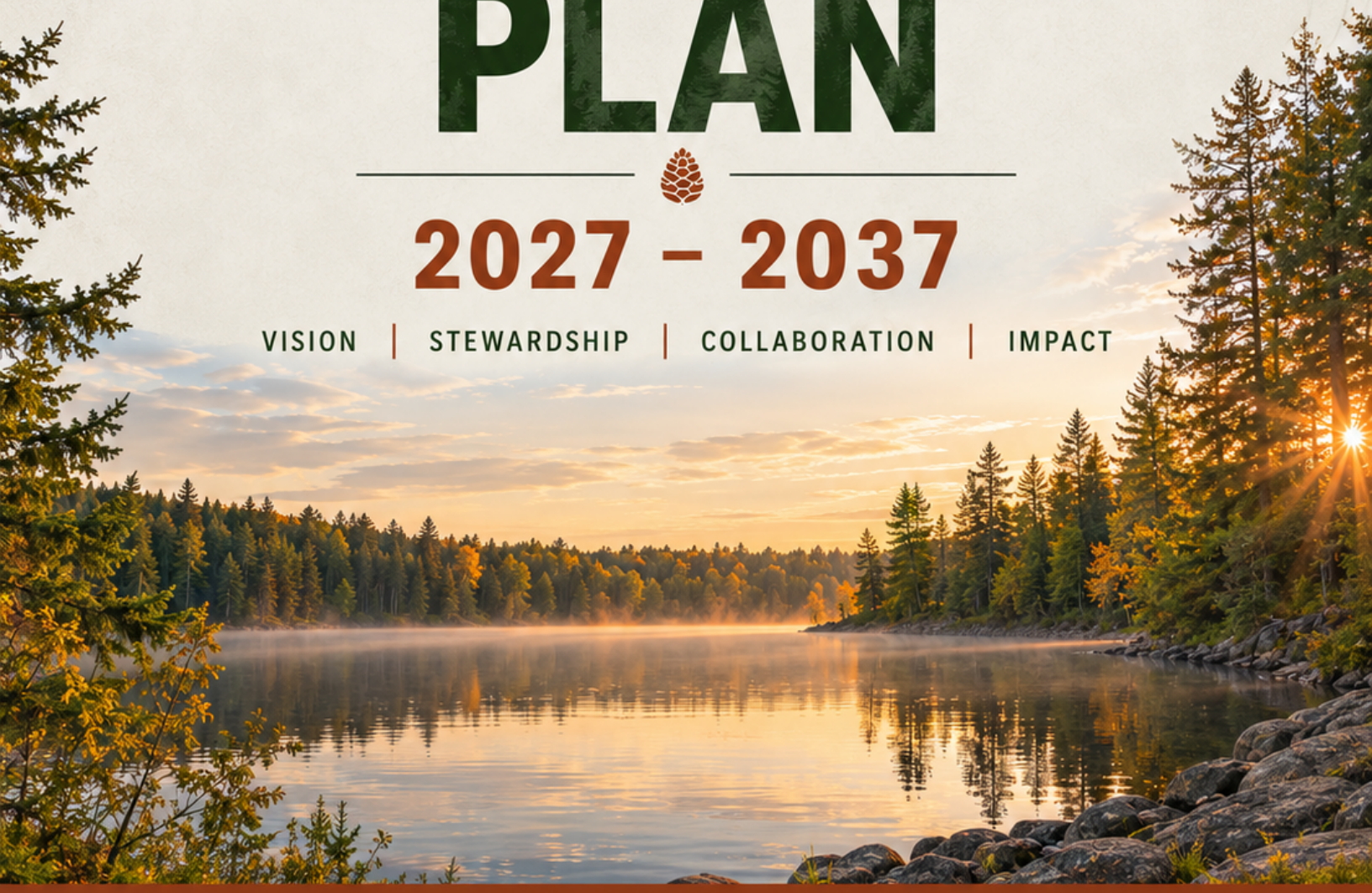
WISCONSIN COUNTY FORESTS ASSOCIATION
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STRATEGIC PLAN

2027 – 2037

VISION | STEWARDSHIP | COLLABORATION | IMPACT



2.4 MILLION ACRES. 30 COUNTIES. ONE SHARED COMMITMENT.

Healthy forests. Strong communities. Generations of stewardship.

