



Sawyer County

Agenda

Economic Development & UW Extension Committee Meeting
Monday, February 8, 2021 @ 8:30 AM
Assembly Room/Virtual Meeting

Page

1. CALL TO ORDER

- a. The public is **strongly encouraged** to access the public meeting remotely due to public health and safety concerns. To view or participate in the **virtual meeting** from a computer, iPad, or Android device please go to <https://zoom.us/j/97642007840>. You can also use the dial in number for listening only at 1-312-626-6799 with the Webinar ID: 976 4200 7840. If additional assistance is needed please contact the County Clerk's Office at 715-634-4866 prior to the meeting.
- b. If you are on a computer, click the "Raise Hand" button and wait to be recognized.
- c. If you are on a telephone, dial *9 and wait to be recognized.

2. CERTIFICATION OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE OPEN MEETINGS LAW, ROLL CALL

3. MEETING AGENDA

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

5. CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

- a. [Economic Development.UW-Extension Minutes of 1.11.21](#)

6. SAWYER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL FAIR ASSOCIATION REPORT

7. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION DEPARTMENT REPORT

- a. [Project Discovery 1-21-21 UWEX](#)

8. HAYWARD LAKES VISITORS & CONVENTION BUREAU REPORT

- a. [Hayward Lakes Report Feb 2021](#)

9. NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION REPORT

10. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION REPORT

- 7 - 8 a. Economic Development Director Report
 [EDC Activity Report January 2021](#)
- 9 - 23 b. Heart of the North Report
 [HON Issues 2021 \(002\)](#)

11. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- a. Discussion with Sawyer County Historical Society
 Representatives

12. OTHER MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

A quorum of the County Board of Supervisors or of any of its committees may be present at this meeting to listen and observe. Neither the Board nor any of the committees have established attendance at this meeting as an official function of the Board or committee(s) or otherwise made a determination that attendance at the meeting is necessary to carry out the Board or committee's function. The only purpose for other supervisors attending the meeting is to listen to the information presented. Neither the Board nor any committee (other than the committee providing this notice and agenda) will take any official action with respect to this noticed meeting.

Copy sent via email to: County Clerk and News Media. Note: Any person wishing to attend whom, because of a disability, requires accommodation should call the Sawyer County Clerk's Office (715.634.4866) at least 24 hours before the scheduled meeting so appropriate arrangements can be made.

**Minutes of the January 11th meeting of the Sawyer County
Economic Development and UW-Extension Committee
Of the Sawyer County Board of Supervisors
Assembly Room; Sawyer County**



Voting Committee Members Present:

- ☒ Chair: **James Schlender**
- ☒ Tom Duffy
- ☒ Jesse Boettcher
- ☒ Dale Schleeter

Others Present:

Tom Hoff
Mike Coleson
Lynn Fitch
Lori Baltrusis – Virtual
Mike Gardner -- Virtual
Sherry Beckman – Virtual
Janice Snider -- Virtual

Call to Order – Chair James Schlender called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. Roll Call taken.

Certification of Compliance with the open meeting law was met.

Minutes – A motion was made by Tom Duffy to approve the minutes of the December 7, 2020, meeting; second by Jesse Boettcher. Motion carried.

Sawyer County Agricultural Fair Association Report – Janice Snider reported for the Fair Association that new officers were elected at the annual meeting. The committee continues to plan for next summer's fair and the annual Fair fundraising social event, keeping in mind COVID-19 restrictions.

University of Wisconsin-Extension Department Report – Lori Baltrusis reported for UW-Extension. The Extension will be creating written reports on a quarterly basis instead of monthly. Due to COVID-19 constraints, staff and educators are operating virtually and remain available to the County.

Hayward Lakes Visitors & Convention Bureau – Sherry Beckman provided a written report and went through the highlights of the data. Downloads to the website have doubled since 2019; they have decreased the number of printed guidebooks; the sport of fishing has now moved to the top of the interest criteria on the website search engine which has shown a 6% increase in activity this past year. The City of Milwaukee has moved to the top of the inquiry list over Madison this past year in searches, and female viewership has increased 4%. The committee requested an updated room tax report and Sherry will send that to Board members.

Economic Development Report – Mike Gardner provided a written report and a verbal update on recent activities. The Sawyer County/Lac Courte Oreilles Economic Development Committee is beginning to receive information on new Covid government programs, and he is assisting area residents in navigating the new information. There is more support for loggers and truckers in this round. Mr. Gardner attended the Heart of the North Legislative Day and advised that he will be working on issues that affect Sawyer County. He is now beginning to meet with individual businesses to see how the EDC can assist them and also build their membership.

Meeting Date/Time – The next meeting of the Economic Development and UW-Extension Committee will be Monday, February 8, at 8:30 am in the Assembly Room.

