
Hixon Forest is an 800 acre nature-based park located on the east side of La Crosse, Wisconsin. In 2003, the City of La Crosse Planning Department initiated a project to develop a Comprehensive Plan for Hixon Forest. Because of the large number and wide array of current users of Hixon Forest, public input is desired so that the opinions and concerns of those users can be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan. An extensive literary search was performed to examine the different methods of public input. Along with this, interviews were conducted with public agency personnel who were experienced in developing and implementing public input strategies. From this information a Public Input Plan is designed for the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan that will gather verbal and written input from the stakeholders and users of Hixon Forest and educate those users on the opportunities available in the forest. In the beginning the Public Input Plan states the goals and objectives of the process. Along with this a detailed mission statement establishes the purpose for public input. The roles of the many entities involved are described in this plan as well as their relationship to one another. An overall timeline of events in the process is given so that everyone is able to visualize the public input process in its entirety. Each method of public input is then broken down into its own timeline and bulleted lists are given to describe in greater detail what each method will be used for and what type of information each method will provide. The end of the Public Input Plan offers reminders for different steps in the process and tips for constructing survey questions, which will be used to gather information from participants.
PUBLIC INPUT ON
THE HIXON FOREST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:
A CASE STUDY

A PROJECT PRESENTED TO
THE GRADUATE FACULTY
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF RECREATION MANAGEMENT

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DECEMBER 2004
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I recommend acceptance of this graduate project in partial fulfillment of this candidate's requirements for the degree:

Master of Science in Recreation Management

The candidate has successfully completed the final oral presentation.

Signature of Seminar Paper Advisor

Department

Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Steven Simpson for his faith in accepting me into graduate school when others would not. Also for his continued support and guidance throughout my time at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, both in class and during the course of this graduate project. I consider Dr. Simpson both a mentor and a friend, and he has made me a better human being.

A special thanks is extended to all of the staff and faculty in the Recreation Management program at UW-L. I learned so much about myself through all of you and my time at UW-L will have a lasting impact on the rest of my life.

I would also like to thank Adryan Slaght and Larry Kirch from the City of La Crosse Planning Department for their assistance during the drafting and implementation of the Hixon Forest Public Input Plan. Thanks to all of the members of the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan Working and Steering Committees. I learned so much about community planning and group decision making and I will definitely use this knowledge later in my professional career.

My deepest thanks is to my wife Karin, who if not for you, my dream of obtaining a Master’s degree would not have been possible. Your undying love and support helped me and inspired me in so many ways. Thank you so very much, I love you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

### I. INTRODUCTION

- Background Information                                                                                     | 1    |
- Purpose of the Study                                                                                       | 7    |
- Statement of the Problem                                                                                   | 8    |
- Definition of Terms                                                                                        | 8    |

### II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Introduction                                                                                               | 10   |
- Need for Public Involvement                                                                                | 11   |
- Stakeholders                                                                                               | 19   |
  - The General Public                                                                                       | 24   |
- Need for Public Education and Public Awareness                                                            | 26   |
- Information                                                                                               | 31   |
- Techniques for Public Education                                                                           | 34   |
  - Field Trips                                                                                                | 34   |
  - Newspaper Advertisements                                                                                | 34   |
  - News Release                                                                                             | 34   |
- Website                                                                                                    | 35   |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation of Additional Trails</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Management</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-tailed Deer Management</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Representation</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Future Land</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPENDIX</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PUBLIC AGENCY PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PUBLIC AGENCY PERSONNEL</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. ADVERTISEMENT FOR PUBLIC INPUT MEETING #1</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. ADVERTISEMENT FOR PUBLIC INPUT MEETING #2</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. ADVERTISEMENT FOR PUBLIC INPUT MEETING #3</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. WRITTEN AND ON-LINE COMMENTS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. DRAFT OF HIXON FOREST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Hixon Forest (Figure 1) is an 800 acre nature preserve located on the east side of the city of La Crosse, which in turn is located in the southwest portion of the state of Wisconsin. The land surrounding the city is known locally for its majestic bluffs and

Figure 1. Map of Hixon Forest. (Courtesy of Adryan Slaght)
coldwater springs that seep up from large underground aquifers. It is an area that was untouched by the large glaciers during the last ice age and is therefore known as the “Driftless Area” (Schultz, 1986). Hixon Forest contains expanses of native prairie as well as large tracts of hardwood forests and 500 foot sandstone bluffs (para. 2, “Main Page,” n.d.). These bluffs provide an exceptional ecosystem where timber rattlesnake hibernacula can be found and it is also home to a wide array of other animals including ruffed grouse, wild turkey, white-tailed deer, and many species of birds.

