

Wisconsin County Forests Association



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



WISCONSIN COUNTY FORESTS ASSOCIATION

Wisconsin County Forests Association, Inc. (abbreviated WCFA) was established in 1968 to provide a forum for the consideration of issues, programs, and policies of the county forests. WCFA works with and represents interests of Forestry Committees of County Boards responsible for forestry programs in each of its 30 member counties.

Mission

The Wisconsin County Forests Association provides leadership uniting the interests of the world's largest county forest program while ensuring long-term forest health and sustainability.

Board Members

- Norman Bickford, Burnett County (President)
- Joe Waichulis, Clark County (Vice President)
- Greg Sekela, Oconto County (Treasurer)
- Al Mans, Marinette County
- Myron Brooks, Taylor County
- Ed Kelley, Florence County
- Bill Schradle, Barron County
- Phil Schneider, Rusk County
- William Bialecki, Lincoln County
- Arnold Schlei, Marathon County
- Ed Wafle, Juneau County
- Alan VanRaalte, Oneida County
- Michael Luedeke, Spooner, WI (Director-at-Large)
- Henry Schienebeck, Rhinelander, WI (Director-at-Large)



LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2020. What does one say about 2020? So much has changed in the world, it's hard to believe it's only been a year since I joined the Wisconsin County Forests Association as Executive Director. For me, 2020 has been the year of adjustment and learning, and in all honesty, a very challenging one. Trying to assimilate oneself into a new organization and structure amidst a global pandemic in a different place where everything is new is an extraordinary task. It's hard to adjust to a new normal when you have no idea what normal even is!

But regardless, despite the challenges, there's also been a lot of good. The Association and its members should be very proud of the work that we do. I have been thoroughly impressed in how this organization operates and the way the administrators lean on each other for assistance, and in turn offer help and advice. There's a wealth of knowledge amongst the 30 counties and each of them is stronger because of the collective.

A few highlights from my short time here include getting out and visiting a few counties (hopefully these will start back up soon), meeting partners and stakeholders, kicking off the WCFA Strategic Plan revision which will lead us into the future, attending the forest certification audit, seeing the 30th county added to the County Forest Law and sitting on the interview panel for the DNR's Chief State Forester position. Throughout the year, I've continually asked myself "What is WCFA?", "Are we doing what we say we'll do?", "Are we following the mission of WCFA?", and "How can we move forward and upward?" Certainly, all important questions as we look to the future while honoring the past.

It was apparent that for some it was very difficult to see Jane retire. I hope that I've been able to pick up where she left off and am successful in bringing WCFA to new heights. I sincerely thank all of you who have been supportive, encouraging and helpful to me over the last year. It's been a pleasure to become one of the team.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Luedtke

"DIG deep.
Get deliberate,
inspired and going."
- Brene Brown -



LETTER FROM ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Transition is the word pretty much summing up the last year for WCFA. Initially it was the transition of the Executive Director position. Adjustments were made by everyone involved as Rebekah joined the organization and took the reins. As the remaining staff person in WCFA, I was asked to help smooth the transition process and believe I was helpful in that aspect. Overall, I've been pleased how things have turned out. Bringing in someone from the outside is always a challenge but with it comes new opportunities and ideas.

The pandemic has also been a major transition, changing just about everything WCFA normally did and handled. I was disappointed with the cancellation of the Spring Meeting, one that took a significant time to put together and should have been one of the best WCFA ever had. We and others have had to adjust on the fly during this period trying to work around county and state restrictions. I also wish we could have had the second Strategic Planning Meeting and discussed at length how WCFA moves forward and does even a better job of serving its member counties.

The final transition for the year will be the movement of the WCFA office. To most of our member counties this won't be a big deal but will result in several organizational changes and a bit of muscle moving furniture. I do hope the move is a positive one for the organization but would have preferred this decision be done more closely in conjunction with the Strategic Planning process.

Finally, I want to thank Rebekah, the Board, staff of our member counties and our partner organizations for making my job easy and enjoyable. My hope is that I have met your expectations and provided you the support you needed. It's been wonderful working with the best people in the best county forest system in the world.

Best to all of you,

Gary Zimmer



RURAL WISCONSIN VOTERS COULD DETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF THE PRESIDENCY AGAIN

In just less than two months, rural Wisconsin voters will play a major role in determining if President Donald Trump wins another term or if former Vice President Biden takes office on January 20, 2021. This fall's election is the first time in 12 years that there will be no state-wide race on the ballot during a presidential year, so only the Presidential race is what will be motivating most voters this fall.

