



MEMORANDUM

TO: Douglas County Comprehensive Plan Task Force

FROM: Dan Jochum

DATE: December 15, 2009

RE: Douglas County Natural Resources Focus Group Meeting
SEH No. DOUGM 109637

The following document summarizes the Natural Resources Focus Group meeting for the Douglas County Comprehensive Plan; it is not meant to be a complete record of discussions which took place, but rather a summary of the various topics and issues raised and discussed.

Date of Event: November 19, 2009, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Location: Douglas County Public Works Facility

Attendees:

Present: Dave Rush and Rebecca Sternquist (LRM), Dan Jochum (SEH), Doug Mensing (AES), Bob Ricker (MnDoT), Kent Hintermeister (Resident, Developer), Doug Mills (USF&W), Jerry Krebs (Pheasants Forever), Al Liefert (DC), Gary Stevenson and Jim Dahl (DC), Mike Sheldon (DNR), Emily Siira (SWCD), Julie Aadland (DNR), Shelly Beckland (DNR), Dave Dirks (DNR), Dick Kuehn DCLA, Mark Anderson (Viking Sportsmen Club), Bruce Winterfelt (DNR).

Meeting Summary

Doug Mensing presented information related to:

Ecology being the foundation for planning decisions. The natural resources inventory and assessment and ground truth. Overlay data analysis. Concept plan will be developed that balances the interests of ecology, society, and economy. The Parks, Open space and Trails Plan from Isanti MN. Incentive based programs for developers. Work with residents to retrofit existing conditions. Scott County – Conservation Overlay.

Douglas County has Mapping

– land cover, sensitive features, feature recommendation NHIS – “rare natural features” – prioritized habitats “core” – watershed/lake shed concerns – streams and rivers – ecological buffers – multifunctional greenway connections – development of a conservation framework (possible overlay district)

Existing Natural communities, rare natural features, woodlands, aquatic resources, wetlands, major watersheds, runoff (72 minor watersheds) hydric soils, agricultural land (chip and Sauk watersheds have more runoff than cities) aquatic resources water clarity, Chip watershed smaller lakes ag drainage poor clarity, drinking water – groundwater, sand and gravel deposits (geological survey) public and public interest lands.

Preliminary Findings -

Douglas County has diverse natural and cultural land covers. Very little native vegetation remains. Approximately 22% of Douglas County is covered with water. (J. Dahl)

Discussion on presentation:

Missing data or studies needed to complete Comp Plan

Aadland	DNR has subwatershed maps. Should identify mouth points in the lakes where tributaries enter.
Beckland	DNR has layer for invasive species available from St. Paul. Point data for aquatic invasives is also available from Nate Olson (Fergus Office)
Wells	Would be a good idea to have gravel certified to be weed free.
Beckland	Some sand and gravel areas have Significant Biological Sites within them. It will be sometime before a County geological atlas could be completed to compare with CBS data. Dahl has maps from the assessor's office of pits they have identified.
M. Anderson	County has lost existing CRP acres. What is the water quality result of losing this retired farmland? Does the county keep a ditch cleaning schedule and a list of previous work? Contact Tom Anderson for schedule.
Wells	NRCS/FSA data may be able to tell us how much CRP and WRP is out there. Some has been mapped and USFW may have combined wetland/grassland habitat maps.

Goals and Priorities

Aadland	Need to have more buffers on agricultural ditches. Should be promoting channel restoration on ditches – two-stage ditches at a minimum. Should also consider adopting the new shoreland rules. Special protection should be provided to Spruce Creek.
Beckland	Protection for S & A by DNR has two methods: purchase by DNR for parkland or other protection and by an easement program. The easement program is currently focused on native prairie.
M.Anderson	County needs to prioritize development opportunity
Wells	Combined conservation protection for wetlands and grasslands is important.
	Enforce 1 rod buffer for ditches which is a State rule.

Buffers

Not many in the county. Currently SIZ and some for ag practices. Should be required for Ag (50ft), but not enforced by County or DNR. Should county buffer the parks or CLT?

Rickert: Not necessary, DOT considers the trail to be rail bank and could be put back in use some day as a light rail transportation system.

Parks: Parks assume there will be no county protection and build in the necessary buffering in their acquisition. DNR's legislative park acres are met for DC.

Rush inquired if anyone felt it necessary to buffer hunting land. There were a few responses: DNR believed it was a good idea because of the conflicts that can occur when development butts up to WMAs. It discourages hunters and homeowners assume hunters will stay back. No requirements for hunters to stay 440 ft from a WMA boundary. M. Anderson agreed that it would be beneficial to protect WPAs and WMA but no one would provide a suggestion for width of buffer.

Corridors are not planned.

Wells indicated that USFWS is trying to manage larger blocks of land 12 sq mi and build the use buffers into that area. They have mapped wetland/grassland habitat units that they want to acquire and manage.

Other Discussion Points

Sensitive Features Maps

Other information to consider including:

- Rare Natural Features
- Prioritize Habitats (create "core" habitats)
- Incorporate watershed lakeshed concerns
- Streams/Rivers
- Ecological buffers
- Multifunctional greenway connections
- Woodlands (greater than 40 ac.)
- Pour Points, drainage network
- Invasive Species

Data that may need to be revised

- Aquatic vegetation
- Sand & gravel deposits (county Geological Atlas needed, Assessor's Office)

County Ditches

- Develop [and publish] a maintenance schedule (M. Anderson)
- Encourage/Adopt two-stage ditch design (J. Aadland)

Adopt new Shoreland Rules to protect Spruce Creek, a designated trout stream (J. Aadland)

To consider:

- Defining wetland buffers (fixed or variable, distance)
- "Core" habitats-establishing minimum corridor widths
- Developing guidance for land owners regarding land use restrictions on their property
- Map areas of high recreational value
- Develop wind energy policy/ordinances
- View-shed protection

- Rural residential density (ex. 1 per 40 acres)
- Buffering/preserving open spaces that are not county or state parks
 - Setbacks for land that may undergo prescribed burns or sprayed
 - View-shed protection, etc.

Land Development

- Developers/land owners need to understand what they can do with their land and what they can't. Developers don't like surprises.

Public Land

- The Comp Plan should address land acquisitions that would come off the tax role. There are a lot of misconceptions regarding what is actually paid by the agency acquiring the land. The myths need to be debunked regarding loss of tax base. Acquisition of public land adds to the quality of life for County residents.

Wind Energy

- Where is the appropriate location for wind towers to be located?

Setbacks to public lands

- Discussion of setbacks from public lands, such as WMA, WPA, State Parks, etc was discussed. A setback would help diffuse future conflicts by having proper spacing between residential uses and public land. More discussion is needed on what the setback would be. A setback off 500 feet may be appropriate for some public uses but more discussion is needed as it relates to what the specific uses are and how the setbacks relate to that.

Next Steps

Dan Jochum indicated that the information collected at this focus group meeting will be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan where appropriate. The task force will be discussing the preliminary findings at the next Task Force Meeting, which was held from 2:00 to 4:00 PM on November 19, 2009.