Hixon Forest was donated to the City of La Crosse by Joseph M. Hixon and his family in 1912 to save the area from being quarried and logged. At that time 300 acres were conveyed to the city with a stipulation that it was to be used for park purposes and for locating a reservoir (“Bluff property conveyed”, 1935). Since 1912 Hixon Forest has been home to an assortment of different uses, including a rifle marksmanship range, an archery range, off-road motorcycle trails, horseback riding trails, and a U.S. Forest Service watershed lab. Currently there is an array of trail systems encompassing 13 miles that is used by hikers, dog walkers, mountain bicyclists, and cross-country skiers. Motorized vehicles are not allowed in the forest. The Forest Service lab building has been converted into Hixon Forest Nature Center (HFNC) which is an interpretive and visitor facility that provides environmental education programs to children and school groups. The nature center is operated by a non-profit membership organization called the Friends of Hixon Forest Nature Center in cooperation with the La Crosse Parks and Recreation Department (Hixon Forest Nature Center, n.d.).
In previous years when decisions were made regarding activities in Hixon Forest, the La Crosse Parks and Recreation Department was in charge of implementing those decisions. All final decisions were made by the Park Board of Commissioners who received advisement from the HFNC staff because of their first hand experience with Hixon Forest. Members of HFNC work tirelessly by conducting environmental programs, educating visitors, maintaining trails, and keeping the forest healthy and vibrant. In the meantime, although Hixon Forest had been donated to the City Parks and Recreation Department, it is merely stewards of the land and must operate it as such as to follow the guidelines addressed in the initial transfer papers written up in 1912 by Mr. Hixon. A portion of the exact wordage is as follows: “Conveyed on condition that it is to be used by second party for park purposes and for the purposes of locating a reservoir for the city water works, and it may also be used for other public purposes, for forestry or for pasturage, subject to the control of the board park of commissioners, but no portion shall be used for a sanitarium or pest house” (“Bluff property conveyed”, 1935).

As it is stated in that transfer agreement, the City of La Crosse Park Board of Commissioners actually make the final decisions about the activities and processes surrounding Hixon Forest. If a concern needs to be addressed, the Parks and Recreation Department, under the advice of HFNC, bring it before the Park Board, and a decision is made that the Park Board members feel is appropriate. However, since the Forest’s conveyance to the City of La Crosse, for 91 years there has been no written management plan for the forest. Then in 2003 the City of La Crosse Planning Department decided to initiate a project that would develop a Comprehensive Plan for the management of Hixon
Forest. This Comprehensive Plan would be a visionary document that would establish goals, objectives, and policies regarding future use, development and conservation of Hixon Forest land (Koles, 2001).

One major issue that arose is how the floral composition of the forest should be managed. A forest assessment was completed by Hutchinson Resource Management in early 2003 which focused on an inventory of tree composition while giving recommendations and alternatives of the management of those tree species within Hixon Forest. The four main recommendations given by the assessment team were: 1) Limit the spread tree invasives, 2) Control the deer herd, 3) Identify and mark external boundaries, and 4) Prevent waste of wood fiber (Hutchinson Resource Management, 2003). The assessment team also supplied alternatives ranging from doing nothing to other different management techniques and addressed what type of outcome could be expected with each alternative. This report was an assessment from a private entity however, and the Planning Department needs to take into consideration how the users of Hixon Forest may react to these management techniques.

Another issue that prompted the creation of the Comprehensive Plan is the use of Hixon Forest by different recreational user groups. The forest already has established trails for hiking, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing; however, members of some of those recreational clubs are seeking to create additional trails within Hixon Forest boundaries. Previously, there had been no established method for addressing this issue. What is the recreational carrying capacity of Hixon Forest? Would the creation of additional trails affect the floral and faunal composition of the forest? If so, how? These
are some of the questions that the Planning Department wants answered before any more trails are added to the forest.

