

# WORKING LANDS CONNECTION

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

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## In This Issue

- ◆ Message from the Secretary
- ◆ Calendar of Upcoming Events
- ◆ Working Lands Steering Committee to Reconvene
- ◆ Understanding the Working Lands Proposal
- ◆ American Farmland Trust to be a Wisconsin Partner



## Message from Secretary Nilsestuen

Regardless of political persuasion, wealth, occupation or residence, all citizens share three fundamental goals: economic well being, protection of their environment and community, and a fair distribution of the benefits of growth. Wisconsin's economic and environmental future and ability to achieve these goals depends upon how we manage our various land assets. These land assets comprise our state's "working lands."

Maintaining these working lands is critical to ensure the continued health and success of the state and all of its residents. It is Wisconsin's working lands that provide homes for people and for many of the plants and animals that inhabit our earth. These working lands also produce abundant food and fiber, paper and pulp and now are a source of biomass for fuels, energy, and the products of the future. Preservation of the resource base, and maintaining quality open spaces and recreational opportunities will promote a strong and growing tourism industry, and provide a higher quality of life that will help draw new businesses to the state.

Yet, as we know from simple observation, Wisconsin's working lands are threatened by how we are currently growing as a state. We continue to lose too many acres of farmland every year, and in many cases, it is the best farmland that we have. Over recent years, the rate of loss of farmland to development has increased by 60 percent. Of equal concern, we are losing forests and farms in a fragmented fashion that increases urban-rural (and rural-rural) land use conflicts and deprives us of the land base and infrastructure we need for agricultural development and profitability.



For more information on Wisconsin's Working Lands Initiative:

Website: <http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/workinglands>

E-mail: [DATCPWorkingLands@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DATCPWorkingLands@Wisconsin.gov)

***Message from the Secretary (continued from page 1)***

In order to protect and preserve our working lands, Wisconsin needs a shared vision that balances existing land uses to ensure intelligent growth while also conserving one of our most precious resources. To that end, I appointed the Working Lands Steering Committee in 2005. The steering committee was asked to identify practical options for preserving Wisconsin's working land for agriculture, forestry, recreation, and tourism in a way that balances state strategic planning for business and housing growth, while maintaining our valuable environmental resources.

After a full year of reviews and in-depth deliberations, the steering committee issued its final report in August, 2006. The report contained recommendations to achieve land protection goals, while encouraging sound economic development and maintaining environmental sustainability, including a number of specific policy proposals for modernizing and revitalizing the existing state farmland preservation program, while at the same time, creating a new program for protecting land in the future from incompatible development. The committee also sought to encourage more efficient and effective land use planning. The beauty of these recommendations is that:

- ◆ They are not "one size fits all," they recognize that needs in Polk County are different from those in Jefferson or Waupaca Counties;
- ◆ And, they are not top-down state mandates, but rather provide practical new tools for those communities which wish to utilize them.

It is now time to move forward with the ideas presented by the Working Lands Steering Committee. Successful implementation will help ensure the long-term health of our farmlands and forests, a healthy state economy, and thus, a strong future for Wisconsin. Over the next few years, we will be working to implement this statewide vision. As a part of this vision, we will continue to provide educational opportunities, such as this newsletter, and host workshops and open forums designed to facilitate the discussion of the future best use of Wisconsin's lands. By working together, we can all be a part of an empowering vision of Wisconsin that ensures the health of its working lands for many generations to come.

-Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary

**Calendar of Events**

**June 4 ★**

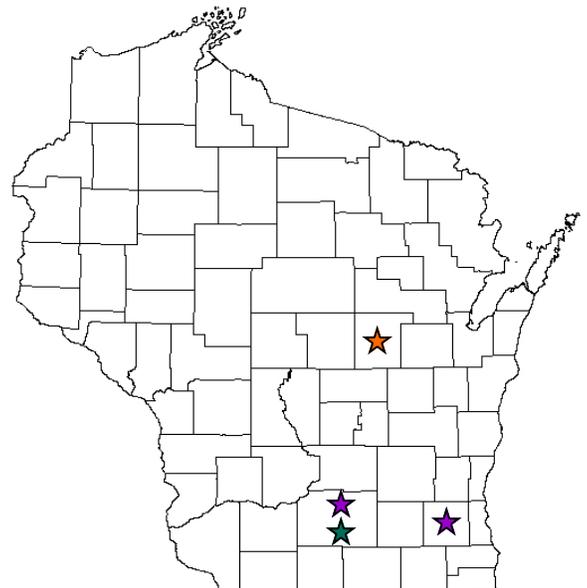
Review of DATCP Working Lands Proposal  
Working Lands Steering Committee  
Madison, WI

**June 10 and 11 ★**

Announcement of AFT Partnership In Wisconsin  
Bob Wagner, Managing Director  
American Farmland Trust  
Madison and Waukesha, WI

**June 24 ★**

Tour to Highlight Farmland Preservation Issues  
Natural Resources and Agriculture, Trade and  
Consumer Protection Boards  
Waupaca, WI



## Working Lands Steering Committee to Reconvene

Despite the recent break in activity regarding the Working Lands Initiative, there continues to be high interest in the program geared towards preserving Wisconsin's productive lands. For example, American Farmland Trust has paid increasing attention to the initiative, and is becoming more involved as the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) attempts to obtain legislative consideration of a working lands policy package in the next session. To aid in this effort, the Working Lands Steering committee, a broad-based set of leaders in key stakeholder sectors, will reconvene on June 4, 2008 in Madison in the board room at 2811 Agriculture Drive. The meeting will provide an opportunity for DATCP to update the committee on activities and the proposals developed following the recommendations previously provided by the steering committee in their final report.

