

Minimizing Recreational Use Conflicts in Wisconsin's Forests



OUTCOMES

Champion: Dave Marcouiller
Lead Facilitator: Debbie Yarmark
Total number of participants: 41

Key Issues:

- 1) How can we ensure that the full-spectrum of forest-based recreational opportunities in Wisconsin is available to the public, while at the same time ensure that public forest lands are managed for their economic benefits and ecological integrity, according to their intended missions?
- 2) How can we ensure that the collective “Wisconsin trail network” is an efficient and effective system that meets recreational demand, is properly maintained, and has minimal impacts on forest resources?
- 3) How can the needs of the growing motorized (ATV) recreation sector be met in Wisconsin, while meeting the needs of the non-motorized recreation sector and maintaining the ecological integrity of Wisconsin's forests?
- 4) How can we ensure that Wisconsin forests meet the demands for equestrian trails and associated amenities, amidst demands from other user groups and while minimizing impacts on forest resources?
- 5) Recent surveys show that Wisconsin citizens and visitors generally do not understand forest ecology, forest management, or human impacts on Wisconsin's forests. How can we ensure that Wisconsin citizens and visitors have a basic understanding of Wisconsin's forest communities, forestry practices and human impacts?
- 6) Less forestland is available for public use and large blocks of forest are being fragmented. How can we ensure that Wisconsin will always have space for forest recreation activities that require large areas?

OUTCOMES

- I. **Revitalize the State Trails Council**: There is great need for a statewide “umbrella” group that would serve as a clearinghouse for recreation information and a catalyst for the development and promotion of recreation BMP’s, and coordination and planning across agency and organization lines. The council in its current format is not effective and needs re-working. Potentially, it could be a powerful, beneficial force in the management of Wisconsin’s forest recreation resources.

Committed or targeted Individuals/organizations: WDNR Bureau of Parks and Recreation, external partners?

Timeline

ASAP (within the next year?)

Indicators of success: Development of a group that provides guidance and assistance to recreation providers

Perceived obstacles/barriers: Who will take the lead in initiating this?

- II. **Support and Promote Recreation Research**: Wisconsin lacks published research on the positive and negative impacts of forest recreation uses and the associated recommendations and conclusions that could result from such research. There is no recipe book for recreation management due to the dynamics of the users and the variable features of each property; therefore research is needed in Wisconsin so that guidance based on science can be provided to planners, managers and property owners.

Committed or targeted Individuals/organizations: UW-system, state and federal agencies?

Timeline: Within the next biennium

Indicators of success: Development of a Wisconsin-specific collection of studies, information and recommendations. Perhaps creation of recreation BMP’s for Wisconsin.

Perceived obstacles/barriers: Funding currently is limited.

- III. **Support and Promote Education and Interpretation Services**: Due to society’s increased separation from the land, there is an increasing lack of public understanding regarding Wisconsin’s forest resources and human impacts on those resources. Further, it is recognized that education is an important and integral law enforcement tool in recreation settings. More funding and training needs to be available to agencies, organizations and landowners. Wisconsin’s forested landscape, whether publicly or privately owned, is practically devoid of educational and interpretive services that clearly explain regulations, explain forest ecology and forest management practices, or promote behaviors that minimize user conflicts and impacts on the land.

Committed or targeted Individuals/organizations: UW-system, state and federal agencies?

Timeline: Within the next biennium

Indicators of success: On-site education and interpretation services development is included in agency budgets.

Perceived obstacles/barriers: Funding is currently not focused on on-site education and interpretation, where the recreation occurs.

- IV. **Increase funding for Recreation Management:** Current agency budgets are not adequate to meet increasing demands from a greater number of recreationists, a greater variety of recreational uses, and greater impacts on the land – such as those impacts associated with ATV use and the spread of invasive species via recreationists and their equipment/vehicles.

Committed or targeted Individuals/organizations: Recreation users, legislature, agencies?

Timeline: Within the next biennium

Indicators of success: Funding increases significantly for public lands recreation

Perceived obstacles/barriers: What will be the source of the additional funding?

Participant Comments:

- “This year will be the year that there are more atv’s registered than snowmobiles”-Tim Miller
- “you would think with 23,000 acres you could spread use out and there wouldn’t be conflict..” Paul Sangren, Silent Sports Magazine
- Rule #1 for addressing conflict-“DO NOT put new uses on facilities not designed for that use” Paul Sangren, Silent Sports Magazine
- “There are huge amounts of information on specific types of activities but not how they interact.”
- “Cooperation and networking is expensive but worthwhile if not necessary.”
- “Economically-atv’ers are spending money and are good for the economy”
- “Good education reduces conflict” (Tim miller, ATV issues)
- “When is always tough, the need is now, the need was yesterday, the need was 20yrs ago”
- “In order for ATV trails to be sustainable they must be built with low grade road standards.”

- “Our education efforts should be to all users”
- Carrying capacity of the land- “every piece of public land cannot be everything to everyone”
- Responsibility of the land- “conservation is a state of harmony between men and land”- Aldo Leopold
- “Conservation in the broadest sense is a state of harmony between man on the use of land”- George Meyer
- “Suggestion-if at all possible conflicts of this nature need to be dealt with at ind. Level/ user level/ owner level; if it gets to legislature level, everyone may lose”
- “There should be no use allowed that degrades land or water quality”
- “The ultimate solution is to be pro-active instead of re-active”

Partnerships Forged:

It is apparent that people of different interest groups do want to work together towards solutions. They all want to be heard and they want to get to real solutions – action rather than just talk. They all see their resources (land base) shrinking quickly. The big question is “Who will take the lead?” The audience that attended was a good mix of people, however, there were quite a few organizations and agencies that were not represented. There was little to no representation from agency field managers who experience and work on forest recreation use conflicts on a daily basis. USDA-Forest Service, WDNR – Northern State Forests, WDNR-State Parks, etc. This left a knowledge and experience gap in the small group discussion dynamics.

Summary:

I feel that we were successful given the time limitations and the complexity of the issues. We were, as everyone was, limited by time. These are complex issues and so the solutions are also complex. It is difficult to develop a thorough strategy in a 4-hour period, especially when working with people from such broad backgrounds. For the time we had, I believe we were productive. This session went essentially as we had planned it.