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 am
Minutes recorded by Lynn Fitch, County Clerk

3RD WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH
6:30-7:30 VIA ZOOM

PAPER ART

ALL AGES

Throw out the brushes, drop the scissors, hide the paint AND bring your glue. Join us for an opportunity to create beautiful works of art with only paper, glue and your own two hands.

3RD TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH
AT 7:00 PM VIA ZOOM

ANIMAL SCIENCE

3RD - 8TH GRADE

Come along with me for the next 6 months and learn all about animals, from small to large! We will take time to get to know a few of your favorite species and understand more about them and how to manage them.

PROJECT DISCOVERY

Join us for hands-on fun!



Register Online
wi.4honline.com

sign into 4-H online and click events.
Not a 4-H member? See our More Information website for instructions on how to register.

More Information?

<https://sites.google.com/wisc.edu/area2/projects>

Registration is Ongoing
some projects have limited space/supplies.

WHO?

Anyone in Barron, Burnett, Rusk, Sawyer, or Washburn Counties (or our neighbors)

WHEN?

January 2021-June 2021
times/dates vary

Can't make it every time? No problem, most activities can be completed on your own!

WHAT?

Come learn about 4-H projects (whether you're a 4-H member or not) and even make some ready for the fair (check with your county fair for guidelines)

4TH WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH
7:00 PM VIA ZOOM

STEAM TEAM

3RD-6TH GRADE

Explore the world of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. Learn from your peers using the design process. We will start with circuitry and continue on from there!

3RD MONDAY OF EACH MONTH
6:30-7:30 PM VIA ZOOM

FOOD, SCIENCE & FUN

3RD GRADE THROUGH ADULT

Partnering with FoodWise to offer a Foods & Nutrition and Food Science program for youth and adults together. During our time, we will be doing some food experiments and demonstrations, recipe sharing, culinary skill development, and more!

4TH TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH
6:30 PM VIA ZOOM

OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP

HIGH SCHOOL

Have you ever wondered what skills it takes to be an outdoor leader? Maybe you even have some of them! Here is your chance to learn many skills that apply both to the outdoors and other settings.

2ND MONDAY OF EACH MONTH
6:00-6:45 PM VIA ZOOM

CLOVERBUDS PROJECT

5K-2ND GRADE

The Cloverbuds Project is designed for youth grades 5K-2nd grade to explore and discover project areas. These monthly sessions will provide fun instruction from the Cloverbud Activity/Record Book published by Extension Burnett County.



Questions? Contact:

Beth Rank, Burnett
beth.rank@wisc.edu

Anna DeMers, Washburn
anna.demers@wisc.edu

Sky Holt, Sawyer
sky.holt@wisc.edu

Sara Waldron, Barron
sara.waldron@wisc.edu

Breanne Meyer, Rusk
breanne.meyer@wisc.edu

February 2021
Hayward Lakes VCB Marketing Report

Midwest Outdoors TV-episode in partnership with Lake Chippewa Flowage Resort Association will air in April on WDIO TV-10 Duluth/Superior Sunday at 11:30 am and 10:35 pm, FOX Sports North on Saturday at 9:30 am. Bonus footage aired on December 19, 2020 ice fishing.

Travel Writer-we hosted Jacqueline Kehoe for a media visit to the Northwoods on January 23rd. She was very impressed with our area. Located in Madison, Wisconsin, Jaqueline is a writer, editor and photographer for publications including *National Geographic*, *AFAR*, *Fodor's*, *Oh! Ranger*, *USAToday*, and others. She is also Matador Network's lead branded content editor, working with DMOs and brands like Toyota, Lufthansa and Visit Britain.

Let's Talk Hayward Facebook "live"- John Myhre and Sherry co-hosted the first episode on January 14th. Huge success...over 5,100 followers tuned in to watch the episode. Our guests included Pete Mania and Jarrett McCarthy (ice fishing) and Ben Popp (Birkie). Next show to air is on February 19th at 6³⁰ pm with experts on snowmobiling, ice fishing and snowshoeing.

WI Indian Head Country's Governors Fishing Opener- Hayward is the host town. May 1st
Fish Fry-Friday 11 am – 2pm at the Hall of Fame

Discover Wisconsin Episode Filming-finished filming winter activities January 27 & 28 with Discover Wisconsin staff. The TV episode will air April 17, 2021 and live stream in late March, 2021. Second TV airing probably will air in October 2021.

NW WI ITBEC-new trail guide at the printer

Snap A Selfie Snowmobile Contest-goes until the end of February. We reached over 18,000 friends and fans on *Facebook* and *Instagram* since December 16th.

Trail Genius-Snowmobiling will be captured on video on February 9th to be used to freshen up website content and social media. This is also a part of the JEM grant funding we received from the Department of Tourism.

Videography-hired Beau Peterson Photography to produce 30 second videos highlighting lodging properties to use on social media. He is also producing a video to solicit new members.