Previously, the steering committee formed to provide a catalyst for "planning for prosperity." Steering committee members were affiliated with organizations in many areas including: agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, the development community, local officials, environmental organizations, state agencies, the University of Wisconsin, the Legislature, and others. Their charge was to use a consensus approach to study and recommend policies, strategies, and tools for state and local governments to use in building and implementing their managed land assets vision for their community's future. A set of recommendations was developed including: incentives and assistance to encourage private and public efforts, encouragement of intergovernmental cooperation, and efficient use of existing resources and programs.

The working lands steering committee will continue to be a valuable asset as the working lands initiative moves forward by providing ideas on high priority policies and programs and additional recommendations.

### Committee Members

(Affiliation at date of appointment to committee)

Dan Poulson, Former President, WI Farm Bureau Federation	Steve Hilger, Hilger Farms
Linda Bochert, Michael Best & Friedrich	Steve Hiniker, 1000 Friends of WI
Dick Barrows, UW-Madison – CALS	Jim Holperin, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Tourism
Sue Beitlich, Wisconsin Farmers Union	Ed Huck, Wisconsin Alliance of Cities
Jerry Bradley, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation	Margaret Krome, DATCP Board
Ed Brooks, Foremost Farms USA Board	Tom Larson, Wisconsin Realtors Association
Denny Caneff, River Alliance of Wisconsin	Mark O'Connell, Wisconsin Counties Association
Dick Cates, DATCP Board	Bill Oemichen, Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives
Jerry Deschane, Wisconsin Builders Association	Gary Rohde, Former Secretary, Wisconsin DATCP
Vicki Elkin, Gathering Waters Conservancy	Sharon Schmeling, Jefferson County Board Chair
Rob Gottschalk, Vandewalle & Assoc/Blue Planet Partners	Rick Stadelman, Wisconsin Towns Association
Steve Guthrie, Tomahawk Timberlands	John Torinus, Jr., Serigraph, Inc.
Dave Helbach, Alliant Energy	Curt Witynski, League of Wisconsin Municipalities

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## Understanding the Working Lands Proposal

The loss of farmland and forestland in Wisconsin, and the growing conflicts from competing land uses, are issues of great concern to state residents. Finding a solution that ensures comprehensive protection of the state's working lands is imperative to the state's environmental sustainability and economic development.

The department's "Working Lands Proposal" consists of a series of recommendations that advance many of the recommendations made by the Working Lands Initiative steering committee in 2006. The policies and programs for effectively addressing farmland preservation and managing land uses that make up this proposal balance increased benefits for individual landowners with improved efficiency in planning and program administration for state and local governments.

### Main Components of the Working Lands Proposal

- ◆ Modernizing the Farmland Preservation Program through *updated planning and zoning standards*
- ◆ Expanding and simplifying the current *farmland preservation tax credit* available through the Farmland Preservation Program
- ◆ Establishing *local planning grants* to offset the costs of updating a farmland preservation plan
- ◆ Creating a program for the *purchase of agricultural conservation easements* (PACE) to provide cost share grants to local governments, land trusts and other qualifying organizations to secure development rights on farmland of voluntary landowner participants
- ◆ Establishing *pilot grants* to assist in developing agricultural enterprise areas where owners of contiguous areas of farmland could voluntarily enter into agreements with the state to protect these lands from development
- ◆ Providing *beginning farmer support program* tools to provide an incentive to lease assets to a beginning farmer, and encourage training in farm financial management

**For more details on these proposals:**  
<http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/workinglands>

These proposals do not change or affect the current use-value assessment law. Instead, they attempt to provide for protection of agricultural and forest lands while ensuring continued economic growth. Maintaining these uses will remain critical to balancing this future growth with protection of environmental resources.

### Next Steps

The next step is to work with the state legislature and citizens to try to implement the policies and programs as proposed by the Working Lands Initiative. By working together, we can ensure comprehensive protection of the state's working lands in a way that balances the state's environmental sustainability with future growth and development. For more information, contact the Department at [DATCPWorkingLands@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DATCPWorkingLands@Wisconsin.gov).

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## American Farmland Trust to be a Wisconsin Partner

American Farmland Trust (AFT), a farmland protection organization based in Washington, D.C., has developed a growing interest in the work of the Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative. In light of the recent working lands activities that have taken place around the state, the AFT has indicated a desire to increase its presence in Wisconsin and to help the Working Lands Initiative move forward. American Farmland Trust will designate a Wisconsin representative to serve as a liaison to various stakeholder groups involved with the initiative. Currently, the organization does not have plans to open an office in Wisconsin, but will likely remain an active supporter of the Working Lands Initiative as policies are proposed and programs are developed. We will keep you up to date as the partnership with American Farmland Trust develops.

For more information on American Farmland Trust:  
<http://www.farmland.org/>



*Photos courtesy of Bob Nichols, USDA NRCS*

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