

# ALLIANCE OF THE NORTHERN STATES WORKING TO ENSURE REGIONAL STABILITY

## **A.N.S.W.E.R.S.**

(Michigan/Wisconsin Counties: Dickinson, Iron, Gogebic, Houghton, Florence, Forest, Marinette & Vilas)

*Vice Chairman*  
*Larry Neuens*

*Chairman*  
*Edwin Kelley*

*Secretary/Treasurer*  
*Margie Yadro*

### **Meeting Agenda**

**Wednesday, October 28, 2015**

9:00 AM

### **Florence Natural Resource Center**

5638 Forestry Drive, Florence, WI 54121  
Lower Level Conference Room

1. **Call to Order:** Chairman Edwin Kelley called the meeting to order at 9 AM. Those present included: Vice Chairman Larry Neuens, Florence County Supervisor; Secretary/Treasurer Margie Yadro, Florence County Legislative Committee Coordinator; William Chaney, Forest County Supervisor; Wallace Townsend, Dickinson County Planning Commissioner; Superintendent Ben Niehaus, School District of Florence County; Forest Administrator Eric Peterson, Iron County, WI; Forestry & Parks Administrator Pat Smith, Florence County; Joe Bartz, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation; Ann Hartnell, Marinette County Association for Business and Industry Director; Wendy Gehlhoff, Florence County Economic Development Director; Dale McNamee, representative for Michigan's 38<sup>th</sup> District Senator Tom Casperson; Kelly Westlund, representative for Wisconsin US Senator Tammy Baldwin; President Cary Anderson, Florence County Lakes and Rivers Association; Invasive Species Program Manager Scott Goodwin, Florence County Land Conservation; Coordinator Emily Anderson, Wild Rivers Invasive Species Coalition; Veterans Service Officer Mike Theis, Florence County; UW Extension Administrator Corrin Seaman, Florence County; and, Florence County Legislative Advisory Committee Members: Edward Wenger, Holly Wahlstrom-Stratton, Ron Yadro, and Fred Erwin.
2. **Approval of the Agenda:** on a motion by Wahlstrom-Stratton, supported by Chaney, all were in favor to approve the agenda as posted.
3. **Approval of the Minutes:** Neuens moved to accept the July 22, 2015 Meeting Minutes as drafted. Seconded by Wenger. All were in favor.
4. **Discussion and/or Action Items**
  - a. Economic Development/Tourism – Gehlhoff updated the group on the Florence County Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) District including investment dollars, job growth and future business developments. She finished by naming several upcoming tourism events planned. Townsend added that the owners of Pat's Foods in Florence had recently purchased a previously operated hardware store for possibly expanding operations into Iron Mountain, MI. Hartnell reported on the economic significance of tourism in Marinette County, currently listed at number 20 in the state. She named several new and growing business operations and those relocating into area industrial parks, along with consideration of a developing TIF District and added business services.
  - b. Forestry
    - i. Expiration of the Softwood Lumber Agreement (Canada/United States): a handout was distributed on the expiring 2006 international agreement that addressed reducing the competitive imbalances caused by Canadian subsidies in the production of softwood lumber. At this time, the U.S. Lumber Coalition, representing large and small lumber producers from around the country, agreed not to file petitions under U.S. trade laws for one year to allow development of a new agreement that stakeholders could support. Kelley appreciated that federal legislators were interested in reviewing this item and support a strong forestry based economy, especially for northern Michigan and Wisconsin. Wahlstrom-Stratton moved to draft a letter from ANSWERS that requests WI and MI