Additionally, what types of activities are appropriate in Hixon Forest? Throughout its history Hixon Forest has been home to recreational activities like archery and horseback riding. Are those uses of the forest still appropriate? Times have changed and safety issues would arise if an archery range was to exist in the forest. Horses are no longer allowed in the forest, but there is again support for creating horseback riding trails and permitting horses back. Along with these issues, new recreational activities have become popular in recent years, namely off-trail ventures. With the presence of rock bluffs in the forest, some people may want to pursue climbing or rappelling activities. Other pursuits like orienteering, mushroom picking, and disc golf are possibilities and also have to be considered. The Planning Department can not limit their planning to activities that were currently in demand in Hixon Forest, but they have to foresee other requests that could surface in the future. With the advent of Global Positioning System (GPS) technology, geocaching is catching on in popularity. At first it may seem to be a rather benign activity, but what kind of impacts could it or any other leisure interest have on the overall health of the forest?

The Planning Department also wants to keep recreational conflict to a minimum so that everyone could enjoy Hixon Forest equally. Could the trails handle multiple use activity or should they each be designated for specific uses? If the trails would be multiple use, there could be the danger of accidental collisions of users going opposite directions. Furthermore, the issue of accountability will surface. When there are several
users on the same trail system, finger pointing and laying blame with others will happen
with everything from trail courtesy to trail maintenance. A plan needed to be forged that
would establish a guideline system where issues like these would not become
problematic.

Along with forest management and recreational uses, the third big issue in the
Comprehensive Plan is wildlife management. The biggest concern is a burgeoning
white-tailed deer population that is devastating the floral understory and eating itself out
of house and home. Is it appropriate to try and manage deer numbers? If the deer are to
be managed, what method should be utilized? Could they be managed by non-lethal
means or would a controlled harvest be more effective? Hixon Forest is located in an
urban area so if a hunting season is authorized, safety issues would need to be addressed.
By some means, the deer herd needs to be reduced for the overall health of the forest.

There are other wildlife issues that need to be dealt with. One is the migrant bird
population of Hixon Forest. The forest area is known to be home to a considerable
number of “neotropical migrants”- birds that breed in temperate North America and
winter in the tropical climes of Latin America. The large blocks of mature deciduous tree
species was considered to be important habitat to forest-dependent birds, including 16
species that are considered area sensitive (Thompson, 2004). Because of this
relationship, the process used to manage the forest directly affects the number and species
of birds that inhabit it. Still other issues included rattlesnakes and their den sites as well
as any endangered or threatened species that are found to inhabit the forest.
Of course there are a host of many other topics that need to be covered by the Comprehensive Plan, and all would need to have public input to help with management decisions. Other areas of concern included but were not limited to enforcement of rules, proper signage, and management of newly acquired land. What makes things difficult is that all of the issues were intertwined. A decision that benefits one aspect of the forest may or may not benefit another. However, the purpose of the Public Input Plan is to educate people on some of the more difficult to understand aspects of the issues, while at the same time taking into consideration their concerns and incorporate their desires into the final management decisions. When decisions are made by considering the wishes of everyone who has a stake in the process, a stronger and more supported outcome will result.

**Purpose of the Study**

Because of the large number and wide array of users in Hixon Forest, it is necessary to gather their input and incorporate those opinions into the final management decisions regarding Hixon Forest. An extensive literary search was performed to examine different methods and techniques for incorporating public input into the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan. Along with this, private interviews were conducted with public agency personnel in order to gather further insight into certain techniques that may work better than others and particular pitfall areas to avoid.

Since Hixon Forest is public land it is necessary to gather input from the public because they deserve to have a say about the future of that land. Using public input will also legitimize the overall planning process and give users of differing opinions the
opportunity to understand the views of others. It was the purpose of this study to develop an impartial public input process in order to formulate a Comprehensive Plan that would incorporate the views and opinions of all of the users of Hixon Forest.

