of biodiversity who aren’t motivated by science or economics but by other very hard-to-put-our-fingers-on topics?”
- “If we’re not addressing private landowners, like Leopold said, we’re losing the battle”
- “What’s in it for me, a landowner, to do it without a tax incentive?”
- “Do we want an early win or do we want something that will be harder to achieve but might have more impact?...I say high impact!”

## **Partnerships Forged**

- We need greater coordination between state, federal, and local governments, and non-profit agencies and private landowners.
- There are many barriers to creating better linkages; we need to break these down.
- Many of the sub-groups talked a lot about private landowners and the need to engage them further.
- We should include faith-based groups as well as science-based groups. We shouldn’t just communicate with people who think the same way we do – we need to reach the entire citizenry.
- We need to find ways of reaching landowners to get them to feel like stake holders. One example would be to connect them to knowledgeable people like bird watchers.
- Connecting to realtors was another idea – have some kind of environmental assessment tool that realtors could share with people buying land (another group had the same discussion).
- One group had several educators in it – this is a valuable group to partner with (as well as teachers and non-formal educators)
- There was a general sense that people who are interested in biodiversity issues tend to have the same types of values, thus several groups said they had a fairly homogenous group of participants. Ownership is therefore already there among people who participated. The question is how to build ownership beyond the people who just show up.

**To what extent were the various interests related to this theme represented in your session? Which important stakeholder groups were absent from the discussion?**

The group seemed to be fairly homogenous. There were few representatives from industry, although they were quite vocal in one of the break-out groups. There was a distinct lack of legislators, individuals representing themselves (e.g. private landowners), and students.

**Connection with other themes**

Land Use, Invasives, Fragmentation, Policies and Incentives (especially as these concern private landowners)

**Summary**

We expected clarity, but we aren't sure we got it. We did really well in soliciting additional ideas, but perhaps didn't get as far with sub-actions, next steps, and implementation. It was hard to plan with such a big group and in such a short period of time. Many of the action items that we started out with were not very concrete (they were more like goal statements). We would have liked more time to refine bigger action items, rather than to define sub-actions. However, the outcome is still a good step – we developed a broad list of possible actions. We now need to filter these, and this wasn't the right process for doing that. The challenge is going to be winnowing it down. Maybe what we came up with is actually more valuable – once you collect good ideas, you can figure out how to implement them. One big success was in the Long-Term Vision group: there was real consensus that the state ought to get into state-level ecoregion planning. Another success is that the participants in this process will have a sense of where the ideas came from, once they start to be implemented in the future.