

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

October 22, 2014

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, Florence County Supervisor. Those present included: Larry Neuens, Florence County Supervisor; Wendy Gehlhoff, Florence County Economic Development Director; Ron Yadro, School District of Florence County; Edward Wenger, Florence County Supervisor; William Chaney, Forest County Supervisor; Holly Wahlstrom-Stratton, Florence County Supervisor; Margie Yadro, Florence County Land Conservation; Dale McNamee, Michigan's 38th District Senator Tom Casperson's Office; Pat Snyder, Wisconsin's 7th District Congressman Sean Duffy's Office; Joe Varius, Iron County, WI Forester; Ben Niehaus, Superintendent of the School District of Florence County; Stanley Suszka, resident of Town of Fern; and, Keith Langenhahn, Wisconsin Counties Association.
2. **Approval of the Agenda:** Neuens moved to accept the current meeting agenda as presented, supported by Wahlstrom-Stratton. Motion passed.
3. **Approval of the Minutes:** Chaney motioned to approve the July 23, 2014 meeting minutes as drafted, seconded by R. Yadro. All were in favor.
4. **Secretary/Treasurer's Report:** M. Yadro supplied a copy of the October 15, 2014 bank statement with a balance of \$114.46. She also reported that a website was being developed to enhance communication at <http://www.florencecountywi.com/departments/?department=3ccd7649bdf5&subdepartment=8b393fd99c3> where those that are interested can make future meeting agenda item suggestions or retrieve previous meeting documents such as resolution templates and letters of support. On a motion by Wenger, seconded by Neuens, the Secretary/Treasurer's Report was accepted as stated. Motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS –

5. Issues within the ANSWERS Region:

A. Economic-

1. McNamee expressed growing concern about potential increases in electricity costs in the Upper Michigan region. Also, he noted that nothing has been decided yet on the limestone gravel offer though the project has been shrunk down to about 7,000 acres. Chaney followed with Forest County's approval to add a 4-wheeler trail system from Crandon. Land purchases are also reviewed for future county forest management acreage. Gehlhoff reported on Florence County business growth including: one retail store recently breaking ground on a new building site in the Town of Florence; another wood manufacturer has an expansion underway; the new hardware/grocery store appeared to be doing well; and, a retail store relocated to US 2 in Florence from Iron Mountain, MI and is enjoying increased traffic/customer exposure.

B. Forestry–

1. **Sustainable Federal Forestry Committee Report:** Wenger stated that the group had recently met with US Senator Tammy Baldwin's and Ron Johnson's Offices where they appear to be appreciating the significance of requesting increased national forest harvests. State foresters

also seem to be on board and understand the need for improved US Forest management and the critical role it plays in increasing forest health, providing timber materials on the market, and in impacting local economies and budgets. Not much was reported as happening on the Michigan forests side with similar negative effects on the local economies. Wahlstrom-Stratton questioned Open House locations announced for districts of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest that included Eagle River and Laona offices as the nearest to Florence County. Gehlhoff followed up with a report on the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) grant project through Grow North where a 226 acre first timber sale was issued. This Stewardship Master Agreement for Region 9 also calls for a significantly larger second timber sale that is currently on hold. A conference call is scheduled to try to push this project forward.

