

# Targeting Priority Working Lands and Operations

## Equipping Local People with Accurate Tools



*"No matter how big our economy grows, no matter how technology advances, no matter how global our society, we need people to till the land, produce our food, harvest timber, produce our paper, and conserve our most basic and precious resource, Wisconsin's productive working lands.*

*Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection*

The Targeting Working Lands and Operations (TWLO) pilot project aims to provide local decision-makers with the tools and training necessary to identify Priority Working Lands and Operations. Priority Working Lands and Operations are important farms and farmlands where protection efforts are desirable and help attain community goals and objectives.

Local people are at the heart of targeting priority working lands and operations. They know their community best and can share critical information about local needs, interests, and biophysical, economical, and cultural conditions. The TWLO pilot project

will apply local feedback and information using the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA)<sup>1</sup> system and Geographical Information Systems (GIS)<sup>2</sup> to deliver flexible, accurate and understandable land protection models. The results will identify local Priority Working Lands and Operations. The results are intended to help local decision-makers create, defend, and implement balanced public policy choices that protect important working lands and operations yet safeguard private property rights.

### **Cultivating Educated Local Leaders**

Local decision-makers (i.e. citizens, stakeholders, county board members, plan commissioners) are responsible for influencing and making decisions that meet local needs. Access to reliable information helps them make sound judgments. The TWLO pilot project will help local decision-makers:

- Identify and communicate local priorities.
- Communicate model outcomes to fellow citizens.
- Use model results to make effective public policy choices.
- Build public acceptance of valid models and appropriate public policies.



## Balancing Community Interests in a Diverse Landscape

Wisconsin's working lands are as diverse as the interests and activities that occur on them. Some working lands possess the best soils on earth and support bumper row crops. Others have unique physical conditions prime for growing specialty crops. Working lands far from urban centers face different challenges than those on the edge of development. Working lands provide natural amenities that foster recreational commerce and ecosystem services that filter water and air, store flood water and provide wildlife habitat. Importantly, working lands provide homes for people that earn a living from the land or love the opportunities these places offer.

However, increased demand for finite resources, especially from incompatible activities, can lead to conflict. Targeting priority lands and operations will help local people wrestle with and balance the diverse interests in working lands. Project results

are intended to help local governments, land trusts, and active stakeholders:

- Balance land preservation with rural development interests.
- Optimize the performance of a sustainable bio-based economy.
- Focus protection efforts on the most prized resources.

## Growing Support for the Future

The Targeting Priority Working Lands and Operations pilot project will progress over a two year timeframe and will conclude June 30, 2009. To provide local leaders elsewhere with assistance, project partners will develop educational materials for local officials and interested citizens and training modules for professional resource conservationists, planners, and GIS analysts. Before concluding work, the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection will host a meeting to help share our research findings and explore options for a statewide GIS and LESA support network.

<sup>1</sup> LESA is a rating system developed by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to evaluate the importance of a piece of land for agriculture use. The system has two components. The Land Evaluation (LE) measures soil quality characteristics of the site. The Site Assessment (SA) measures other characteristics of the site.

<sup>2</sup> GIS is a tool to store, modify, analyze, evaluate, visualize, or use spatial information. GIS provides the ability to combine and compare information that may have nothing else in common except for location.

Please look for our research findings, documentation, and educational products on the internet: [www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/workinglands](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/workinglands).

## Project Funding and Partners

The project is funded by the University of Wisconsin Consortium for Extension and Research in Agriculture and Natural Resources. Project partners include:

- UW-Stevens Point, Center for Land Use Education (CLUE)
- UW-Madison, Land Information and Computer Graphics Facility (LICGF)
- UW-Madison, Department of Urban and Regional Planning (URPL)
- UW-Extension (UWEX) Cooperative Extension

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- Wisconsin USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection