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Wisconsin County Forests Association
Strategic Plan
2027-2037

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The Wisconsin County Forests Association, Inc

The Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) is a collaborative platform for members to discuss issues, programs, and policies affecting the county forests in Wisconsin. Established in 1968, WCFA is a not-for-profit, quasi-government organization whose membership is made up of the 30 counties in Wisconsin with lands enrolled in §28.11. Instead of each individual county dealing with issues on their own, WCFA takes on the responsibility to advocate on everyone's behalf.

The Association's professional staff act as a clearinghouse, providing communication and administrative services and serves as spokesperson for the organization. WCFA members and staff advocate for and represent the entire county forest system in a multitude of capacities. Since its formation, WCFA has provided an invaluable service to its 30 member counties, Wisconsin's forest products industry and to the people and visitors of Wisconsin. On many issues of concern, volunteer counsel and leadership by dedicated WCFA members and staff has enhanced the County Forest program. WCFA members also provide leadership on proposed legislation affecting forestry and forest land in Wisconsin.

The priorities and work of the Association are steered by a strategic plan geared towards the continued success and sustainability of its members and the important work they do. The 15-member Board of Directors is comprised of elected county board officials who serve on their respective County Board Forestry Committees. There are also several internal committees who help direct and craft the work accomplished by WCFA.

The Principles, Goals, and Actions identified in this plan define the work of the many parties that make up WCFA. While the Executive Director is responsible for much of the day-to-day work of WCFA, the Board of Directors, other staff, and County Forest Administrators play an important role in supporting and implementing many of the actions identified within.

VISION – the future we will achieve

The people's forests are sustained and enjoyed

We support each member county to manage their forests sustainably in the face of biological and socioeconomic challenges.

Residents, state and local elected officials understand the benefits of their county forests.

People benefit from their forests in many ways:

- Better health
- Recreation
- Food and medicine
- Thriving rural communities with strong forestry and tourism businesses.
- County programs funded by timber sale revenue.
- Local forestry businesses and employment supported by forest product industries which employ people and serve markets around the world.

MISSION – the work we will do

We provide resources for our member counties to succeed in their many forestry endeavors.

We grow trusting relationships with state and local elected officials.

We provide leadership on forest policy.

We partner with state agencies and recreation user groups.

We partner with, support and advocate for forest industry in Wisconsin.

We tell the story of forestry in ways that make sense to different people: New county forest staff; County supervisors; State legislators; Children; Adults

We build a diverse funding structure to provide these resources.

VALUES – our "why"

We stand together for …

- thriving forests
- thriving counties and communities
- work we can be proud of



Principles & Goals

PRINCIPAL 1 | WCFA supports the forest economy through policy, investment, and partnerships

1.1 Advance policies, investments, and partnerships that expand markets and support innovation in Wisconsin's forest products industry.
1.2 Strengthen recruitment, retention, succession planning, and professional development for the county-forest workforce.
1.3 Increase policymaker understanding of WCFA priorities and county-forest needs.
1.4 Maintain effective, accountable advocacy on issues important to WCFA.
1.5 Maintain and continue to foster the partnership with WI DNR rooted in Wis. Stat. § 28.11.

PRINCIPAL 2 | Counties realize the economic impacts of their county forests

2.1 Increase county supervisors' understanding of WCFA and the county-forest program.
2.2 Increase local officials' understanding of the economic, recreational, environmental, and community benefits of county forests.
2.3 Ensure local policy and regulatory decisions reflect their effects on county-forest operations.

