

# 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 Minutes**

**January 28, 2015**

Florence Natural Resource Center  
5638 Forestry Drive, Florence, WI 54121  
Lower Level Conference Room

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m. by Chairman Edwin Kelley. Those present included – William Chaney, Forest County Supervisor; Dale McNamee, Michigan’s 38<sup>th</sup> District Senator Tom Casperson’s Office; Corrin Seaman, University of Wisconsin Extension, Florence County; Ann Hartnell, Executive Director, Marinette County Association for Business and Industry; Eric Peterson, Forest Administrator, Iron County, WI; Bryce Luchterhand, Wisconsin U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin’s Office; Emily Anderson, Coordinator of the Wild Rivers Invasive Species Coalition (WRISC); Margie Yadro, Florence County Conservationist; and, Florence County Legislative Advisory Committee Members: Supervisors Edward Wenger, Holly Wahlstrom-Stratton and Edwin Kelley; Ron Yadro, Florence School Board Member; and Fred Erwin, Unit Chair of the Wisconsin Towns Association.
2. **Approval of the Agenda:** On a motion by Erwin, supported by McNamee, all approved the current meeting agenda as presented.
3. **Approval of the previous Meeting Minutes:** Wahlstrom-Stratton moved to approve the October 22, 2014 ANSWERS Meeting Minutes as drafted. Supported by Chaney. Motion passed.
4. **Secretary/Treasurer’s Report:** M. Yadro reported no change in the group’s finances since the October 2014 meeting that posted a bank balance of \$114.46. No action was necessary.
5. **OLD BUSINESS –**
  - a. **Economic Report on issues within the ANSWERS region:** Florence County Economic Director, Wendy Gehlhoff, submitted a written report that noted tourism related businesses appear to be doing very well this winter, most likely due to good snow cover. Florence County sales tax collection is up 13% in 2014 over the previous year. Other parts of the region reported similar tourism increases where good winter sport conditions exist. Erwin commented on the status of Family Dollar coming to the Town of Florence. Hartnell added a Marinette County update where she believes they are seeing growth across multiple industries with business expansions and increased employment opportunities. Wahlstrom-Stratton added a Workforce Development concern expressed from employers in the region who attract qualified applicants to hire only to find few that actually pass the drug testing. Luchterhand reported a lack of general work ethics across the state with recent reports of one out of four employees actually working out. Chaney commented on the significant outreach efforts to secure employees in the Iron Mountain area. Hartnell felt that the internet is being used as an up and coming hiring tool that shows great promise. R. Yadro spoke of several new behavior related programs that have been instituted at Florence Schools over the past few years that has shown real promise.
  - b. **Forestry–**
    - i. ***Sustainable Federal Forestry Committee Report:*** Wenger attended a recent meeting with Don Peterson, Director of Sustainable Resources Initiative, where progress was discussed on a forestry grant project to be conducted within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Gehlhoff stated that all timber sale and service work in the Stewardship Agreement done by Peterson via Grow

North WEDC grant has been contracted. In addition to timber harvest, this included 735 acres of new timber marking. Several forestry management groups are working closely to better understand the implications and use of the “Good Neighbor Forestry Act” which allows cooperative agreements, between U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and state partners, to perform watershed restoration and protection services on National Forest System Lands through the Good Neighbor Authority, a nationwide program expanded as part of the 2014 Farm Bill. The agreement template is currently undergoing public review and is expected to be finalized in time for 2015 project implementation locally. (See the Federal Register Notice (FRN) for more information or to make comment.) Wenger also stated that Senator Baldwin helped introduce the bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act proposal that would avoid the existing practice of “fire borrowing” which has historically redirected funds and staff from other important forest management programs and activities in Wisconsin and Michigan. Though a similar proposal did not pass during the last session, Luchterhand encouraged the members to convey their support again on this issue to their federal legislators. Wahlstrom-Stratton moved to send a letter in support of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act 2015 to federal representatives, endorsed by those representing the ANSWERS members. Supported by Wenger. All were in favor. R. Yadro added a recent letter from state legislators that informed the Florence School District to expect 30% less from the 25% Fund which is generated through federal timber harvests. Seaman also shared an agenda on the Sustainable Forestry Conference that will be held in Florence on April 16, 2015 and included presentations on some of the same topics under discussion today.