2. **Bats and other endangered species that may affect forest management:** Kelley noted that a letter opposing Northern Long-Eared Bats being named as an “endangered” species was recently approved by the Florence County Board of Supervisors. Snyder distributed a handout from US Representative Sean Duffy who is leading the effort to urge the US National Fish and Wildlife Services to reconsider the potential burden to the forest industry and power line maintenance efforts, etc. in a species distinction that would pose forest habitat restrictions on what appears to be a fungus based disease problem that is ultimately causing a decline in bat populations. Snyder went on to say that over 100,000 comments had been received and they must follow a court ordered action with a final determination by 5 regional directors by April 2nd of 2015. Some special circumstances designations allow for more flexibility though he expressed logging concerns about a possible 45 day window consideration for bats nesting in trees. He also gave examples of current vaccine experiments and treatments being used to combat the white-nosed bat syndrome and recommends contacting other congressmen along with Senator Baldwin’s office to share opinions on this matter. Niehaus added that a draft letter is available online for those that are interested in making public comment. Chaney asked Snyder to also consider reducing the timeframe for US Forest Service to meet federal timber harvest quotas before forest management might be turned over to other local entities. Snyder will bring that suggestion back to Representative Duffy though he went on to explain the Good Neighbor Authority implemented to permit the head of a state agency with jurisdiction over state forestry programs to perform watershed restoration and protection services on National Forest System Lands and may allow the US Forest Service to reach out now for assistance in meeting federal harvesting quotas. McNamee motioned for the members to support Duffy’s efforts and send a letter to the US Fish & Wildlife Services opposing the long-eared bat being listed as an “endangered” species, supported by Chaney. All were in favor.
 3. **Opposition of returning the 25% Fund to the US Forest Service** – It was reported that Michigan has repaid these funds though the status of Wisconsin’s payback is unknown.
 4. **Any other forest issues** – none.
- C. **Mining issues:**
1. **Mining & Forestry Issues on lands with Indian Treaty Rights** – Research is currently being conducted in the Iron County, WI area where wetland delineation, inventories and specific sites are being identified for mining development. Squatters have primarily cleared off at this point. McNamee says the Eagle Mine is operating and things appear to be quiet and going well. Opposition seems to be somewhat satisfied as initial environmental concerns are alleviated. Snyder reports that Congressman Duffy will watch any over reach of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that may affect development of a local mine where similar operations were on the same site years ago. He wants to see the EPA to follow the guidelines of the Department of Natural Resources. This development should bring \$60,000

annual incomes to an area that is in desperate need of jobs. Wahlstrom-Stratton asked about the EPA contemplating removal of the word “navigable” in the description of public waters. Both states appear to be working on limiting the far reaching implications of this proposed language change. Wahlstrom-Stratton asked about deep freeze temperatures being considered for disaster relief, especially after last year’s severe weather related damages.

D. Railroad and other Transportation Issues:

1. **Northwood’s Rail Transit Commission** – Gehlhoff took part in a recent meeting with DOT and additional Michigan counties showcasing data collected on a rail freight study. Canadian National is looking for more shipping data to evaluate the upcoming rail needs. Also looking at a discontinuance on 77 miles of track near Ashland. Wenger asked about the Tiger Grant opportunities and how priority is given in railcar production where forestry ranks lower. A Tiger grant was applied for though not successful on the first time application. The Commission learned ways to improve if there is another opportunity for rolling stock rail cars where they hope to be able to service the whole Great Lake region through this public rail car ownership under Canadian National. Snyder would like to see this grant program funded again. Neuens reports that six miles of rail has been recently removed at Argonne with the steel relocated to the west side of the state. Canadian National are holding out their options yet to see future mining developments. McNamee reports that Escanaba seems busy reconstructing and refitting cars with railroad stock appearing all over on the lines.
2. **WI/MI ATV Updates:** Kelley reported that the Nicolet Trail by the Brule should be open for the snowmobile season. No efforts appear to have been made on reciprocal agreements between states on the trail. McNamee talks about confusion on the fee structure for trail permits that have undergone a significant increase in trail access charges. Not sure how that might affect Wisconsin.
3. **Update re: Waters of the US rulings by the EPA:** Snyder says that the comment period has been extended for changes to the definition of public waters. NACOs has been fighting this change as well as Highway Commissioners where this could affect upkeep of roads. Committee members questioned why this change is being proposed. All were asked to send in public comment. Kelley asked for the pleasure of the committee. Neuens motioned for ANSWERS to send public comment in opposition of this definition change by EPA, seconded by Chaney. Motion passed.
4. **Update re: EPA Air Quality rules and effect on energy costs:** Snyder says Duffy signed a letter asking for the public comment period to be extended. EPA proposal could change nation’s energy structure and to rethink some of the regulation on power plants. This could be a huge burden on business and communities. Langenhahn noted that agricultural combine use would not meet EPA regulations being entertained in a rule to control air quality and dust emissions.
5. **School Issues:** Niehaus had just attended a superintendent state conference and was pleased to have heard many speaking on the challenges facing rural schools and appreciated the message getting to Madison from the effort Representative Swearingen led last session. Federal forest income did help out the local district recently to offer some property tax relief. Niehaus also felt that if the Good Neighbor Rule was acted upon with federal forest harvests, it would give significant financial support to local schools and communities. Wahlstrom-Stratton asked about the interaction between PILT and the 25% fund. It appears that both are needed to assist local governments and school budgets though it was felt that PILT had never been adequately funded and that there may be some adjustment to state aid depending on the additional funding received. McNamee commented on Michigan’s PILT monies supporting Dickinson County with so much state owned land that is supposed to be subsidized by PILT