Statement of the Problem

Since its donation to the city of La Crosse, Wisconsin in 1912, there had been no overall written management plan for Hixon Forest. In 2003 the city of La Crosse Planning Department decided to implement a process that would create a Comprehensive Plan designed to govern management decisions and all activities within the forest. In order to create a Comprehensive Plan that would incorporate the views and opinions of the users and stakeholders of Hixon Forest it is necessary to gather this information in a structured and organized manner. A Public Input Plan is then developed to outline the strategies that will be used and the overall timeline of events throughout the process. This plan is intended to gather information from all parties involved in a fair and unbiased manner.

Definition of Terms

Comprehensive Plan - visionary document that establishes goals, objectives, and policies regarding future use, development and conservation of land (Koles, 2001).

Focus Group - small group discussion, led by a professional mediator, designed to brainstorm and give opinions on relevant issues (U.S. Department of Transportation, 1994).

Personal Survey or Stakeholder Interview - one-on-one interviews where questions are asked and responses are recorded during a conversation.
Public Awareness - techniques used to inform the public and make them aware of upcoming opportunities to provide input.

Public Education - techniques used to educate the public about technical or not widely known information.

Public Involvement or Public Participation - any activity undertaken by a decision making agency to provide opportunity for the public to influence the final decision (Daneke, Garcia & Delli Priscoli, 1983).

Public Meeting - gathering of interested public individuals, resource professionals, and policy decision-makers designed to initiate discussion and provide input.

Stakeholder - anyone who have a vested interest in the topic that is undergoing the planning process.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

A Working Committee, made up of personnel from the City of La Crosse Planning Department and Public Works Department, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Hixon Forest Nature Center, the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, as well as other organizations, was assembled to gather information on alternatives for proper management of Hixon Forest. It is the job of the Working Committee to research and present alternatives and organize natural resource information of the forest so that a Comprehensive Plan can be drafted that establishes concrete guidelines for appropriate uses of Hixon Forest by professionals and general users of the forest.

Because of the large number of users of Hixon Forest, the Working Committee decided that it is necessary to acquire information from those users so that the final Comprehensive Plan would reflect their opinions and concerns. The City of La Crosse is not legally obligated to use public input because it is not required by any law. Furthermore, there are no political motivations, since none of the elected officials have any involvement in organizing the public input process (Larry Kirch, personal communication, December 6, 2004). The purpose of the study was to research techniques used by professional public land managers for incorporating public input into the management decisions concerning an urban forest. The study resulted in a draft
Public Input Plan, and the rest of the Working Committee assisted in refining the plan and ensuring that it would be accessible to everyone who had concerns about the management of Hixon Forest. From that point on it was the responsibility of the Working Committee to organize and implement the Public Input Plan.

The following is a review of pertinent literature about public involvement and public involvement techniques. Along with the review of literature, interviews were conducted in January, 2004 with public agency personnel who are experienced with gathering and using public input in agency planning. All interviewees read and signed Informed Consent forms prior to the interview (see Appendix A). A series of questions were then asked to gather more detailed information about public input techniques (see Appendix B). These questions were merely used as a foundation for which to gather information; additional questions were asked in order to collect more detailed data. This Review of Literature is meant as a generic guide for any individual or agency that is using public involvement in assistance for making management decisions. This review used brief examples to the Public Input Plan of Hixon Forest for explanatory purposes.

Need for Public Involvement

Public involvement and public participation are interchangeable terms which describe any activity undertaken by a decision making agency to provide opportunity for the public to influence the final decision (Daneke, Garcia & Delli Priscoli, 1983). Because Hixon Forest is a large resource-based park and because it is used by a large number and a wide variety of visitors, it is essential to gather information from visitors regarding all of the possible uses and the appropriate course of management of the forest.
The users are a very important constituent, and their opinions are invaluable to ensure that a wide variety of management alternatives will be considered in the Comprehensive Plan.

The need for more and better public involvement in agency decision making has been reiterated by resource professionals at every level of management and administration (Blahna & Yonts-Shepard, 1989). Public involvement in government agency planning processes is a vital component to the success of the proposed project. There is no "Universal Plan" for public involvement that is to be used in every situation, but there are three distinct phases in which it is especially appropriate to obtain active citizen involvement. Those three are: 1) issue identification, 2) alternative development and evaluation steps, and 3) draft plan and revision (Blahna & Yonts-Shepard, 1989).