PRINCIPAL 3 | Members have the expertise to implement sustainable forest management

3.1 Ensure County Forest Administrators have the knowledge and training needed to implement sustainable forestry.
3.2 Strengthen peer learning and mutual support among County Forest Administrators.
3.3 Connect county forests with relevant research and make findings usable for practitioners.

PRINCIPAL 4 | Increased awareness and understanding of Wisconsin County Forests and Wisconsin's forestry industry through coordinated communications, media engagement, and storytelling

4.1 Provide members with consistent, ready-to-use communication tools.
4.2 Expand accurate, positive media coverage of Wisconsin county forests.
4.3 Increase outdoor recreation users' awareness of county forests and their multiple benefits.
4.4 Increase youth and educator engagement with county forests and forestry careers.

PRINCIPAL 5 | Engaged membership that sustains a strong, effective association

5.1 Improve onboarding and participation among County Forest Administrators, committee members, and other member representatives.
5.2 Make WCFA meetings and networking opportunities accessible, useful, and engaging.
5.3 Increase member contributions to WCFA priorities and organizational leadership.
5.4 Diversify and strengthen WCFA revenue to support long-term organizational stability.

PRINCIPAL 1 | WCFA supports the forest economy through policy, investment, and partnerships	
1.1 Advance policies, investments, and partnerships that expand markets and support innovation in Wisconsin's forest products industry.	
1.1.1	Define and annually update WCFA's priority policy and investment recommendations, including Wisconsin Forests FIRST initiatives.
1.1.2	Build or strengthen relationships with WCA, WTA, GLTPA, WATVA, economic-development organizations, and other aligned partners.
1.1.3	Develop concise policy briefs that explain the county-forest need, proposed solution, benefits, and requested action.
1.1.4	Identify and support pilot projects or emerging technologies that create markets for county-forest products.
1.1.5	Track policy progress, partner commitments, and investments influenced by WCFA.
1.2 Strengthen recruitment, retention, succession planning, and professional development for the county-forest workforce.	
1.2.1	Assess workforce vacancies, projected retirements, recruitment barriers, and high-priority skill gaps across member counties.
1.2.2	Develop a county-forestry careers toolkit for colleges, technical schools, job fairs, and member outreach.
1.2.3	Create job-shadow, internship, or early-career networking opportunities with member counties and education partners.
1.2.4	Compile and share effective county practices for onboarding, retention, knowledge transfer, and succession planning.
1.2.5	Advocate for competitive staffing resources and investments needed to sustain county-forest operations.
1.3 Increase policymaker understanding of WCFA priorities and county-forest needs.	
1.3.1	Continue an annual Capitol Day with clear member talking points and coordinated follow-up.
1.3.2	Invite local, state, and federal officials to county-forest tours, field days, meetings, and project demonstrations.
1.3.3	Review WCFA's legislative outreach plan after elections and update contacts, committee assignments, and messages.
1.3.4	Provide members with issue briefs, testimony templates, and guidance for communicating with elected officials.
1.3.5	Maintain a contact and engagement log to support timely, nonpartisan relationship-building.
1.4 Maintain effective, accountable advocacy on issues important to WCFA.	
1.4.1	Set an annual legislative agenda with defined priorities, desired outcomes, and decision points.
1.4.2	Integrate the contract lobbyist into staff and board planning, with clear roles and communication protocols.
1.4.3	Provide regular updates on legislative activity, accomplishments, risks, and member action opportunities.
1.4.4	Establish a rapid-response process for analyzing proposals and coordinating WCFA positions.
1.4.5	Evaluate advocacy results annually and adjust strategies based on outcomes and member feedback.
1.5 Maintain and continue to foster the partnership with WI DNR rooted in Wisconsin State Statute 28.11.	
1.5.1	Participate in DNR Strategic Direction planning and implementation efforts.
1.5.2	Participate in Forest Certification processes and audits.
1.5.3	Continue to engage DNR Forestry, Wildlife, Waterways, Natural Heritage Conservation staff on issues impacting County Forests.
1.5.4	Continue to invite and encourage DNR participation in trainings, field reviews and WCFA meetings.

