

XII. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As part of the Forest Legacy Program (FLP), and as listed in Forest Legacy Guidelines, the public has a role in determining how the Forest Legacy Program will be developed and what criteria will be used to prioritize those tracts that receive consideration.

To this end, a wide array of potential stakeholders was invited to a series of four meetings at different locations around the State: Lansing, South Haven, Grayling and Marquette.

Included in the invitation mailing were representatives from state and federal agencies, conservation groups and the timber industry, as well as all conservation districts, local land trusts and local and regional government associations, among others. (A copy of the notice is included as **Appendix A**).

General information (**Appendix B**) about the Forest Legacy Program Assessment of Need, prepared by the Michigan Forest Stewardship coordinator, a list of meeting dates, and a public input survey (**Appendix G, results included**) were also distributed. These items were also posted on the website of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. E-mail solicitations were also made on a continuous basis, as each stakeholder meeting identified further perspectives that should be sought or included.

After a draft AON was prepared, it was posted on The Nature Conservancy and MDNR websites, and a series of five meetings were announced via State wide press release. The five public meetings were to explain the AON to interested individuals and solicit additional information, reactions, or comments from the general public. These meetings, which were promoted in industry trade magazines, local press coverage and media (e.g., Michigan Public Radio's Great Lakes Radio Consortium) occurred as follows:

Date	Time	Location	
September 9, 2002	7:00-9:00 pm	Peter White Library	Marquette, MI
September 10, 2002	7:00-9:00 pm	Hartwick Pines	Grayling, MI
September 11, 2002	7:00-9:00 pm	Chamber of Commerce	Lansing, MI
September 18, 2002	7:00-9:00 pm	Environmental Int. Center	U of M, Dearborn
September 19, 2002	7:00-9:00 pm	Kalamazoo Nature Center	Kalamazoo, MI

The goals for the Michigan public involvement process were threefold:

1. To provide information to stakeholders and the general public about the Forest Legacy Program;
2. To elicit any concerns, suggestions, and general comments about Forest Legacy;

3. To promote forest stewardship.

Minutes for all meetings are available from the Michigan Chapter of The Nature Conservancy or the Michigan Department of Natural Resources upon request.

Analysis of Public Input

Overall, the intensity of Michigan's public's interest in the Forest Legacy Program was relatively light. No strong opinions regarding any aspect of this program were expressed during the public comment period, which ended September 30, 2002. What opinions were expressed were all positive with respect to establishing the Forest Legacy Program.

A private forest land stakeholder assessment survey was sent out and twenty-eight responses were received (see Appendix C). Five inquiries were made in the survey regarding: 1) setting in which the respondent lived, 2) the length of time the respondent has been living in Michigan, 3) Did the respondent own 10 or more acres of Michigan forestland, 4) what was the respondent's primary interest in private forestland conservation and 5) a request for the respondent to list the five (out of a possible twenty-three choices) most important State-wide criteria for protection of environmental sensitive private forestlands.

The following is a general summary of the responses to this survey:

- 90% lived in rural areas.
- Over 90% lived in Michigan for greater than 11 years.
- Over 70% own ten or more acres of Michigan forestland.
- Over 70% stated their primary interest in forestland conservation was due to the fact that they worked for either a public land management agency or land trust that was involved in some way with the conservation of private forestland.
- The five most important State-wide criteria to use in protecting environmentally sensitive forestland were as follows:
 1. Control and minimize impacts of urban sprawl
 2. Wetland/riparian issues
 3. Wildlife habitat
 - 4&5. A four-way tie between: unique ecological areas, forest timber products, large contiguous forest, flora/fauna species diversity

Public response regarding this program has been entirely positive with respect to establishing a Forest Legacy Program in Michigan. Key questions raised during the public comment period were:

1. Who would be the agency responsible for holding the easements and general program management?
2. How well would Michigan compete with other states regarding the receipt of FLP funds?

3. How would Michigan/DNR decide which landowners and/or parcels would receive FLP funding?

With respect to the public/stakeholder forestland assessment survey, the Assessment of Need does contain all those selection criteria ranked in the top five by respondents to the survey (Section XI.A.).

With respect to the three overarching questions of concern: 1) The AON states on page 30 that the State of Michigan will hold the easements with the DNR being the State agency responsible for program management, 2) The AON is a planning document and basis for implementation for a state becoming eligible for funding; how funds are allocated amongst states is due in large part to the quality of projects eligible for funding and the amount appropriated by Congress for any given fiscal year, 3) the Forest Legacy Project Selection Criteria will be used as a foundation for the developing ranking criteria.