

The Working Lands Initiative: What Is It and Why Do You Care

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On Behalf of The Working Lands Committee

Presented by:

Linda H. Bochert
Michael Best & Friedrich LLP
One South Pinckney Street, Suite 700
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608.283-2271 Fax 608.283-2275
lhbochert@michaelbest.com

What is it?

- a. Focus: “working lands” – i.e., productive agriculture, forestry, tourism and recreational use
- b. Premise: Wisconsin’s land base and natural resources – clean waters, rich habitat areas – are critical to economic stability and must be maintained in environmentally friendly way
- c. Created by DATCP: develop policy and program recommendations to Governor, agencies, Legislature

What is the charge?

- a. Find common ground on new strategies to preserve Wisconsin's working lands
- b. Boost economic development by strategically protecting land for the bio-economy (biomass of forestry and agriculture materials), natural resources for future generations
- c. Create policy tool kit for state and local governments
- d. Seek innovative partnerships between public and private entities to maximize success

Who is it?

- a. Ultimately, the citizens of the state of Wisconsin
- b. Initially, a Steering Committee of diverse interests
- c. Co-Chairs:
 - *Dan Poulson: former President, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation; current Natural Resources Board member
 - *Linda Bochert: Partner, Michael Best & Friedrich
- d. Diverse stakeholders representing agriculture, forestry, local government (cities, towns, counties), builders/realtors, business/manufacturing, tribes, environmental interests, utilities, cooperatives, planners, tourism

Why was it formed?

- a. Agriculture (including sale of farm products) contributes \$28.6 billion annually to the Wisconsin economy
- b. In 2004, travelers spent nearly \$11.8 billion in Wisconsin
- c. Earnings in Wisconsin forest products manufacturing jobs were \$4 billion in 1997

Why was it formed?

- d. Wisconsin is losing farmland rapidly; trend is accelerating: triangle between Madison, Milwaukee, Chicago losing farmland at third highest rate in nation
- e. Still much to preserve and sustain: 11.5 million acres cropland/pastureland; 15.9 million acres accessible forestland (2002/2003)

Why was it formed?

- f. Wisconsin population projected to grow 10% by 2025; est. increase of 550,000 to 6+M population
- g. Have many diverse and rapidly urbanizing areas; critical working lands being lost or fragmented

Why was it formed?

- h. Wisconsin well-positioned to lead in the bio-economy:
- *shift away from fossil fuels
- *to locally grown biomass (plants, crops, wood waste, animal waste, food waste, municipal solid waste)
- *as raw materials for energy, fuel and chemical production

Why was it formed?

- i. Challenge: not at a crisis – yet; but need to address before lose critical mass
- j. Related effort: Governor's Consortium on Bio-Based Industry: develop bio-economy to provide greater energy independence; i.e., renewable energy sources we can grow on the land

What is the status of the Committee's work?

- a. Meets first Wednesday of each month
- b. September through December, 2005: information and education
- c. January through June, 2006: develop, refine policy choices
- d. Spring 2006: public listening sessions
- e. July 2006: final report

What themes are emerging?

- a. Emphasis on state leadership and incentives; not regulation
- b. Look for local control, planning and implementation
- c. Healthy rural areas require and are supported by healthy urban areas

What themes are emerging?

- d. Agriculture, forest products and tourism need contiguous, non-fragmented land base
- e. Coordination can be improved among agriculture, forestry and tourism programs at state and local levels

What themes are emerging?

- f. New tools may be needed:
 - *Farmland Preservation Program has limitations
 - *Tax policy doesn't recognize the “other” values of working lands, e.g., water recharge areas, critical wildlife habitat, open space, aesthetics
 - *Statewide framework for Purchase of Development Rights programs
 - *Emphasis on “clusters”; e.g., regions of state with common crops support related fuel conversion facilities
- g. Opportunities for new partnerships between public and private entities

How can you participate?

- a. Steering Committee meetings are open to public
 - *Attend – listen/speak
 - *Watch webcast via DATCP website
- b. DATCP website: datcp.state.wi.us

How can you participate?

- c. Submit comments, questions to DATCP staff:
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- *Gary Radloff 608/224-5020
gary.radloff@datcp.state.wi.us
- *Jim Arts 608/224-5008 arts@wisc.edu