PRINCIPAL 2 | Counties realize the economic impacts of their county forests	
2.1 Increase county supervisors' understanding of WCFA and the county-forest program.	
2.1.1	Track county-board and forestry-committee membership changes following elections and appointments.
2.1.2	Provide a concise orientation packet and briefing for newly assigned supervisors and committee members.
2.1.3	Visit at least six county forest committees each year so all member counties are reached within five years.
2.1.4	Equip County Forest Administrators to deliver a consistent overview of WCFA, program responsibilities, and local benefits.
2.1.5	Create an annual county-forest highlights report that members can present to county boards.
2.2 Increase local officials' understanding of the economic, recreational, environmental, and community benefits of county forests.	
2.2.1	Complete the county-forest economic impact study, including forest products, recreation, employment, and local spending.
2.2.2	Translate study findings into county-level fact sheets, presentations, infographics, and talking points.
2.2.3	Explain related public benefits such as ecosystem services, tourism, tax implications, and payment programs where data are available.
2.2.4	Brief county administrators, economic-development organizations, town officials, and other local leaders on relevant findings.
2.2.5	Refresh core impact data on a regular schedule and document examples of local use.
2.3 Ensure local policy and regulatory decisions reflect their effects on county-forest operations.	
2.3.1	Monitor county and town agendas for proposals that could materially affect county-forest management or access.
2.3.2	Develop a simple impact-analysis template covering cost, staffing, safety, timber management, recreation, and legal considerations.
2.3.3	Provide timely, factual briefings to affected officials and member counties before key decisions.
2.3.4	Facilitate communication among County Forest Administrators, committees, and local legislators when an issue crosses jurisdictions.
2.3.5	Document significant decisions and share lessons learned with members.

PRINCIPAL 3 | Members have the expertise to implement sustainable forest management	
3.1 Ensure County Forest Administrators have the knowledge and training needed to implement sustainable forestry.	
3.1.1	Assess member training needs annually and publish a coordinated professional-development calendar.
3.1.2	Offer practical training on forest management, certification, recreation, safety, leadership, budgeting, and emerging issues.
3.1.3	Develop a recommended core curriculum and onboarding checklist for new County Forest Administrators.
3.1.4	Strengthen DNR–county participation in trainings, field reviews, and county-forest program discussions.
3.1.5	Evaluate each training and use results to improve future offerings.
3.2 Strengthen peer learning and mutual support among County Forest Administrators.	
3.2.1	Maintain and actively promote a member question-and-answer platform and searchable resource archive.
3.2.2	Establish a voluntary mentorship program for new and transitioning County Forest Administrators.
3.2.3	Support regional meetings and field days that demonstrate practices, projects, and lessons learned.
3.2.4	Create recurring peer roundtables for timely operational challenges and shared problem-solving.
3.2.5	Recognize and share member innovations, templates, and successful practices.
3.3 Connect county forests with relevant research and make findings usable for practitioners.	
3.3.1	Gather and prioritize research questions from member counties each year.
3.3.2	Build working relationships with universities, Extension, DNR, federal agencies, and other research organizations.
3.3.3	Connect researchers with interested counties and clarify expectations for access, data, results, and communication.
3.3.4	Translate relevant findings into short practitioner summaries, webinars, and field demonstrations.
3.3.5	Expand learning exchanges with state, federal, tribal, and private forest managers.