Website: ADA compatibility

Sport Shows: we will attend Eau Claire and the Milwaukee sport shows in April 16-18.

PR:

Midwest Outdoors- Chippewa Flowage Ice Fishing (he was reading a Hayward Lakes VG).December 19th.

Fox 21 online-A 'Lure' of Lights expected to Help Hayward Businesses. December 1, 2020

WI Public Radio-Report:Outdoor Recreations worth 7.8 billion to WI Economy (Sawyer County) December 21, 2020

Silent Sports Magazine=Birkie in several articles January 2021

CBS Channel 6 KDLH Duluth TV-Snap a Selfie snowmobile promotion, January 12, 2021

[Type text]



Sawyer County / Lac Courte Oreilles Economic Development Corporation

January 2021 Activity Report

Recovery Assistance

Distributed registration materials to our business list for numerous SBA Informational Sessions covering updates on the Paycheck Protection Program, Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, and the new Shuttered Venue Operators Program. Attended sessions.

Business Retention and Expansion

To ensure our economic vitality a strengthening of our local and regional partnerships was initiated.

- Attended **Sawyer County** Economic Development & Extension meeting (1/11)
- Attended the **Hayward** Business Improvement District meeting (1/18)
- Attended the **Winter** Area Chamber of Commerce meeting (1/19)
- Attended the **Exeland** Area Business Cooperative meeting (1/25)
- Attended the **LCO** Tribal Governing Board meeting (1/26)

Aided two small businesses in startup process. Directed them to financial assistance contacts and County Zoning representatives. Locations: Village of Winter, Whitefish Lake area.

Heart of the North Legislative Day

Participated in the preparation and trainings for the February 4, 2021 effort. Represented Natural Resource priority issues for the 2021-23 State Biennial Budget:

- Strengthen the viability of the County Land & Water Conservation Staffing and Cost-Sharing Grants program by increasing base funding for the state program to \$13.0 million annually.
- Restoration of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program to 2010 levels.

Organizational Sustainability

Continued development of the programmatic building blocks for energizing our organization and communities. The foundation will be built on data analysis, existing community plans and the viewpoints of residents. Key building blocks:

- **Leadership:** develop a new generation of local leaders who will take an active part in addressing community priorities.
- **Economy:** build a supportive community environment for small business and entrepreneurs.

- **Placemaking:** invest in our places through creative quality of life initiatives related to public spaces, design, local foods, and tourism, among others.
- **Investors:** develop a strong presence of both individuals and organizations that provide financial support and are dedicated to the advancement of EDC.

Recent Reports:

- Broadband and the Wisconsin Economy: [2021-01-07-Broadband-Report.pdf \(wisc.edu\)](#)
- Forecasting the U.S. and Wisconsin Economies in 2021: [Current Economic Analysis – CROWE – UW–Madison \(wisc.edu\)](#)
- Economic Contribution of Forest Products Industry to Wisconsin Economy, 2020: [Economic Contribution of Forest Products Industry to Wisconsin Economy - 2020](#)
- Remote Work: What Jobs are Being Done at Home During the COVID-19 Crisis? Evidence from Firm-Level Surveys. Harvard Business School. [20-138 ec6ff0f0-7947-4607-9d54-c5c53044fb95.pdf \(hbs.edu\)](#)

Contact: Mike Gardner Executive Director mgardner@northflow.net 715-462-4775



Education

Issue 1:

Address rising student debt by increasing Wisconsin Grants

History: For two decades, state financial aid for Wisconsin Technical College students has lagged behind the other higher education sectors, while technical college students have nearly twice the need. An annual increase of \$11.8 million in Wisconsin grants for WTCS students will reduce their reliance on loans, allow them to take additional classes and earn a credential sooner.

Ask: As stated above, an increase of \$11.8 million to statewide funding would address the concern in totality. The Wisconsin Grant is critical to many technical college students. An increase in funding will ensure students are able to gain valuable skills through education and training. The Heart of The North Committee asks the State of Wisconsin to consider fully funding the Wisconsin grants program with an increase of \$11.8 million dollars.

Issue 2:

Acquire up-to-date firefighter certification software

History: The proprietary software that WTCS has used since 1996 to process testing and certify firefighters is no longer supported. An annual increase of \$50,000 to the WTCS firefighter training state operations is required to purchase new fire certification software and a learning management system which will streamline the administration of on-site testing and provide online course and content delivery.

Ask: The Heart of The North Committee asks the State of Wisconsin to increase funding to the Wisconsin Technical College System firefighting training site's annual budget in the amount of \$50,000.

Issue 3:

Provide teacher and staff licensure flexibility, while allowing recent retirees to work more than 880 hours per year without affecting Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) allocations.



