

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

July 22, 2015

9:00 AM

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

1. **Attendance:** Chairman Edwin Kelley, Florence County Supervisor; Vice Chairman Larry Neuens, Florence County Supervisor; Secretary/Treasurer Margie Yadro, Florence County Legislative Advisory Coordinator; Edward Wenger, Florence County Supervisor; Holly Wahlstrom-Stratton, Florence County Supervisor; WI 34th Assembly District Representative Rob Swearingen; Keith Langenhahn, WI Counties Association (WCA); William Chaney, Forest County Supervisor; Joe Bonovetz, Gogebic County Supervisor; Vilas Schroeder, Marinette County Supervisor; Forest Administrator, Eric Peterson, Iron County (WI); Fred Erwin, Unit Chairman of Wisconsin Township Association, Florence County; School District of Florence County, Board Member Ron Yadro, Superintendent Ben Niehaus; Health Department Director Annette Seibold, Florence County; UWEX Department Administrator, Corrin Seaman, Florence County; and, Invasive Species Program Manager, Scott Goodwin, Florence County Land Conservation Department. Special guest presenters included: James Lienau of Nsight Teleservices; and, Don Sidlowski of the Northwoods Broadband Development Coalition.
2. **Approval of the Agenda:** On a motion by Wenger, supported by Niehaus, the agenda was approved as posted. All were in favor.
3. **Approval of the Minutes:** Moved by Wahlstrom-Stratton. Seconded by Erwin. All were in favor to approve the April 22, 2015 Meeting Minutes as submitted.
4. **OLD BUSINESS** – (discussion and/or action)
 - a. Economic Development/Tourism: Florence County Economic Development Director, Wendy Gehlhoff, submitted a report of local improvements including: TIF District valuation growth, business openings and expansions, successful tourism promotions and events, and increased workforce development through a Fab Lab installation at Florence Schools. Schroeder followed noting the recent addition of a new County Administrator at Marinette. Bonovetz reported on mining developments in Gogebic County. Representative Swearingen spoke on the positive business improvements noticed throughout the district and wrapped up with a comment regarding the state administration remaining focused on jobs and the economy.
 - b. Forestry–
 - i. Sustainable Federal Forestry Committee Report: Committee member Wenger stated that the group continues to meet and are working toward providing more timber on the market through a number of projects and programs. Stewardship Projects are being carried out locally. The group is also seeking several initiatives to cut costs related to timber harvests.
 - ii. Good Neighbor Authority update: Wenger explained the developing GNA agreements that are primarily in the state's hands now and was pleased that the state forester appeared to be on board. Stakeholders seem enthusiastic in utilizing the counties to contract the work. Requests are currently being made by the WDNR to the counties to see what resources are available. Discussion followed on the multiple financial benefits to these programs. It was unknown if surrounding national forests have pursued similar timber harvest activities.

iii. Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and other related public funding impacts: Niehaus spoke on anticipated impacts to public school budgets through several aid programs. He felt that PILT funding was critical to the district. Increased federal timber harvesting would likewise increase revenues in public budgets, especially to schools and townships. Niehaus spoke of his appreciation for the collected effort of this group. Swearingen commented in his belief that PILT will survive on the national level, and noted the resignation of forestry champion Tia Nelson, Executive Secretary of Wisconsin's Board of Commissioners of Public Lands. Wahlstrom-Stratton moved to send a letter to Wisconsin Congressman Sean Duffy's Office thanking him for his efforts in pursuing PILT funding. Supported by R. Yadro. All were in favor.

c. Mining: Bonovetz reported that the price of iron has dropped significantly, potentially impacting local mining operations. Global mineral exploration continues in the western U.P.

d. Communications –

i. Broadband/Wireless resources and services presentations: Lienau of Cellcom/Nsight Teleservices was on hand to provide more detail on wireless and landline communication available within the region. He explained that the company that originates from Pulaski, WI has a good record of retaining customers and has expanded several times, most recently, purchasing Niagara Telephone Company that included 11 local cell towers. Due to an agreement with Verizon, voice and data services are now available with 4g technology. Discussion followed on impacts to signal reception which is affected by: the number of people sharing a portion of a cell site; the distance the signal travels; tree foliage cover; and, by the spectrum or channel that it works from. Competitors can also roam on the Cellcom tower system though there are less carriers in the rural areas. Niehaus asked about increasing fiber services to support broadband growth. Lienau explained that most of the Florence County towers are lit and providing 3g service locally with 4g added through agreements. More fiber and wireless coverage is planned especially along northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