PRINCIPAL 4 | Increased awareness and understanding of Wisconsin County Forests and Wisconsin's forestry industry through coordinated communications, media engagement, and storytelling	
4.1 Provide members with consistent, ready-to-use communication tools.	
4.1.1	Establish brand, message, and style guidance for WCFA and shared county-forest communications.
4.1.2	Build a central library of fact sheets, presentations, signage, media templates, photos, videos, and ready-made stories.
4.1.3	Create a recurring package of adaptable social-media posts and short-form content for members.
4.1.4	Develop a simple process for members to submit local stories, photos, accomplishments, and data.
4.1.5	Review and refresh the communication library at least annually.
4.2 Expand accurate, positive media coverage of Wisconsin county forests.	
4.2.1	Develop an annual editorial calendar tied to forestry seasons, Forest Products Week, recreation, and major milestones.
4.2.2	Build relationships with statewide, regional, trade, and outdoor media contacts.
4.2.3	Partner with experienced communicators and aligned campaigns, including #forestproud and Wisconsin education organizations where useful.
4.2.4	Host or support media field days that give reporters direct access to county-forest stories and experts.
4.2.5	Use the 2028 county-forest centennial and WCFA's organizational milestones as anchors for coordinated storytelling.
4.3 Increase outdoor recreation users' awareness of county forests and their multiple benefits.	
4.3.1	Partner with recreation, tourism, wildlife, and user-group organizations on shared messages and outreach.
4.3.2	Develop trailhead, event, web, and social content explaining county-forest ownership, management, and public benefits.
4.3.3	Help counties incorporate consistent county-forest messages into maps, signage, visitor information, and events.
4.3.4	Use surveys or event feedback to identify common knowledge gaps and information needs.
4.3.5	Highlight how sustainable forestry supports recreation, wildlife habitat, local economies, and public access.
4.4 Increase youth and educator engagement with county forests and forestry careers.	
4.4.1	Strengthen partnerships with LEAF, Trees For Tomorrow, school forests, Extension, colleges, and other education organizations.
4.4.2	Develop adaptable classroom, field-day, Arbor Day, and career-exploration materials.
4.4.3	Support county staff participation in school visits, teacher field days, job shadows, and career events.
4.4.4	Create a directory of county-forest sites, speakers, and learning opportunities for educators.
4.4.5	Connect youth outreach with internships, job shadows, and county-forestry career pathways.

PRINCIPAL 5 | Engaged membership that sustains a strong, effective association	
5.1 Improve onboarding and participation among County Forest Administrators, committee members, and other member representatives.	
5.1.1	Define baseline participation and set a board-approved target for engaging new or previously less-active members.
5.1.2	Create role-specific onboarding materials for County Forest Administrators, forestry committee members, and board members.
5.1.3	Contact new administrators and committee leaders promptly following staff, election, or appointment changes.
5.1.4	Offer a brief annual orientation to WCFA programs, governance, benefits, and ways to participate.
5.1.5	Track participation by county and use targeted outreach to address gaps.
5.2 Make WCFA meetings and networking opportunities accessible, useful, and engaging.	
5.2.1	Evaluate meeting timing, format, location, cost, and content through regular member feedback.
5.2.2	Use a balanced mix of statewide, regional, virtual, and field-based opportunities.
5.2.3	Build structured peer networking and problem-solving time into major meetings.
5.2.4	Review attendance and satisfaction data after major events and adjust accordingly.
5.3 Increase member contributions to WCFA priorities and organizational leadership.	
5.3.1	Use short-term work groups with clear assignments, timelines, deliverables, and staff support.
5.3.2	Provide advocacy, facilitation, and leadership training for members and prospective board members.
5.3.3	Develop a board leadership and succession pipeline, including orientation and officer preparation.
5.3.4	Recognize member contributions and report how volunteer work advances strategic priorities.
5.3.5	Provide annual strategic plan progress reports to members and conduct a comprehensive five-year review to assess accomplishments, reaffirm priorities, and recommend necessary revisions.
5.4 Diversify and strengthen WCFA revenue to support long-term organizational stability.	
5.4.1	Inventory current revenue, restrictions, concentration risks, and near-term funding opportunities.
5.4.2	Evaluate earned revenue, sponsorships, grants, partnerships, fundraising, and member-supported options against mission and staff capacity.
5.4.3	Adopt a prioritized revenue plan with responsibilities, costs, expected returns, and decision points.
5.4.4	Pilot two or three feasible revenue initiatives and evaluate results before expanding them.
5.4.5	Establish board-approved targets for revenue diversity, unrestricted income, and operating reserves.