Education continued:

History:

School districts need continued flexibility in the hiring and licensure of teachers and administrators to manage anticipated high levels of turnover. We support the following recommendations to tackle troubling educator shortages in the short-term:

Ask:

The Heart of The North Committee asks the State of Wisconsin to:

- Expand and streamline licensing reciprocity to increase the pool of out-of-state educators available under PI 34.
- Maximize opportunities for pre-service teachers to serve in direct student instruction.
- Provide incentives for teachers to meet dual enrollment accreditation standards.
- Ease restrictions on hiring retired educators to fill key positions.

Issue 4:

Address revenue limit issues for Wisconsin K-12 Public School Districts

History:

Because of COVID-19, the actual September 2020 student count for many Wisconsin school districts declined, leaving these districts to face the fiscal consequences in 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, as a three-year rolling average is used in revenue limit calculations. School districts, and the students they serve, should not suffer financially because of the uncertainties of a world-wide health crisis.

Ask:

The Heart of The North Committee asks the State of Wisconsin to allow districts to use the greater of the district's 2019-2020 or 2020-21 pupil count for revenue limit calculations.

Issue 5:

Address funding for economically disadvantaged students, students with mental health needs, and students with special education needs.

HONDAYS.COM



Education continued:

History:

Wisconsin currently has no comprehensive program that targets additional resources to raise achievement among economically disadvantaged students. In addition, too many children have unmet mental health needs, and these unmet needs often result in serious negative consequences for students, their families, our communities and the learning environment in our schools.

While we greatly appreciate the school mental health investments made in the last two state budgets, we believe a stronger, long-term commitment from the state is required to meet the challenge that all Wisconsin schools and communities face.

Schools in Wisconsin greatly appreciate the increase in special education categorical aid. Moving forward, this will be an issue that needs continual attention.

Ask:

The Heart of The North Committee asks the State of Wisconsin to:

- Provide an additional \$150 in per pupil aid for each student identified as economically disadvantaged.
- At a minimum, sustain funding for mental health initiatives in the State of Wisconsin.
- Increase the current level of special education aid to reimburse 40 percent of aidable costs by the end of the 2021-23 biennium.

HONDAYS.COM



Transportation

Issue #1: Work Zone Safety

Work Zone Safety continues to be a critical focus of the Local Governments. Workers and drivers are at risk in the work zones. Ensuring that the drivers that encounter work zones and the workers who are performing the work remain safe is critical. There are far too many crashes, injuries and fatalities in work zones in Wisconsin. Efforts must be directed to improve the safety of work zones for everyone that is in contact with a highway work zone.

We support the following to aid in increasing safety in work zones:

- 1) Allowing work zone flaggers to report violations to law enforcement. School Crossing Guards currently have this ability under Statute 346.465.
- 2) Adding Work Zone Safety instruction to the Drivers Education Curriculum.
- 3) Automated Speed Enforcement in Work Zones
- 4) Allowing local municipalities to implement green strobe lights on vehicles.

Issue #2: Increases in funding for the local road system

The economy of Barron, Rusk, Sawyer and Washburn Counties relies on a strong local road system. Over the past several budgets there has been added investment in funding for the local road system. Thank you for the continued effort in working to provide adequate funding to the local road system. The increase to General Transportation Aids, the Local Road Improvement Program and the Local Road Improvement – Supplement (LRIP-S) program all provided the locals with additional funding. There are still many unmet needs across the entire local road system as well as other ways for more efficient use of the provided funds. This was highlighted extensively by the sheer number of projects that were proposed for under the LRIP-S application cycle. The program proposed \$75 million in funding and local governments submitted 1,596 projects with a value of over \$1.4 billion, demonstrating the need for additional resources to meet the needs.

We support the following to continue to address the funding needs on the local road system:

- 1) Increases to the General Transportation Aids
- 2) Increases to the Local Road Improvement Program
- 3) ½ % Sales Tax dedicated to transportation projects.

HONDAYS .COM



Tourism

Thank you

Thank you to the Department of Tourism for the Wisconsin Travel Stimulus Grants that were issued to local entities from across the state that promote tourism and suffered losses as a result of COVID-19.

Topics:

Office of Outdoor Recreation:

- What are the focus areas in the Office of Outdoor Recreation's budget for 2021?
- Discuss strategies for collaboration between our local entities and the Office of Outdoor Recreation to further build upon the importance/strength of outdoor recreation to our local economies.

Department of Tourism:

- What geographical markets does the Department of Tourism intend to target over the next twelve months?
- How can we best assist the state's Dept. of Tourism with highlighting the uniqueness of our counties in Northwest Wisconsin, particularly our abundant strengths in outdoor recreation?

HONDAYS.COM



Natural Resources

Issue#1

Restoration of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program to 2010 Levels

History:

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is the most important source of matching funds used by local nonprofit organizations to protect land and water in Wisconsin. The Knowles-Nelson grants awarded to local governments and nonprofits, like land trusts, are matching grants. This means that every dollar that the state invests in a conservation project is matched by another dollar (or more) contributed by local governments or generous individuals. Knowles-Nelson funds support land purchases, trail building, boat launches, playgrounds, picnic shelters, and more.