- federal legislators to work toward reinstating this type of international agreement for the future protection of fair lumber trade. Seconded by Neuens. All were in favor.
- ii. Good Neighbor Authority/Stewardship Programs: Smith reported on the US Forest Service working with the DNR on this Farm Bill program to contract for timber sales on federal lands. McNamee added that some movement on this was occurring in Upper Michigan though more is anticipated. Smith agreed that these types of sales could be a better fit for counties and smaller contractors to be involved, and should also provide more harvest dividends to public budgets, including school districts.
  - iii. PILT and other related public funding: Wisconsin Senator Baldwin has joined others in introducing Senate Bill 1925 to reauthorize and fund the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program for six years, permanently reauthorize and fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and permanently fund the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Program. The SRS program, created 15 years ago, is meant to provide consistent funding to rural counties and schools located near national forests across the country. The LWCF offers funding for projects like national wildlife refuges and parks along with federal acquisition of lands for outdoor recreation, etc. PILT compensates rural communities for certain federal lands that cannot be taxed such as national forests. The bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in August. Wahlstrom-Stratton moved to send a letter in support of this effort to senators representing the region and to that Senate Committee Chairman. Supported by Chaney. All were in favor.
- c. Mining – Kelley asked for an update in the region. Peterson spoke about companies interested in better management of their public image. He added that the White Pine facility seemed to continue to progress. Though it was felt that some mining operations appear to be cutting back slightly on production, the Eagle Mine is thought to be doing well. There is a lawsuit currently involved with the EPA over access routes in Marquette, MI. The Groveland Mine was excited last summer with a possible frac sand mining opportunity along with reclamation of taconite when the price is right. Hartnell commented on the Back 40 Mine in Menominee, MI that underwent an ownership change and is currently seeking new investors.
- d. Transportation –
- i. Northwoods Rail Transit Commission: Chairwoman Gehlhoff spoke of their last meeting in September with 22 counties currently on board. A TIGER grant was submitted by the group to secure additional funding to provide an adequate fleet of railcars dedicated to transporting logs in the region. Several local companies are now interested in manufacturing those cars. Collecting shipper data is another aspect that the Commission is pursuing. A meeting has been requested with Canadian National to gauge their interest in short line rail. Several commented on the legal abandonment process in the removal of a local rail spur.
  - ii. WI/MI ATV/Snowmobile Trail: Smith updated the group on the recent agreement reached between Florence County Forestry & Parks and the Michigan DNR to maintain and operate the railroad bridge connecting the trail system over the Menominee River. If Lansing signs off, Smith feels that the Michigan DNR will take over ownership of the bridge which directly connects Florence County to Dickinson County, which he says is a good starting place. All look for this effort to support tourism across state lines. Suggestions were made on addressing trail sticker policies by the neighboring states.
- e. Natural Resources –
- i. Invasive Species Prevention and Management: Goodwin noted the development of county-wide Invasive Species Council being established in Florence County and their review of projects and related grant funding. E. Anderson added a newsletter from the Wild Rivers Invasive Species Coalition who has seen the most grant funding resources over this past year. She was excited to report the variety of new prevention and management efforts that were acted upon this season. Mapping plant populations, networking with road commissioners, along with combined treatment

control is being targeted for right-of-way and trail management. Several members commented on the resources and efforts put toward treatment of phragmites a perennial grass along the Great Lakes and now within the local region. Neuens would like to see increased communications between entities managing invasives which has often been directed by funding source.

- ii. EPA Endangered and/or Threatened Classifications: Erwin suggested that schools and natural resource managers work together to add bat houses or make other habitat improvements that can accommodate threatened species. Smith reported that the wood turtles listing could be under review. M. Yadro shared concerns about being good stewards of the land, but is cautious about ultimately limiting land uses. Discussion followed on wolf conflicts and management; and concerns on changing the federal definition of “public waters.”

f. Public Education –

- i. State and Federal Funding/Regulation: Niehaus added information on the federal mandate that requires public schools to meet a Maintenance Of Effort for special needs services. Originally, Wisconsin Congressman Ribble introduced a bill which was later taken up by several others including Congressman Benishek of Michigan that would allow for improved efficiencies for districts as long as financial gains do not result in a reduction in special education programming. A similar resolution will be brought by Florence Schools before the Wisconsin Association of School Boards for a vote in January 2016. Chaney moved to draft a letter in support of this resolution and bill to forward to federal senators and to the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education. All were in favor.

g. Township Priorities – nothing added.

- h. Regional, State, Federal Programs/Services – M. Yadro provided a legislative handout from Senator Baldwin’s office describing the Protecting Medicare Beneficiaries Act of 2015 that calls for holding the 2015 premium rate for Medicare beneficiaries. Without this policy change, an estimated 15 million Americans could face an unexpected 52% increase in monthly premiums.

i. Legislative Bills and/or Resolutions – Senator Baldwin’s representative identified legislative priorities from home health care support to waterfront community revitalization.

- i. Vietnam Blue Water Navy legislation: Theis brought forward S. 681, a federal bill relating to the compensation and health care of Vietnam Veterans’ exposure to health risks. Theis moved to send a letter in support of this proposal to federal legislators, support by Wahlstrom-Stratton. All were in favor.
- ii. Wisconsin SB 210 – exempting EMS personnel from licensure requirements across state lines. At this time, it is believed that this is just for Wisconsin to utilize supporting services from out of state providers. Wahlstrom-Stratton moved to send a correspondence to Wisconsin legislators, seconded by Theis. All were in favor.

- j. Reports from State and Federal Legislators – Bartz reported on recent changes and improvements at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. McNamee spoke about Senator Casperson sponsoring a bill designed to make state government act more responsibly by requiring departments to repay the court costs of residents and businesses who prevail against a department in court. A Fab Lab Grand Opening and Open House is planned at Florence Schools.

- k. Any Other Business/Future Agenda Items – With all business completed, Wenger moved to adjourn until January 27, 2016 at 9 AM as the next meeting date and time. Supported by Erwin. All were in favor.

5. **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Margie Yadro*

Margie Yadro, ANSWERS Secretary/Treasurer