SUGGESTED MEASURES

PRINCIPAL 1 | WCFA supports the forest economy through policy, investment, and partnerships		Suggested Measure
1.1	Advance policies, investments, and partnerships that expand markets and support innovation in Wisconsin's forest products industry.	Priority recommendations are current; partner initiatives and policy or investment outcomes are documented.
1.2	Strengthen recruitment, retention, succession planning, and professional development for the county-forest workforce.	Workforce needs are assessed; recruitment partnerships and succession resources are in use; vacancies and participation are tracked.
1.3	Increase policymaker understanding of WCFA priorities and county-forest needs.	Policymaker participation, meetings, follow-ups, and demonstrated support for WCFA priorities increase.
1.4	Maintain effective, accountable advocacy on issues important to WCFA.	Members receive timely updates; responses are coordinated; annual advocacy outcomes are reviewed by the board.
1.5	Maintain and continue to foster the partnership with WI DNR rooted in Wisconsin State Statute 28.11.	WCFA included in DNR planning processes; Improved DNR/CFA relationships through meaningful collaboration; Improved participation by DNR in WCFA.

PRINCIPAL 2 | Counties realize the economic impacts of their county forests		Suggested Measure
2.1	Increase county supervisors' understanding of WCFA and the county-forest program.	New officials receive orientation; six committee visits occur annually; understanding is assessed through feedback.
2.2	Increase local officials' understanding of the economic, recreational, environmental, and community benefits of county forests.	Impact materials are completed and used; local briefings and audience reach are tracked.
2.3	Ensure local policy and regulatory decisions reflect their effects on county-forest operations.	Priority proposals receive timely analysis; member counties report that WCFA information supported decision-making.

PRINCIPAL 3 | Members have the expertise to implement sustainable forest management		Suggested Measure
3.1	Ensure County Forest Administrators have the knowledge and training needed to implement sustainable forestry.	Training participation, priority skill coverage, and participant feedback improve over the plan period.
3.2	Strengthen peer learning and mutual support among County Forest Administrators.	Mentor matches, peer exchanges, shared resources, and member use of the Q&A platform are tracked.
3.3	Connect county forests with relevant research and make findings usable for practitioners.	Member research priorities are documented; projects and practitioner-oriented research products increase.

SUGGESTED MEASURES

PRINCIPAL 4 | Increased awareness and understanding of Wisconsin County Forests and Wisconsin's forestry industry through coordinated communications, media engagement, and storytelling		Suggested Measure
4.1	Provide members with consistent, ready-to-use communication tools.	A current communication library exists and member downloads, submissions, and use are tracked.
4.2	Expand accurate, positive media coverage of Wisconsin county forests.	Media contacts, pitches, earned stories, audience reach, and member amplification increase.
4.3	Increase outdoor recreation users' awareness of county forests and their multiple benefits.	Partner reach and use of county-forest materials increase; audience feedback shows improved awareness.
4.4	Increase youth and educator engagement with county forests and forestry careers.	Education partnerships, youth contacts, field experiences, and career-exploration opportunities are tracked.

PRINCIPAL 5 | Engaged membership that sustains a strong, effective association		Suggested Measure
5.1	Improve onboarding and participation among County Forest Administrators, committee members, and other member representatives.	A participation baseline and target are approved; onboarding is timely; participation broadens across counties.
5.2	Make WCFA meetings and networking opportunities accessible, useful, and engaging.	Attendance, county representation, networking value, and satisfaction are monitored and improve.
5.3	Increase member contributions to WCFA priorities and organizational leadership.	Volunteer participation, completed deliverables, and the pool of prepared board leaders increase.
5.4	Diversify and strengthen WCFA revenue to support long-term organizational stability.	At least two revenue pilots are completed; revenue concentration and progress toward board-approved targets are reported annually.