This program has seen cuts in budget from \$86 million per year in 2010 down to \$33 million more recently. The program is up for renewal in 2021.

Here is just one of many examples of the value of the Knowles -Nelson Stewardship Program is that without this fund, Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association would not have been able to purchase 262 acres along the Totogatic Wild River and donate the land to the state for river protection and sustainable forestry.

Ask:

Would you support restoring funding of The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program back to at least the 2010 level for further conservation work across the state?

HONDAYS.COM



Wisconsin Land+Water Conservation Association

131 W. Wilson Street, Suite #601 · Madison, Wisconsin 53703
(608) 441-2677 · Fax: (608) 441-2676 · www.wisconsinlandwater.org

Budget Priorities to Improve Land and Water Resources

2021-23 State Biennial Budget

From the DATCP Soil and Water Resources Management Program budget, provide \$13.0 million for county conservation staffing and support, building technical capacity to meet the state's growing resource needs, and fulfilling the state's statutory funding goal.

- *Our top priority is a baseline state investment in county conservation department professional staff that increases our ability to meet conservation standards and improve water quality, while supporting private landowner management goals at the same time.*
- *Wis. State Statutes §92.14(6)b provides a goal for the state to fund an average of the first three staff positions in county conservation departments at 100%/70%/50%. In 2020, the DATCP SWRM program provided \$9.4 million, which was \$3.4 million short of this goal.*

Additional priorities we support:

- Increase annual DATCP SWRM Program bond revenue for cost-share grants from \$3.5 million to \$5 million.
 - *Only 47% of requested cost-share grants from bond revenue were met last year, directly affecting our ability to meet state and local conservation standards. This investment not only supports farmers during difficult financial times caused by the dual stressors of the farm crisis and global pandemic, but defrays the costs of implementing long-lasting, verifiable conservation practices.*
- Support increases to Farmland Preservation Program participant tax credits
 - *The FPP program is a win-win for farmland owners and conservation, but the tax incentives for participation should be increased, as proposed in 2020 SB 575/AB 637.*
- Support provisions to improve water quality
 - *We support several proposals generated by the Legislature's Water Quality Task Force in 2020, including SB 715/AB 795, SB 722/AB 800, and SB 718/AB 796.*

Who We Are

The Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association (WI Land+Water) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, membership organization that supports the efforts of 450 county Land Conservation Committee (LCC) supervisors and 350 professional staff in 72 county Land Conservation Department (LCD) offices. We provide training and education, develop conservation standards, promote youth education, build partnerships, and advocate for our members.



22 EAST NIELLIN STREET, SUITE 900
MADISON, WI 53703
TOLL FREE: 1.866.404.2700
PHONE: 608.663.7188
FAX: 608.663.7189
www.wicounties.org

COUNTY LAND CONSERVATION STAFFING AND COST-SHARING GRANTS

County land conservation staff work to promote effective conservation practices. Their work includes efforts to preserve topsoil, protect Wisconsin's vital agricultural economy, keep lakes and rivers healthy, and promote recreation and tourism. County land conservation staff also administer key programs to ensure that manure storage facilities are properly built, drinking water is protected, and runoff is properly managed. Overall, these efforts help create jobs and foster economic growth in many industries including agriculture, tourism, forestry, and recreation.

Since 2001, Wisconsin statutes have set benchmark funding levels for county land conservation staffing grants that, if met, would exceed \$13 million annually. Unfortunately, the average funding amount from 2001 to 2011 was \$9.3 million per year. In recent years, budget cuts and lapses have reduced funding to as little as \$7.7 million annually. In the 2013-15 state biennial budget, the Legislature and Governor provided a one-time biennial increase of \$1.6 million to supplement the program by using segregated fees from the Nonpoint Account of the Environmental Fund. As a result, \$8.8 million was appropriated in each fiscal year, approximately \$500,000 short of the long-term average of \$9.3 million per year. More recently, the Wisconsin Counties Association has successfully worked with the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association to increase base funding for the program to just under \$9 million.

County land conservation staff assist farmers in successfully applying for over \$35 million of federal cost-share funding that is utilized by farmers and other landowners, over twice the amount provided through all state funding sources. Loss of funding for county staff would jeopardize farmer and landowner access to this critical federal funding.

CURRENT STATUS: Base funding for the program was increased in the 2017-19 state biennial budget by \$900,000, bringing the base funding level to \$8,964,100 annually. This number is just shy of the long-term average of \$9.3 million needed on an annual basis to sustain program viability. As Governor Evers declared 2019 to be the "Year of Clean Drinking Water" and Speaker Vos commenced a "Water Quality Task Force," more can and should be done to assist counties in protecting vital water resources. The 2019-21 state biennial budget added one-time funding for the program, leaving base funding at \$8,964,100, as the dollars added are not ongoing.