Currently, polls showing former Vice President and Democratic candidate Joe Biden leading Republican President Donald Trump consistently in the Badger State. A mid-August Marquette University Law School had Biden leading Trump by a 49 percent to 44 percent margin. However, this poll was done before either party's convention and Biden's pick of the U.S. Senator Kamala Harris of California as his running mate.

Most state and national political pundits believe that Wisconsin remains competitive, however, nearly all of them agree that the President has some work to do here to win the state like he did four years. In 2016, then Republican candidate Donald Trump surprised nearly all political observers by winning the Presidency. One of the main reasons why he became President was because he was the first Republican to win Wisconsin since 1984 winning by a very narrow margin due to the huge vote margins he received in rural Wisconsin.

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* recently provided an excellent analysis of how Trump was able to win Wisconsin in 2016 by focusing on the stark differences between rural and urban voters in their choice for President. The premise of their analysis was that if you divide Wisconsin into "metropolitan" counties and "non-metropolitan" counties, the state's 46 non-metro counties contain around 25 percent of the state's voters.

The "non-metro" voters accounted for 60 percent of the raw vote shift toward the GOP from the 2012 election to the 2016 election, proving that rural voters were the reason for Trump's narrow victory in Wisconsin. Specifically, big voter swings in small towns was what put Trump over the top.

Trump won these non-metro counties collectively by almost 19 points. No GOP nominee since the 1980s had won them by more than five points, according to the *Journal Sentinel's* analysis. Moreover, if you drill down to the local level, the smallest shifts toward the GOP from 2012 to 2016 occurred in larger communities while the biggest shifts (Trump's biggest gains) occurred in the smallest communities.

Trump's margins were about 2 points better, collectively, than Republican Mitt Romney's in communities of more than 10,000 people. But they were 20 points better in communities of under 1,000 people.

Rural Wisconsin is in the position to once again determine who the leader of the Free World will be in the upcoming election. It is important to note that election day is on November 3, however, Wisconsin residents already have begun voting early or by mail.

Shawn Pfaff is the President of Pfaff Public Affairs, LLC a government and public relations firm that represents the Wisconsin County Forests Association in the State Capitol.



HIGHLIGHTS & LOWLIGHTS

➤ New Executive Director

The end of 2019 saw the transition of Executive Director as Jane Severt retired from WCFA after 12 years at the helm. Rebekah Luedtke joined the Association on October 1st, moving to Wisconsin from Minnesota. Rebekah continues to sit on a number of committees and boards on behalf of WCFA such as the Council on Forestry, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLTPA), Trees for Tomorrow, and several others.

➤ Meetings and trainings

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 situation, the majority of WCFA's internal and external meetings have been cancelled or postponed since March. We're hopeful we can get back on track in 2021.

➤ Establishment of 30th County Forest

At the end of June, Adams County became the 30th county in Wisconsin to establish a County Forest by enrolling in §28.11. We're also very excited to have Adams County join as members of WCFA! Welcome!

➤ Market Shifts

2020 was definitely a challenging year for wood markets. While some markets went up, others went down reacting to the pandemic. The beginning of June saw the collapse of two of the largest mills in our region when Verso shut their doors in Wisconsin Rapids and Duluth. WCFA has been actively engaging with stakeholders, legislators and government officials in hopes that a solution will be found sooner rather than later.

➤ Forest Certification

The annual forest certification audit occurred in early August this year, after much discussion on whether or not to have the audit virtually or in person. After a fantastic showcase tour by Wood, Jackson, Marathon and Juneau Counties, the counties again received a clean audit, for the second year in a row! WCFA was present at the meetings, the field days and had one-on-one conversations with the auditors. These interactions have been proven to be beneficial and important to the whole audit, and this year was no exception.



➤ Outreach and Education

WCFA once again received a grant from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point to provide Environmental Education outreach hours. The counties did wonderful work and WCFA received \$50,000 for our collective efforts. In addition, WCFA funded a few other projects, through the GLTPA and the Wood Industry Collaborative, to help spread the message of sustainable forestry in Wisconsin.

WCFA also continues to be active with presentations at meetings and trainings, and staffing conference booths as time allows. In addition, we continue to sponsor and/or financially support education efforts through the North American Forest Partnership, Trees for Tomorrow and the Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association. Lastly, WCFA is working to boost our online presence, including on social media. Our Facebook "likes" or "followers" have increased 19% over the course of the year. It is a goal to keep increasing our online portfolio over time, including giving the WCFA website a refresh in 2021.