Appendix A: Glossary and Acronyms

- BOD – Board of Directors. Referring to the WCFA Board of Directors
- CFA – County Forest Administrator. Referring to the Department heads or key person responsible for the forestry program of each individual county.
- DNR – Department of Natural Resources
- DOF – DNR Division of Forestry
- ED – Executive Director. Referring to the WCFA Executive Director
- GLTPA – Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association
- LEAF – Refers to Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program
- SAF – Society of American Foresters
- TFT – Trees for Tomorrow
- USFS – United States Forest Service
- UW – University of Wisconsin
- UWSP – University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point
- WATVA – Wisconsin ATV Association
- WCA – Wisconsin Counties Association
- WTA – Wisconsin Towns Association



Rusk County

Appendix B: Strategic Plan Development Process

In October 2025, Executive Director Rebekah Luedtke and Kris Tiles, University of Wisconsin – Madison Extension began discussions to update the WCFA strategic plan. Work was started in November 2025 to scope out the next plan process and timeline.

In April 2026, a survey was sent to all members and employees of Wisconsin County Forests Association. The survey remained open for about one month. In total, 69 surveys were distributed, with 42 surveys started for a 61% response rate. Survey questions included:

- Values, Vision and Mission
- Ranking of 2022-2026 Strategic Plan Principles
- Mission critical actions
- Open-ended recommendations for 2027-2037 plan
- Recommendations for start, stop, continue

Summaries of survey responses resulted in the creation of 5 draft principles and potential goals or actions. These draft principles were brought to an in-person strategic plan meeting. All members, WCFA board of directors and WCFA employees were invited to participate. On August 19, 2026, twenty-eight (28) individuals attended; 15 counties were represented, and 7 BOD members were present. The day consisted of prioritizing the principles and small group work identifying actions for the various principles. Input from the strategic planning workshop was compiled, organized, and refined with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools. The resulting draft principles, goals, and actions were reviewed and finalized through WCFA's strategic planning and approval process.

On September 23, 2026, the Wisconsin County Forests Association Board of Directors approved the principles, goals, and actions found in the 2027-2037 strategic plan.



Strategic Plan Workshop, August 19, 2026. Merrill

Appendix C: Measuring Strategic Plan Progress

The most important piece of developing a solid strategic plan is the follow-through and the implementation of action plans. In order to evaluate the strategic plan's effectiveness and impact, the following steps will be taken to measure success and keep WCFA's mission at the forefront.

- Invest in a strategic plan dashboard to aid in monitoring, tracking and reporting.
- Having a qualitative and quantitative avenue to capture impacts, accomplishments and problem areas is vital to understanding performance (good or bad) of the plan.
- Quarterly review and monitoring of the plan by WCFA staff.
- At minimum, WCFA staff will review the plan's goals, actions and tactics to ensure work is aligning with the plan, or if adjustments need to be made, every quarter.
- Annual review monitoring of the plan by WCFA Board of Directors.
- At the fall Board of Directors meeting, the board members will review the plan's goals and actions, their progress, what has been achieved for the year and set out needs for the next year.
- At the 5-year mark, provide a more comprehensive overview of Strategic Plan update and propose any necessary revisions for the remaining 5 years.
- WCFA staff, members and directors will keep an eye out for opportunities throughout the year and life of the strategic plan to capitalize on, leading to the accomplishment of goals and actions.
- The Executive Director will maintain an annual implementation work plan identifying priority actions, responsible parties, anticipated timelines, and progress measures, with regular updates provided to the Board of Directors.
- It should be noted that if through the life of the strategic plan, adjustments or amendments should be made to the plan, the WCFA Board of Directors, in consultation with WCFA staff, has the ability to do so.



Douglas County