REQUESTED ACTION: Strengthen the viability of the County Land Conservation Staffing and Cost-Sharing Grants program by increasing base funding for the program to \$13.0 million annually, an annual increase of \$4,075,000. This is the necessary level of

MARK D. O'CONNELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

baseline funding to sustain basic county conservation services, and protect against drinking water contamination.

TALKING POINTS:

- County conservation staff are uniquely qualified to provide technical assistance to design and implement conservation practices and help farmers and municipalities reach phosphorus reduction goals. This high level of technical assistance is not available from any other public sector provider.
- County conservation staff:
 - Are “partners in agriculture” with landowners, farmers and industry leaders.
 - Will be the primary local implementers of the state’s phosphorus management program to clean up lakes, rivers, and streams.
 - Work directly with farmers to avoid contamination of drinking water supplies.
 - Work on the front lines to manage resource challenges, often serving as “first responders” in the case of floods, droughts, and other emergencies.
 - Provide construction oversight and assistance to large-scale livestock operations to ensure operator compliance with state agricultural performance standards.
 - Provide educational and technical assistance to help farmers meet state agricultural performance standards and county livestock licensing requirements.
 - Help farmers secure permits for manure storage and other regulated activities and, in the process, ensure compliance with standards that protect drinking water.
 - Educate landowners and monitor the implementation of nutrient management plans that ensure nutrients are properly applied.
 - Implement multiple facets of the farmland preservation program, in addition to monitoring conservation compliance.
 - Monitor shoreland and lakes for erosion.
- The state investment in the program is small in comparison to the economic benefits.

Contact: Daniel Bahr, Government Affairs Associate
608.663.7188
bahr@wicounties.org



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Rural Wisconsin boasts of a robust small business economy. With few large employers (employers with 500+ employees) in each county, the true backbone of economic development success is small businesses. Many of these small businesses employ a handful of workers, from retail to custom design machine shops. Even more small businesses are made of the owner and maybe two other employees. These may not be large job creating businesses; however, they are critical for the local communities. As access to the internet is replacing access to fields for plowing in rural Northern Wisconsin, to keep these businesses competitive, robust, and growing, it is imperative that the following issues are addressed, and action taken to ensure food on the table and roofs over the head are earned through work of the able-bodied residents in Northern Wisconsin.

For the first time in a long time, people from metropolitan areas are looking to permanently move to rural northwest Wisconsin. They want to work where they play and play where they work. The years of messaging that rural northwest Wisconsin has a high quality of life, affordable amenities and accessibility for all is starting to pay dividends. COVID-19 has accelerated the need for broadband, housing, workforce training and small business support, as our infrastructure is at a critical mass. Timely investment now with State of Wisconsin dollars will ensure continued growth of new residents and retention of Wisconsin born citizens.

Issue #1: Broadband Access

Thank you for continuing to make Broadband a major issue that needs immediate action. 2020 exposed the weaknesses in having poor to no broadband access in rural communities in particular (education, telehealth, working from home). Compounding the issue (with a positive influence on the area) came from the influx of people moving from urban areas converting their second homes into full-time residence or seeking a temporary shelter from neighboring state's more robust COVID-19 policies. Many of these individuals and families seeking northern Wisconsin respite during the CV-19 shutdowns in urban areas, NEED higher speeds to continue working their good paying jobs in order to live here.

On January 4, 2021 Wisconsin Public Radio¹ reported that:

[The *Broadband in Rural Wisconsin*] report found more than 430,000 people, who make up 25 percent of the state's rural population, lack access to high-speed internet. The state ranks 36th nationwide in terms

¹ Kaeding, Danielle. [Report: Rural Areas Of Wisconsin Suffer From Major Gaps In Broadband Access | Wisconsin Public Radio \(wpr.org\)](#). Monday, January 4, 2021. Accessed on Tuesday, January 19, 2021.



of accessibility in rural areas, which ranges widely across rural Wisconsin. [...] Less than half of residents had access to high-speed internet across nine counties in rural Wisconsin, including Ashland, Clark and Douglas counties. [...] In August, the state estimated about 45,000 students lacked access to broadband coverage.

Further, a January 2021 UW-Extension Report entitled *Broadband and the Wisconsin Economy*², that was funded by the United States Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, through various grants to UW-Madison, found:

Broadband access is closely related to population density and income levels, meaning the most rural and the lowest-income regions generally have the least access. [...] In the most rural areas, 56% of these low-income households have no internet. [...] Bureaucratic barriers severely constrain municipal provision in Wisconsin and data limitations make it difficult for communities to show need, which is often an important component of grant applications. Furthermore, there has been less federal investment in broadband. Broadband is becoming increasingly important to community and economic well-being. It is linked to better business performance, including rural entrepreneurship and farm profits. It is also linked to higher home values and higher educational outcomes at both the grade school and high school levels. [...] Some communities seemingly have broadband service available based on provider-reported data from the FCC, yet many households are without service. This may be a sign that the FCC data does not accurately depict broadband availability—a concern of many broadband grant applicants. [...] The most underserved areas are typically rural and likely do not have sufficient infrastructure. Accordingly, these areas may want to prioritize strategies and policies that encourage the development of physical resources needed to provide access. [...] [T]he experiences of COVID-19 and the resulting movement to telecommuting for many workers and online learning for both K-12 and higher education students demonstrates that much work needs to be done.