➤ Strategic Direction

The current strategic plan was developed by WCFA's Board of Directors, along with county forest administrators and WCFA staff, and formally adopted in June 2016. Unfortunately, just as WCFA was beginning to update our strategic plan earlier this year, the COVID-19 pandemic was emerging, pausing the revision. We are hopeful we can get a revised plan completed in 2021. We encourage all members to participate in the planning workshops, and to dream big and help mold the future direction of WCFA.

➤ Public Affairs

WCFA Board of Directors continues to contract with public affairs representative, Shawn Pfaff of Pfaff Public Affairs, who resides near Madison. This relationship continues to be a positive one, and services performed by him proved valuable during the development of Wisconsin's FY20-FY21 State Budget. Services provided by Mr. Pfaff are in addition to ongoing efforts by WCFA's Executive Director as a registered lobbyist. This arrangement continues to allow increased contact with state legislators, the office of the Wisconsin Governor and other policy making agencies regarding a variety of important issues related to natural resource management, transportation, tourism, etc. Politics continue to be important in our role as managers of a significant public resource. In the last adopted State budget Wisconsin County Forests received an increase in county forest road aid payments from Wisconsin Department of Transportation and an increase in sustainable forestry grant dollars from Wisconsin's Forestry Account, thanks in part to the efforts of WCFA.

WCFA is gearing up for the next State budget cycle, which is set to kick off this fall. We are discussing priorities and preparing issue briefs to advocate for policy changes and address funding challenges facing the counties. In addition, we will continue to be involved with hosting forestry tours for members of Wisconsin's federal congressional delegation and state legislators as requested.

➤ National Forest Affairs

WCFA remains actively involved with issues surrounding national forest management. We continue to be a member of the Federal Sustainable Forest Committee (FSFC) and WCFA's Board of Directors is on record in support of FSFC's efforts. In addition, Gary Zimmer continues to serve as secretary/treasurer of that committee and WCFA pays

him to fulfill those duties. The FSFC is focused on improving forest health through sound and sustainable forest management as identified in the CNNF plan.

Besides FSFC, WCFA frequently engages with staff and leadership of the CNNF on a variety of topics, providing comments on projects and federal legislation related to national forest management. We anticipate that the Public Forest Resource Group (PFRG) will re-form once a Chief State Forester is named for the WDNR. The PFRG pulls together leadership from the top 3 public land owners in the state (CNNF, WDNR & County Forests) to discuss and collaborate on issues.



➤ Committee Work

WCFA has a few internal standing committees who meet on a regular basis to address issues, develop guidance and work on a variety of tasks. Standing committees include the Executive Committee, Legislative & Forest Certification, Budget, Motorized Recreation and Personnel.

Legislative & Forest Certification Committee addresses the bulk of the issues that come before WCFA, including forest certification matters, audits, and annual findings. Of notable interest, the committee recently took it upon themselves to craft internal guidance in dealing with HCVs on county forest lands. Guidance such as this will help promote consistency amongst counties in how they deal with HCVs, including providing critical information for newer administrators. Mike Peterson, Washburn County Forest Administrator, is the current Chair of WCFA's Legislative & Forest Certification Committee.

Our Budget Committee, chaired by Tom Lovlien, Marathon County Forest Administrator, is tasked with dealing with budget matters both internal to WCFA and external to the State budget. Tasks include evaluating and recommending WCFA's membership structure and annual dues to our Board, WCFA's annual operating budget, discussing options for new revenue and developing priorities for State budget cycles.

Our Executive Committee provides oversight and input on organizational matters and deals with any immediate or time sensitive issues that may arise. WCFA staff, Board officers and County Forest Administrator President Patrick Smith, Florence County Forest Administrator, and Vice President Brian Loyd, Juneau County Forest Administrator make up the Executive Committee.

LOOKING FORWARD: CHALLENGES, GOALS, PRIORITIES

It's imperative to our continued success to keep looking forward and critically think about what WCFA can do and how we accomplish those things. As we evaluate where to take WCFA, the revision of our strategic plan is the place to do that, including exploring new options for generating revenue. So, one of the main goals for WCFA in the next year is to do just that, revise and implement a new strategic plan. We strongly encourage and request all our Board of Directors and members engage in this process, for at the end of the day, we work for you.

Beyond completing a strategic plan revision, the main challenge for WCFA and the Counties in the foreseeable future will be the State budget cycle and how the programs and/or grants our members rely on will fare in the budget. WCFA will be there in every discussion possible, being an advocate for our members.