The development and implementation of the plan depends on many factors that include but are not limited to; the overall goal of the plan, size of the project, number of interested parties, budget, timeframe, and any contributing or limiting factors that may exist. Public involvement gives the public the opportunity to exchange information with a governing agency, and it provides an important social function and a role in community well being. In order to be optimally effective, it must focus on group learning, discourse, and consensus building (Shapansky, Adamowicz & Boxall, 2003). A public participation process should achieve the following objectives:

- Inform the public. The idea is to provide sufficient knowledge to selected members of the public to enable them to deliberate issues and formulate an opinion based on facts rather than on myths and beliefs;
• Incorporate public values into decision-making. While the first objective focuses on informing the public, this is about informing the planning agencies. The public involvement initiative should decrease the planning agency’s own prejudices against other parties;

• Improve the quality of decisions. The public involvement process should add substantive knowledge or ideas that would not have been available otherwise. These might include identifying relevant factual information or mistakes, or generating alternatives that satisfy a wide range of interests;

• Increase trust among institutions. Trust may be difficult to measure, since it is a difficult concept to define. Nevertheless, the process should increase the quality of communication networks among stakeholders and thus increase the will to work together by building new partnerships rather than publicly attacking each other’s work; and

• Reduce conflict. A public involvement process will not eliminate conflicts. However, if the four previous objectives are met, this should decrease the risk of destructive conflicts in which decisions favor only one interest. The process should generate constructive conflicts, leading to new information-sharing, alternatives, and partnerships (Cote & Bouthillier, 2002).

The process for public involvement must be adaptive and durable. It needs to have structure, while at the same time is flexible enough for any adjustments that are necessary (Walker & Daniels, 2001; Twarkins, Fisher & Robertson, 2001). Involvement processes of participation have basic core values:
- People should have a say in decisions that affect their lives;
- Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision;
- The process communicates the interests and meets the needs of all participants;
- The process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected;
- Participants are involved in defining how they participate;
- Participants are informed of how their input was, or was not, used; and
- Participants are given the information they need to participate in a meaningful way (Walker & Daniels, 2001).

These values are necessary for the public to accept the resultant plan, and the plan needs to reflect the knowledge and concerns of the public. It is important that the public is informed on the agency’s planning process as well as the public informing the agency of their needs because heightened knowledge improves communication channels (Moote & McClaran, 1997; Buchy & Hoverman, 2000). The core of public involvement is proper communication, and this needs to be administered from the very beginning of the involvement process. At the start, it is essential to clarify the purpose of participation. The agency must be clear about what it wants to achieve and how the process is to be conducted. It must not fear sharing control, and the personnel must speak with one voice (Wilcox, 1994). If different personnel are conveying different information, then the overall message will get lost. Along with this, in order to develop a sense of partnership
between the agency and its constituents, continuity in personnel throughout the planning stages may be needed. Dealing with different employees at each stage of the process might generate frustration and distrust by participants (Floyd, Germain & Ter Horst, 1996). The overriding agency needs to understand what factors like public perception or personal emotion affect the public’s behavior. This then leads to more accountable government services and an increase in citizen trust and confidence in public officials (Koontz, 1999) which will result in an improved rapport between the community and government agencies (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000). Trust is essential, it needs to be established even before the process begins and then maintained throughout. When parties trust each other there is less likelihood of conflict and undermining of the participation process.

Public involvement procedures should not be rushed; they take time. And with anything that is multi-faceted and lengthy, there are inherent benefits and disadvantages. The benefits include:

- More insightful decisions which reflect a broader range of public concerns, interests, and values;
- Reduction or avoidance of conflict or confrontation resulting from decisions, and public support for and ownership of the decision taken;
- Increased credibility of the planning process; and
- Education of all parties involved.
The disadvantages include:

- Time and money required;
- Uncertainty of success; and
- Loss of control over the decisions and the need to compromise in fulfilling the decision maker’s own objectives (Blouin, 1998).

Other disadvantages include less attractive outcomes of bureaucratic efforts to encourage citizen participation, including exacerbation of conflicts, and undue influence accruing from uninformed or unqualified individuals (Koontz, 1999). Organizers of public input must supply the public with all possible solutions to a problem, while at the same time give the public the power to come up with their own solutions. Organizers must also strive to keep conflict to a minimum and ensure the transference of complete and accurate information.

