

Appendix E: **Public involvement process.**

A) Introduction.

The Department and the External Advisory Team have attempted to inform the public about the proposed project and gather input, ideas, and perspectives during the planning process using multiple approaches. Several obstacles, including the extended length of the planning process and the lack of feasible ways to directly contact a wide and diverse audience, prevented the Department and its partners from meeting this goal to the extent desired. Nonetheless, the Department and the External Advisory Team pursued several ways to involve the public throughout the planning process that are described here.

B) Public meetings.

In addition to input and guidance from the External Advisory Team (and indirectly from the feedback they received from the groups they talked about the project with), the Department and External Advisory Team hosted four public meetings over the course of the planning process to present information and concepts, gather input, ideas, and reactions, and to better understand the issues the public wanted to see addressed both in the proposed project and in its associated planning process. Open house meetings were held February and September 2006, and October 2007. A final set of public meetings is planned for the summer of 2009 to receive input on the final draft of the planning documents. The series of public meetings was designed to move through the four phases of the planning process and are described here:

February 2006

The first meeting focused on presenting the first steps of planning, including: an explanation of the overall vision of the proposed project, why the Department was drawn to this part of the state for the proposed project, how the planning process would likely unfold, the public involvement process, and the Department's intent to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in concert with the Feasibility Study.

The public expressed a strong desire to see the Department undertake the planning process and to do so in close collaboration with county and local governments. Also of interest to those in attendance was a desire to mesh the proposed project's design and implementation with local economic development efforts.

September 2006

The second public meeting described in more detail the goals and objectives of the proposed project. It was also designed to gather various information about the types of recreation experiences that residents wanted and how the proposed GHA might be able to meet them. The meeting also presented more information about the State Wildlife Areas in the Study Area and the Department's intent to revise their Master Plan in combination with the development of the Feasibility Study, which was evaluating the potential for new DNR acquisition.

Also, the public was notified again that the Department would be conducting an EIS and was asked to provide input on issues they would like to see addressed in that evaluation process. Attendees were also provided another opportunity to comment on the public involvement process.

The public provided considerable input on their experiences and preferences for hiking, hunting, horseback riding, camping, bike riding, fishing, and wildlife watching. They also provided perspectives

on what types of recreation activities they liked to participate in together and what would encourage them to participate in these activities more often in the GHA. From the results of this input, “generic” experiences were developed for eight different activities: camping, hiking, horseback riding, hunting/trapping/fishing, mountain biking, paddling, recreational biking, and wildlife watching.

October 2007

The third public meeting presented information about the broader regional assessment and the draft “concept maps” for eight different recreation activities. These maps had been developed based on the public’s previous input on preferred recreation experiences combined with the locations of existing public properties, topography, land cover, land use, and other factors. The concept maps displayed four types of lands that potentially could be the focus of land protection efforts: conservation parks, linking trails (between parks and cities), river corridors (subsequently referred to as “river-based conservation areas”), and farmland and habitat conservation & restoration zones.

Using a survey booklet, the public was asked to comment on the individual concept maps for the eight different recreation activities as well as the river corridors and the farmland and habitat conservation & restoration zones.

The most consistent theme of the responses received was very strong support for overall network. People with a wide array of recreational interests supported the creation of the proposed network. A large majority of respondents believed that the right recreational experiences were targeted, that the right places were identified for the different activities, and that about the right amount of places for these activities were proposed.

The one area of conflict that was evident in the public input revolved around recreation uses of the existing Wildlife Areas. People who currently participate in hunting on the Wildlife Areas had a range of views. Some supported limited uses of the Wildlife Areas (these people tended not to support horseback riding or mountain biking, but did support developing hiking trails, interpretive signs, wildlife watching platforms, and seasonal closed areas). These people also tended to participate in other recreation activities in addition to hunting, trapping, or fishing. Other hunters were very opposed to any uses other than hunting, trapping, and fishing occurring on these properties. For them, allowing recreational hiking, wildlife watching, biking, horseback riding, or other activities on Wildlife Areas would unacceptably detract from their hunting experience and success.

People who do not participate in hunting tended to support or have no opinion regarding hunting. They supported the Department considering developing hiking and recreational biking trails, interpretive signs, wildlife watching platforms, and seasonal closed areas on the Wildlife Areas. Within this group there was varying support for horseback riding and mountain biking trails; some supported the Department considering establishing them on these properties, many others didn’t.

June and July 2009

The Draft Feasibility Study, Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Glacial Heritage Area was released for public review and comment on June 1, 2009. In addition to posting the entire document on the Department’s web site, paper copies were available in all the local libraries. The Department hosted public open house meetings on June 29 in Waterloo and June 30 in Fort Atkinson. On July 1, the Department hosted a two-part meeting. The first part was another open house style informational meeting and the second part was a formal public hearing. Seven members of the public testified at the hearing.

The Department also developed a 20 question on-line survey to gather public input and perspectives. 651 responses were received. In addition, a paper copy of the survey was developed and the Department received 43 hard copies of the survey. The public reaction to the proposed project was overwhelmingly

positive. A summary of the input received and the Department responses was prepared and distributed to all those who provided addresses at the public meetings and was posted on the project's web site.

C) Web site.

The Department hosted a web site where information about the project (e.g., background information, goals, objectives, maps, and notices of public meetings) was periodically posted. The Department did not have the resources to develop or manage an on-line survey to gather residents' perspectives and ideas. As such, the web site was a way to disseminate information, but not receive input. The web site address was posted on all press releases and public notices related to the project and the meetings of the External Advisory Team.

D) Mailings.

The Department maintained an e-mail distribution of interested members of the public that was used to notify interested members of the public of upcoming meetings of the External Advisory Team and other matters.

E) Other media coverage and outreach.

Over the course of the planning process, many articles in local papers describing the proposed project were published. Most of these articles were timed to coordinate with upcoming public meetings and were helpful in generating interest and attendance at the meetings. In addition, Department staff and External Advisory Team members briefed members of a variety of different organizations and elected officials on the progress of the proposed project throughout the planning process.