FINANCIAL REPORT

2020 WCFA BUDGET

INCOME		
Acreage Assessment	\$	119,767.00
Annual Dues	\$	46,400.00
Interest Earned	\$	1,000.00
UWSP Center for EE Grants	\$	50,000.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$	217,167.00
EXPENSES		
WCFA Board of Directors:		
Board Travel & Meeting Expenses	\$	8,000.00
Board Per Diem	\$	4,000.00
Total Board of Directors	\$	12,000.00
Other Expenses:		
WCFA Committees	\$	5,000.00
WCFA Exec. Dir. Travel	\$	7,500.00
Asst. Executive Director Travel	\$	3,000.00
Public Relations & Education	\$	5,500.00
Bookkeeping	\$	20.00
Historical Records	\$	50.00
Insurance	\$	1,500.00
Association Dues	\$	2,200.00
Miscellaneous	\$	1,000.00
Total Other Expenses	\$	25,770.00
Office Expenses:		
Printing/Copying	\$	400.00
Computer/Printer Supplies	\$	600.00
Office Equipment	\$	500.00
Equipment Reserve Fund	\$	-
Filing Fees	\$	20.00
Telephone	\$	2,700.00
DSL	\$	500.00
Office Rent	\$	1,200.00
Postage	\$	500.00
General Office Supplies	\$	800.00
Total Office Expenses	\$	7,220.00
Payroll Expenses:		
Executive Director Salary	\$	74,789.00
Health Benefits	\$	23,023.00
Executive Director Retirement	\$	7,479.00
Asst. Executive Director Salary	\$	25,200.00
WCFA FICA Tax	\$	7,645.00
Total Payroll Expenses	\$	138,136.00
Contract Services:		
Accounting Fees	\$	500.00
Legal Fees	\$	1,000.00
Webmaster Fees	\$	1,500.00
Clerical Assistance	\$	2,000.00
Lobbyist	\$	12,000.00
Total Contract Services	\$	17,000.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$	200,126.00
NET GAIN TO WCFA	\$	17,041.00

Summary Of 2019 Financial Report

Total Income	\$ 237,503.62
Total Expenses	\$ 230,065.92
Net Gain to WCFA	\$ 7,437.70

Current List of Assets

(as of September 15, 2020)

Checking	\$ 13,672.51
Savings	\$ 172,586.45
Certificates of Deposit	\$ 127,772.74
Total Net Worth	\$ 314,031.70

WCFA Financial History

	Net Worth at Year Start	Net Gain/Loss at Year End	Dues	Acreage Assessment
2008	\$ 46,118.64	\$ (8,419.63)	\$ 850	\$ 0.0261
2009	\$ 37,699.01	\$ 20,472.66	\$ 1,000	\$ 0.0470
2010	\$ 58,171.67	\$ 45,353.56	\$ 1,375	\$ 0.0425
2011	\$ 103,525.23	\$ 36,994.76	\$ 1,375	\$ 0.0425
2012	\$ 140,519.99	\$ 12,035.23	\$ 1,250	\$ 0.0400
2013	\$ 152,555.22	\$ 29,230.00	\$ 1,250	\$ 0.0400
2014	\$ 181,785.22	\$ (10,072.08)	\$ 1,250	\$ 0.0400
2015	\$ 171,713.14	\$ (23,869.09)	\$ 1,600	\$ 0.0460
2016	\$ 147,844.05	\$ 30,914.58	\$ 1,600	\$ 0.0460
2017	\$ 178,758.63	\$ 13,683.41	\$ 1,600	\$ 0.0500
2018	\$ 192,442.04	\$ 29,601.73	\$ 1,600	\$ 0.0500
2019	\$ 222,043.77	\$ 3,568.81	\$ 1,600	\$ 0.0500
2020	\$ 225,612.58		\$ 1,600	\$ 0.0500

2021 CALENDAR

(subject to change)

- Wednesday, March 17th - WCFA Strategic Plan Workshop (Marshfield)
- Thursday & Friday, March 18th & 19th - Spring Meeting (Marshfield)
- Wednesday - Friday, June 23rd - 25th - Summer Tour, Vilas County (Eagle River)
- Wednesday & Thursday, September 22nd & 23rd - WCFA Annual Meeting (TBD)

WE'RE MOVING

As of October 5th, the WCFA office will be located at the Lincoln County Service Center in Merrill. With the move, almost all of our contact information will be changing. Please share and update your files accordingly.

NEW ADDRESS:

Lincoln County Service Center
801 N. Sales Street, Room 158
Merrill, WI 54452

NEW OFFICE PHONE NUMBER:

To be distributed at a later date.

NEW EMAIL ADDRESSES:

- Rebekah Luedtke: rebekah@wisconsincountyforests.com
- Gary Zimmer: gary@wisconsincountyforests.com
- info@wisconsincountyforests.com