The overall purpose and attributes of public involvement make it a process that is necessary and, more often than not, expected by those in the community. It is a vital source of new information in which to base decisions and add substantial knowledge that otherwise would have been missed (Cote & Bouthillier, 2002; Duinker, 1998). Proper public involvement highlights the diversity of skills and expertise held by different members which then contributes to identifying a myriad of the potential uses of the resource in question. Relevant factual information or mistakes can be identified by the public as well. The involvement process tends to emerge from existing community interactions, so public involvement activities should be ongoing as communities and social systems change (Cote & Bouthillier, 2002; Daniels & Walker, 1996). The process
must create open and honest discussion about the tough tradeoffs that come by making one decision over another. Alternatives can then be added or eliminated to enhance the palatability of these tradeoffs (Shindler & Neburka, 1998; Moote & McClaran, 1997). There must be respect for both plurality and diversity of opinion. When conflict arises, an agreed upon resolution through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise is necessary (Blouin, 1998). Everyone will do better when confronting difficult or intractable conflicts by focusing on how they can be conducted more constructively (Burgess & Burgess, 1996). Also, managers must pay attention to a concern or an issue that seems irrelevant early on in the participation process, because it may resurface at some point down the line (Transportation Research Board, 2002). The impact of public involvement is influenced by the willingness of authorities to be imaginative and support new approaches in order to respect participants concerns (Cote & Bouthillier, 2002).

The role of power is important in public involvement, and it is one of the main reasons why people get involved in decision-making. The impact of the process will be influenced by the degree that the participants have power. Also, people’s attitudes will be influenced by the role and power that they think the governing agency has. The more power by outsiders (professionals and those outside the community), the less local communities will get involved. Generally, agencies and managers are reluctant to relinquish control over the resource, but this pattern must be changed in order for a true participatory process to flourish (Cote & Bouthillier, 2002; Buchy & Hoverman, 2000; Wilcox, 1994).
The issues brought up in public involvement processes are perceived as important by the intended audience; otherwise participants would not spend their time, money, and energy to be better informed (Barrows, 1993). For it to be effective, public involvement must encourage mutual education, creation of joint knowledge, generation of multiple options, and selection of an option that satisfies mutual interests (Dale & Hahn, 1994). The agency must not succumb to pressure politics, and it must not come down to a competition of “us versus them” (Walker & Daniels, 2001). Public policy decisions must be viewed as a compromise between interests. To do this, all comments must be viewed as valid. This helps encourage a stronger sense of trust, which improves dialogue and enhances opportunities for participant contributions. There also must be a heightened sense of participant ownership and commitment. When participants are more involved, they are more inclined to take better care of the facilities and the resource (Twarkin et al, 2001; Koontz, 1999). Also, people value interactive participation with two-way communication and shared decision-making, and everyone must listen to all legitimate and informed viewpoints (Walker & Daniels, 2001; Blouin, 1998).

The success of public involvement depends on equitable representation, access to information, fair and open processes, and informed participants. The ultimate outcome is partnerships, not conflict. Public involvement implies a commitment to equitable solutions and an absence of hidden agendas. People are sensitive to hidden agendas and their suspicions can lead to mistrust which then undermines collaboration (Blouin, 1998; Wilcox, 1994). To avoid this, the agency must take the project to the people, not the reverse. When participants recognize that their opinions matter and are taken into
consideration, the process has a much better chance of succeeding. Agencies must also consider legal authority and accountability in decision-making, as well as economic, institutional, and legal challenges (Moote & McClaran, 1997). All of these issues must be dealt with from the start and explained to the participants so that everyone is aware of possible hurdles that may arise. Everyone must be aware of issues that could thwart success. Issues like rigid views, authoritarian cultures, grudges and antagonists, hard to reach groups, those with poor communication skills, and those lacking the confidence, skills, or knowledge to participate could all create possible obstacles (Duinker, 1998; Wilcox, 1994).

Public involvement is any situation where people other than agencies and managers are invited to give opinions. This does not replace managers as decision-makers, however. It provides forums in which conflicts can be productively addressed, and to work efficiently, its techniques should be tailored to the unique circumstances of the problem at hand. Most importantly, it must incorporate a balance of opinions and views from everyone involved (Duinker, 1998). A desirable public participation process is thus one that enables citizens to shape planning decisions and outcomes while increasing their levels of social and political empowerment (Laurian, 2004).