In the past year, northwestern Wisconsin constituents have written to our politicians to explain the broadband emergency the region is facing. One example is county and Economic Development officials have explored the possibilities of hovering networks in the air as a temporary relief for broadband access in all corners of Washburn County. The Washburn County Economic Development Corporation hosted a virtual town hall with Senator Baldwin highlighting the desperate need for broadband in our community, highlighted by the pandemic crisis. In that virtual town hall, the guest speaker from a school district in the four-county, Heart of the North area could not stay connected from the school he was calling from because the speed was so low. Community and agency officials met with PSC representatives to explain why the PSC grants currently don't work for all communities, including, too low of a grant percentage for a provider to make a return on investment from installing the fiber due to

² Conroy, T., et al. January 2021. *Broadband and the Wisconsin Economy. Study Series No. 7.* [online] Economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu. Available at: <https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/files/2021/01/2021-01-07-Broadband-Report.pdf>



the population density in rural areas. Most internet companies were looking at 70-80 year return on investments...with the PSC grants. That did not deter Washburn County and its constituency who met with all the providers in the area, except for the two large ones who already 'exist,' to plead for help and ask what it would take. Mosaic Technologies met with us right away and tacked a part of their project onto a grant they were working on, requiring multi-county cooperation. All involved are hopeful that this wonderful relationship will continue.

ACTIONABLE ASK: We are asking that broadband be treated as a high priority asset and remove the significant barriers to apply for and receive money to make these projects happen for Wisconsin based companies. The two most significant barriers are time between the announcement of a grant program, and the award; and priority access for Wisconsin-led, Wisconsin-based providers.

Rural Northwest Wisconsin DOES NOT HAVE TIME to wait two to three years for a project award. Once the funds are announced, cable should be going in the ground two to three months later. The construction/build season is short, and the demand is great. The available award money should reflect the drastic need, not bureaucratic demands, across the state and especially in Northwest Wisconsin.

The second barrier is allowing the national providers to participate in the State of Wisconsin grant awards. This needs to be a Wisconsin-led, Wisconsin-based provider approach. The locally grown, small to medium sized telecommunication companies (telecos) in the state lead the industry with quality, access, and service above and beyond the national provider abilities. We are fortunate in the state to have so many local telecos who understand their community assets and needs because they were built by the community. Giving them direct, priority, and expedient access to Wisconsin available dollars only makes sense from an economic and delivery standpoint.

In final thought, our rural community school districts are stringing things together to try to make it work for their students, but the entire infrastructure is in trouble if entire school districts need to go completely virtual again. Additionally, with Northwest, rural Wisconsin's aging population, many people in the counties are still not comfortable seeing a doctor, as they are afraid of contracting COVID-19 from the hospital or clinic. Having better access to internet will allow doctors to continue to care for their patients, making us a healthier community, and thus less of a burden on the taxpayers.

Issue #2: Workforce Housing

The lack of available workforce is the largest issue faced by business in Wisconsin. Workforce housing, especially in northwestern rural Wisconsin, is at a premium with 0% availability in most areas. Barron

HONDAYS.COM



County recently performed a comprehensive housing study that shows a need for an additional 450 rental units and 1200 owned (single-family/multi-family) units. The greatest need is low to moderate income earners, which makes the majority of the workforce.

COVID-19 has only exasperated the issue through slowdown in building new dwellings due to increased material prices, limited employees at job sites, and an exodus of urban residents to the rural area. Many people are moving from high-density areas to live in places like rural northwest Wisconsin for the high quality of life and affordability. Many second homes (cabins, cottages, summer, vacation homes) are being converted into full-time residences. This is enhancing the strain on available housing inventory in the area.

ACTIONABLE ASK: We request the legislature to authorize the creation of a workforce housing Tax Incremental District (TID) to assist municipalities and developers to create new workforce housing developments. The single largest cost to enable new housing developments is getting sewer, water, street, curb, gutter, sidewalk, and power to the proposed developments. We believe a workforce house shorter term TID (estimated timeframe of 10-15 years) is all that is needed to really make this a viable, economic investment of taxpayer dollars. Whereas, a business can leave after receiving the full benefit of a TID, the home and infrastructure will also exist. Even if the residents who purchase the home leave, another homebuyer will purchase the vacant house. This is not always the case with a vacant and depreciated commercial or industrial building.