though it doesn't always happen the way it should. Any land now purchased through the Trust Fund is required to have the PILT funds assigned to it. Niehaus also talked about Florence Schools in the early stage of exploring the Fab Lab concept. With the great partnerships forming in the area, Niehaus felt it could mean more job skills developed locally to meet the rising demand for these manufacturing niches and skilled trades. Regional post-secondary educational opportunities are really expanding in the area. Gehlhoff talked about the "Heavy Metal" tour that had a great turnout in Rhinelander recently that was brought in through the Work Force Development Boards and Planning Commissions.

6. **New Business –**

A. **PILT Funding:** Snyder says once legislators get back after the election, they will request full funding for PILT. Kelley asked about the status of PILT in the federal Continuing Resolution which Snyder will check on. Wahlstrom-Stratton read from a NACO comment requesting that PILT funding be included. Florence County Supervisors will also send in a similar request. Kelley asked for the pleasure of the committee on this. Chaney moved to send in a letter from ANSWERS recommending to fully fund PILT in the federal Continuing Resolution, supported by Neuens. All were in favor.

B. **Wild Rivers Invasive Species Coalition (WRISC):** Snyder will check if there is any federal funding that could be steered to the WDNR or counties to address invasive species management. Wahlstrom-Stratton commented on the WRISC Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) to become a formal partner with no legally binding obligations. M. Yadro comments that this is a 5-county service area that is revising their MOU that currently has 23 formal partners. Roadside pathways were discussed as a serious weed management issues with limited mowing resources. Neuens stated that Florence County roadways had been inventoried for plant species about 4 years ago. McNamee talked about the phragmites treatment going on in Upper Michigan and all of the regulation involved with chemical treatments. Suszka asked about wild parsnip being designated as a "noxious weed." Several commented on extra mowing that appears to be happening in areas of concern. R. Yadro motioned to apply for membership as a formal partner to WRISC, supported by Neuens. M. Yadro will provide meeting minutes from the group. Motion passed.

1. **EPA Air Quality rules and effect on energy costs:** several Wisconsin power plants are switching from coal to natural gas, implementing new restrictions could cause significant price increases.

C. **Legislative Updates:** Snyder says there are 380 bills waiting for the new legislative session and hopefully getting some movement soon and will know more after the election.

D. **Future Agenda Items:** WRISC information; status of PILT. Chairman Kelley explained the recent "Chairman's Special Achievement" award presented to members of ANSWERS by the Lumberjack RC&D Council for their outstanding contributions in promoting good forest stewardship, as an advocate for forest management, and for the expanded use of forest products.

7. **Adjournment:** On a Motion by Chaney, supported by Erwin, the committee members agreed to adjourn until January 28, 2015. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Margie Yadro – Secretary/Treasurer
ANSWERS Committee