**Stakeholders**

Stakeholders are defined as those people who are directly affected by organizational decisions. They are important because they can identify potential issues that could be raised by projects in the area, groups likely to be affected by issues, key people in each group, types of impacts that might be expected, and the significance of
impact on that group (Transportation Research Board, 2002). Hixon Forest has a broad array of users, and they are all stakeholders in the future management of the forest. There are many user groups that had formed over the years. Groups like Human Powered Trails, a recreational group that created trails for mountain biking, a nordic ski club, a running club, equestrian interests, the Sierra Club, and many more. It is vital that major stakeholders are identified and subsequently contacted before the planning process begins. A knowledge and understanding of the community is critical for identification of stakeholders (Transportation Research Board, 2002). More than likely, however, some stakeholders will initially be missed. By questioning the stakeholders who are currently involved in the planning process, these previously overlooked entities can be contacted and thus a complete list of stakeholders can have a role in participation. The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders are affected by their personality, the historical role of the organization, and their past relationship with the planning agency (Cote & Bouthillier, 2002). During the planning process, stakeholders want to know that their participation made a difference. They need to know how their input changed agency decisions and how seriously their comments were taken. They also need to know how their “local” knowledge fared against “expert” knowledge (Walker & Daniels, 2001). For those stakeholders whose wishes cannot be accommodated, it should be explained to them why their recommendation is not possible and they then need to be given alternative solutions or locations to furnish their request. For example, horses had not been allowed in Hixon Forest for many years so if the decision was made that they would still not be allowed, the equestrian interest stakeholders must be given information on where they were to
pursue the activity of horseback riding. If issues are important to stakeholders—tackle them head on. Ignoring an issue because it seems difficult to measure sends the wrong impression to the stakeholders that they are unimportant (Transportation Research Board, 2002).

Many times stakeholders with like interests may form specific user groups. The existence of mobilized community groups increases individual participation by reducing the costs involved. This occurs because it is easier to join a group than participate individually. For example, a user group can coordinate with its members and attend public input events as a collective, organized entity instead of a sole voice. Furthermore, groups increase the potential benefits of participation by increasing the likelihood that action will be successful. Relationships with mobilized individuals or groups indirectly fostered participation as they increased the degree to which residents were informed about the project (Laurian, 2004).

For the process to work, there needs to be collaboration and understanding between the parties. There will be little progress until stakeholders understand each others values and regard them as legitimate (Walker & Daniels, 2001). Many times parties who once thought they had opposing views eventually discover that their beliefs are rather similar. If there is some type of conflict on views, the animosity among polarized interest groups and any distrust of the government needs to be overcome. This can be accomplished through active dialogue. Active dialogue is important because it articulates needs and concerns, it helps gain an understanding of values, and it aids in participant revision and refinement of values and interests (Moote & McClaran, 1997).
Through dialogue:

- People are able to learn more completely and accurately how they and others are affected by an issue;
- Connections among related issues are more likely to be identified and discussed;
- Balanced treatment of all sides of an issue is more likely;
- Exploration of necessary tradeoffs is more likely to occur;
- A larger array of alternatives is likely to be identified and addressed;
- Consequences for people in different situations and their different values are more likely to be correctly identified;
- Contradictory information is more likely to be noted and addressed; and
- Feasible solutions and realistic strategies are more likely to be identified, and obstacles to simplistic solutions are less likely to be ignored (Dale & Hahn, 1994).

This exchange of information will provide ideas on how to avoid or minimize adverse effects. The resultant collaboration between parties will also likely uncover opportunities for enhancing the resource being discussed (Transportation Research Board, 2002).

If there is a lack of participation by any stakeholder or group, it is usually due to a lack of perceived benefits, time commitment, an undesirable venue, tension with the agency, or a lack of interest in the collaborative approach. For the participation process to work efficiently, however, any lack of participation needs to be addressed immediately (Twarkins et al, 2001). Every stakeholder needs to be involved in order for the final plan
to have validity. Not everyone has an equal stake, however, and that will be determined by how much involvement they desire. Some will want to be involved in every issue resolving opportunity, while others just want to have access to the information and be educated. The governing agency may need to help some stakeholders in determining what their level of involvement will be. Participation works best when stakeholders are satisfied with their level of involvement (Wilcox, 1994).