Issue #3: Workforce Retention and Development

With the lack of housing also comes the lack of workforce and retaining qualified and able-bodied residents in the area. Along with having adequate workforce housing stock available, the proper training, access to quality jobs, and support will lead to many youth and career transitioning adults seeking more employment in the area rather than outside the region or state.

Continued Investment in Existing Programs

The State of Wisconsin has invested great money and effort toward cultivating and maintaining an organic (born in Wisconsin, stay in Wisconsin) workforce. The access of money for rural schools regarding FAB Lab technology, INSPIRE grants, workforce academies, and other programs that connect students to the workforce in their community is working and needs additional support.

Again, COVID-19 has exasperated the employment issue in rural northwest Wisconsin. It is imperative that growing a robust workforce, specifically now with many adults looking to transition careers out of

HONDAYS.COM



hospitality and seasonal jobs and into a year-round or higher pay occupation, is at the forefront of growing our economy. We want to retain the student and able-bodied adults we have, and even recruit new families to the area. As a state, we must continue building upon the growing momentum behind individuals and families from metropolitan areas deciding to call rural Wisconsin home.

Additionally, the workforce boards are most closely following the developments in the 2020 Legislative Interim Research Report on the Organization of Wisconsin's Workforce Development System by the Legislative Council. This report will review the organization of Wisconsin's current workforce development system, including the roles played by different governmental entities to develop Wisconsin's workforce. The report will focus on the structure, interrelationship, and coordination between the state's workforce development programs, considering the separate federal requirements that apply to certain programs. The report will consider whether any programs may be consolidated or otherwise reorganized to strengthen their effectiveness and will include recommendations from stakeholders to improve the structural framework for administering workforce development programs in Wisconsin.

ACTIONABLE ASK: We request that additional and continued support for workforce programs, along with educational program focused on STEM, youth and adult apprenticeship programs, and workforce industry academies will all be key in growing our region's workforce.

ACTIONABLE ASK: Use the 2020 Legislative Interim Research Report findings, recommendations, and actions to create impactful programs during this legislative cycle.

The Wisconsin Grant for Wisconsin Technical College System

The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) has been a longtime proponent of growing Wisconsin's own and re-qualifying the careers of transitioning, able-bodied adults. For two decades, State financial aid for Wisconsin Technical College students has lagged in comparison to the other higher education sectors, while technical college students have nearly twice the need. An annual increase of \$11.8 million in Wisconsin grants for WTCS students will reduce their reliance on loans, allow them to take additional classes and earn a credential sooner. It is shown that WTCS graduates go onto receive livable wage jobs right out of college and contribute to a growing community faster (they go to school locally and work locally) than those of a traditional four-year university.

ACTIONABLE ASK: As stated above, an increase of \$11.8 million to statewide funding would address the concern in totality. The Wisconsin Grant is critical to many technical college students. An increase in funding will ensure students are able to gain valuable skills through education and training. Consider fulling funding the Wisconsin grants program with an increase of \$11.8 million dollars. Students who receive skilled labor degrees locally stay locally.

HONDAYS.COM



Issue #4: Small Business Support

2020 resulted in many federal programs that had directly assisted Wisconsin small businesses. Many of these small businesses relied on the critical federal money available to retain operations and keep their doors open. The State had some programs at smaller injectable award amounts (between \$5,000 and \$20,000). The rollout and implementation of these programs were helpful, but more will be needed in 2021 to keep the backbone of many rural communities, the small businesses open for business. Working capital is always of the greatest need; however, technical assistance on how to better operate, teach business owners financial and computer literacy, and access to capital to expand operations (helping the business launch a robust website; adding equipment to assist with order fulfillment and social distancing requirements; etc.) will go a long way in the economic recovery in the state. These types of programs will also build a robust small business economy that will become more resilient against forced government shutdowns, pandemics, or natural interruptions (tornados, floods, etc.). If a business can use State funding to improve its internal capacities and operations, a stronger Wisconsin economy will result, and jobs will be saved.

ACTIONABLE ASK: Support the budget and future project recommendations that directly assist small businesses, especially in the areas of direct operational enhancement for specific purposes.

Unemployment Insurance

Many small business owners have never received or had delayed unemployment claims processing during the government imposed, non-voluntary, pandemic shutdowns. There was available money for the self-employed to receive critical capital to sustain their business and family, while they were forced to shutter their doors. However, many of the small business owners never received any of the funding for unemployment or their cases are still being processed. Any time over the normal processing period (two to four weeks) is unacceptable, especially for those who inject their own capital and equity into running a business that supports other workers families and the community.

ACTIONABLE ASK: Continue holding those agencies accountable for the delay or non-response of processing self-employed unemployment requests. Also, seek and support programming that would help qualified small business owners receive personal support if another government imposed, non-voluntary shutdown were to occur.