- ii. *Bats and other endangered species that may affect forest management*: Wenger noted a recent correspondence on the status of the Northern Long Eared Bat (NLEB) that will soon be considered for listing as a “threatened” or “endangered” specie. All felt that even though bat mortality was shown to be directly linked to disease and not habitat disturbance, the less restrictive status as “threatened” would mean fewer restrictions to the region’s forest industry. A letter from Senator Baldwin to Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was circulated which urged the USFWS to issue a rule under Section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act that would allow normal forest management practices to continue and minimize economic impacts to the region. Members were encouraged to submit their concerns during the public comment period. Chaney moved to send a similar letter from ANSWERS members to the USFWS Director. Supported by Erwin. Motion passed.
- iii. *Any other Forest issues* – Kelley asked about further developments regarding the wood turtles. Nothing more was known.
- c. Mining issues: McNamee spoke of an upcoming limestone mine meeting in Newberry. He personally had conducted a public survey of local residents and found that all appeared to support this mine development. He added that in Marquette, the most significant mining public concern that remains seems to be related to the transportation route that ended up going through some of the city limits. The original proposed rural route was later denied by the Environmental Protection Agency. McNamee suggests staying tuned in on items surrounding these mining sites for problems related to future land use, timber harvests, wildlife management, etc. Peterson reported on Iron County’s mining development that appears somewhat calm at the moment. Further decision making has been pushed off until the fall of 2015. No action was necessary.
- d. Railroad and other Transportation Issues:
  - i. *Northwoods Rail Commission*: In Gehlhoff’s report, she added that the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission met on January 16 where it approved a resolution to apply for the WisDOT Freight Rail Preservation Program (FRPP) to help fund a new log car fleet for the northern WI/MI region. The fleet could be utilized by all railroads, with both MI and Canadian National (CN) adding funding as

- well. The Commission also approved a letter to Governor Walker requesting the full \$60 million funding level for the FRPP in the next budget biennium. The Commission meets next on March 27. Wenger stated that many counties in Wisconsin along with several in the U.P. continue to pursue the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to secure funding for additional rail cars to fill an infrastructure shortage for hauling logs in the area. Though the first grant application was not awarded, he felt that progress has been made in the proposal for this second round. Members shared concerns over CN's decisions to abandon some of the local tracks and questioned the potential for future demand in rail services to mining operations. At the federal level, Luchterhand said the last meeting he attended on the subject sounded pretty bleak toward getting better rail service to this region that Senator Baldwin supports. Wenger updated the group on developments to support business and transportation growth in Escanaba, MI with additional rail upgrades being seen in several other areas as well. Chaney moved to express continued support for the Northwoods Rail Commission's efforts. Seconded by R. Yadro. All were in favor. This action will be shared with Northwoods Rail Commission Chair, Gehlhoff.
- ii. *Any other Transportation issues:* Hartnell reported on highway planning from Oconto County to Marinette County where they are reviewing and predicting growth patterns over the next 20-years. She feels a final plan will be drafted later this year.
- e. WI/MI ATV/Snowmobile Trail updates:
- i. *Interstate Trail Permit Problems:* Kelley expressed interest in developing agreements for trail users to access each of the bordering states. McNamee reported similar trail issues going on in other areas of the U.P. and believes that it is time for Michigan to step up. Though some thought this border crossing issue had been addressed in the past, most felt that another trail permit is required to legally cross state lines. Though both WI and MI have free weekend dates for trail usage, some recent changes may make this more challenging. Wahlstrom-Stratton asked if a weekend sticker should be explored for economic benefit to the region. Chaney reported on several trails in Forest County that can be used for "just about anything and everything."
  - ii. *Menominee River bridge repair for recreational vehicles status:* Erwin reported on repairs and updates to the bridges connecting the trail systems.
- f. Update on Wild Rivers Invasive Species Coalition: Coordinator Emily Anderson presented materials on recent invasive species mapping throughout their 5-county service region. She shared some of the target species that are currently found in the area along with rapid response activities that are being conducted to reduce or eliminate aggressively growing plants. This unique multi-state organization has also been developing a toolkit for road right-of-way plant management and promoting a contact distribution for recommending control efforts on plants such as wild parsnip that is prevalent in Florence County. Several grant projects are being applied for at this time where funding looks fairly strong. The group is currently revising their Memorandum of Understanding for Formal Partners where the ANSWERS group has already taken action to join. M. Yadro reiterated the importance of keeping these invasive species cooperatives funded so education, outreach and invasive species management can be done through a coordinated effort with shared resources. Erwin commented on control implications for plants designated as noxious and nuisance weeds as well as invasive.
- g. Update: EPA Rulings (Water & Air): Several members expressed concern over far reaching implications on a definition change from "navigable" to "all" waters and how that might affect permitting on projects. All were encouraged to comment on this with federal legislators.
- h. Updates on School Issues: R. Yadro expressed continued concern on school budgets and regional economics directly tied to federal forest harvests. He added challenges occurring in a lack of reciprocity for out-of-state tuition which is currently being addressed by resolution through Wisconsin's