Sidlowski, a member of Wisconsin's Public Service Commission Broadband Advisory Council, complimented the great partnership with Cellcom, especially in serving the rural areas. He felt that Swearingen and other state representatives have been great advocates for advancing broadband technology into the area. Sidlowski recommended pursuing any project proposals to fill the gaps of the "patchwork" service in rural areas and encouraged those eligible to contact Colter Sikora with the Public Service Commission to seek a portion of the \$1.5 million earmarked in state funding for these communication improvements. Connect America and First Net are two more funding opportunities he suggested. Sidlowski also complimented Florence Schools in moving ahead with their Fab Lab to better educate the work force in providing a desired skillset for related businesses. He finished by saying that he is available as a resource to the local communities. Chairman Kelley thanked the presenters for sharing.

e. Transportation –

i. Northwoods Rail Transit Commission (NRTC) report: NRTC Chairwoman Gehlhoff's report included the application of a TIGER VII grant that seeks improvements to the aging log car fleet servicing the region; unsuccessful lobbying of the Joint Finance Committee for a \$4.8 million match; planning to request a separate Wisconsin bill for match in cooperation with Michigan working on similar state monies; Canadian National continues to offer \$1.2 million for this proposal; several NRTC county businesses are pursuing certification to manufacture log rail cars; applying for Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) grant to collect detailed rail freight data from key regional businesses. The NRTC will meet next on July 24 in Rhinelander.

ii. WI/MI ATV/Snowmobile Trail update –

Menominee River Bridge: Kelley reported that the Department of Transportation requires an agreement to allow the Department of Natural Resources more authority of the

bridge. Swearingen plans a meet with stakeholders in August to pursue resolution. He felt that Michigan has offered to take their share of the responsibility of this project.

- f. Natural Resources –
 - i. Invasive Species Management: Yadro introduced Goodwin who briefly described two aquatic invasive species grants taking place locally. He also distributed a map of roadside invasives that could help focus treatment efforts. Erwin then provided wild parsnip and thistle specimens found throughout the surrounding area and explained the local aggressive mowing strategy. Discussion followed on coordinating treatment efforts, especially for right-of-way management. M. Yadro gave an update on the Wild Rivers Invasive Species Coalition (WRISC) resources that can assist folks in the prevention and treatment of invasive plants and animals. Concerns were expressed especially with regards to plants that impact human health such as wild parsnip. M. Yadro added the need for additional Wisconsin resources being earmarked for terrestrial invasive prevention and treatment. Erwin agreed to track treatment methods and results and report back. Wahlstrom-Stratton spoke on the potential long reaching impacts to tourism, property values, forestry and more.
 - ii. EPA Endangered and/or Threatened Classification impacts: the group shared their concerns over classifications on species that negatively impact the logging industry, such as recently seen through the Northern Long-Eared Bats and the Wood Turtle. M. Yadro asked after any movement on the wolf designation. Swearingen believed that the protected classification is going to be challenged.
 - g. Public School priorities –
 - i. Funding: Niehaus added his “Thanks,” to the partners’ efforts in assisting to implement the Fab Lab program locally and continues to work on additional funding toward related equipment, software and services. Though he feels local Wisconsin representatives support rural schools, no inflationary increase for the first time in a long time added to the funding challenge to public districts. Niehaus and colleagues in the Fair Aid Coalition are working toward maintaining a base of at least \$1,000 per pupil in state aid, and attempting to raise awareness that property wealth should not be assessed as “wealthy” in the state aid formula.
 - ii. Regulation: Niehaus added bipartisan support in a recent Senate vote to give the state’s back some control from the federal No Child Left Behind Act.
 - h. Township priorities: Erwin questioned the recent prevailing wage bill that was originally drafted to eliminate townships from contracting with public highway departments. That component of the bill was removed according to Swearingen. Erwin invited Representative Swearingen to attend the local Wisconsin Townships Association quarterly meeting.
5. **NEW BUSINESS** – (discussion and/or action)
- a. State Budget impacts: Swearingen respected all that was discussed today. He added his appreciation to those legislators that sat on the Joint Finance Committee and felt that they had worked hard to represent the local area. Several commented on the disappointment in the Governor’s veto to help fund the conservation projects which negatively impacted the Florence Natural Resource Center. Swearingen expressed his commitment to continue to seek resources.
 - b. Legislative Bills and/or Resolutions: Swearingen expects Congress to get rolling again now that the Budget has been settled and appreciates the continued communication with this group.
6. **OTHER BUSINESS:**
- a. Open Discussion/Future Agenda Items: No other business.
7. **Adjournment**: Kelley encouraged all to send agenda items of interest to all counties. Moved by Neuens, supported by Chaney. All were in favor to adjourn until October 28, 2015.

Respectfully submitted by: Secretary Margie Yadro