Association of School Boards. R. Yadro also reported on local interest in pursuing a “Fab Lab” that is a program designed and implemented through Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He feels that if the local school districts get on this technology early, they will be in the best position to be assisted through grant opportunities and have the greatest advantage for their students and local communities and industries. Hartnell added similar activities going on in Marinette County where industrial production is shown to be conducted efficiently in a compact area. It was acknowledged that while some historical jobs may become obsolete, new jobs are going to be brought forward through this inventive technology that will be utilized throughout the school system and the community. Some of the educational programs are helping students become job ready when completed.

- i. Update on PILT funding: Kelley asked for more information on the status of Payment In Lieu of Taxes to public budgets. Luchterhand offered to report back with more information on this in the future.

**6. NEW BUSINESS:**

- a. Elimination of Wolf Management: A recent federal court ruling returned the gray wolf to the “threatened” species list, which removed any hunting management and wildlife abatement for producer losses. Several expressed concerns on escalating human conflicts with local wolf packs. Since wolves cannot readily return to their native range, McNamee believes that the states are going to have to fight this federal ruling legislatively. Senator Casperson has supported a resolution toward this effort and would like to see the same type of legislation promoted as Idaho and other western states pursued. Wahlstrom-Stratton moved to send state and federal legislators a letter to support for the scientific management of a healthy wolf population by state or region. Seconded by Erwin. All were in favor.
- b. Stewardship, Collaboratives, GNA and other FS tools: Chaney commented on the Good Neighbor Authority and Stewardship programs that appear to be at least a start toward improving forestry management on federal lands. Luchterhand added that a collaboration that originated in Forest County has been looking favorably as these are potentially new tools to increase forest harvests. Resolutions were asked to be shared with ANSWER’s members that support these efforts. R. Yadro moved to send a letter to area legislators that expresses continued support of these programs that will encourage federal forest management and timber harvests. Supported by Wahlstrom-Stratton. All were in favor.

**7. OTHER BUSINESS:**

- a. Open Discussion: Luchterhand forwarded Senator Baldwin’s support of the President’s pursuit of free community college tuition which he says is not a new idea in Wisconsin. Though it is difficult to see how the cost would be met, the Senator felt that this would also be a very good investment in our future. Kelley asked that consideration be given to internships as well that could begin in high school and develop a workforce better prepared for manufacturers.
  - b. Future Agenda Items: Wahlstrom-Stratton requested more information on broadband in the region. Luchterhand commented on an earlier stimulus package goal that was designed to increase access to broadband across Wisconsin, which was later turned down.
8. **Correspondence**: nothing reported.
9. **Adjournment**: With all business concluded, Chaney moved to adjourn until April 22, 2015. Supported by Erwin. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Margie Yadro – Secretary/Treasurer