The amount of power must be shared, and stakeholders need to take collective responsibility for their actions and the outcomes of those actions (Walker & Daniels, 2001). Stakeholders also need to share roles and responsibilities where each group is technically and financially committed according to their interests and abilities (Cote & Bouthillier, 2002). Everyone has the right to their fair say, but they also must not overstep their bounds or get in over their head. In the end, all stakeholders just want to be able to be heard and have their concerns taken seriously. When people know that their contribution was used in the decision-making process, then the public involvement plan is a success. Finally, it is crucial to thank and congratulate stakeholders for their invaluable role in helping to decide the future of management decisions.

A list of stakeholders will generally include:

- User groups;
- Educational organizations;
- Information gatherers (like resource professionals conducting inventories);
- Government agencies;
- Local scientific experts;
- Financial contributors;
- Decision-makers; and
- The general public.

The General Public

The general public is defined as any stakeholder affected by an issue that does not have specific affiliation to an organized group. If the participation approach is to be truly representative, it is crucial that an active effort be made to identify and recruit participants who represent a broad range of interests and backgrounds so that those who are typically omitted from the planning process are heard from (Blahna & Yonts-Shepard, 1989). Sometimes they will not have specific views or interests about a project, but their input is necessary in order to formulate an accurate picture of all of the factors that are to be considered. More often than not, they demand to become decision-makers and they should participate in helping to make the final decision concerning issues that affect their lives (Blouin, 1998; Moote & McClaran, 1997). This is a right that every American deserves and expects from a country based on democracy and freedom of speech. If they are not directly involved in the final decision, they will want opportunities to have options explained to them, and they demand evidence that the decision makers had considered all of the social, cultural, economic, and environmental issues—not just business and politics (Blouin, 1998). This is only fair, and it ensures the best results for everyone that may be affected.

In order to create a solid management plan, scientific evidence is used to support professionals' views. Citizens who are unfamiliar with science can be very skeptical,
however. They also become uncomfortable with the trust that they place in technology and government (Walker & Daniels, 2001; Blouin, 1998). In order for citizens to trust agency science, the use of clear language and evidence is needed to support the claim. Agencies also foster respect by promoting meaningful dialogue and communicating competently. The public, on the other hand, needs to listen actively and be open to learning. They must also realize that science is uncertain; there usually are no universal laws in environments that are ever-changing (Walker & Daniels, 2001). When it comes to presentation of evidence, trust is paramount. Agencies must have established trust with the public before the planning process started. If there is no trust, more than likely the public will not accept the science. If this is the case, agencies will have to contact other professional scientific organizations to conduct similar scientific trials to back their results. Another option is allowing citizens to participate and help scientists gather the evidence. In this way, citizens can see how the science is conducted and have faith in the results. It also gives them a sense of ownership to the project, and they feel like they made a sizable contribution. Generally, though, participants who do not identify with particular interest groups have more moderate views and a more realistic impression of agency biases (Moote & McClaran, 1997).

Just like stakeholders in particular interest groups, members of the general public just want respect and the opportunity to voice their concerns when it comes to community planning. It must be kept in mind, however, that plans using public involvement must be based on actual consultation, not speculation (Transportation Research Board, 2002).
Also as with other stakeholders, agencies need to make a conscious effort to praise and commend public participants for their efforts and assistance during the planning process.

**Need for Public Education and Public Awareness**

Every public involvement process must have a large component designed to educate the participants. It is important that the stakeholders and the general public know precisely how and why decisions are made and the facts and knowledge that are used to make those decisions. A well-informed public will be more apt to accept decisions and the overall process will be able to flow more freely and garner better and more agreeable results for everyone involved. In the end, it is unrealistic to expect individuals to suddenly develop the capability to make complex decisions and become involved in major projects—they need education to develop confidence and trust in each other (Wilcox, 1994). For the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan, the Working Committee educated the public on the history of Hixon Forest and the subsequent need for a management plan. The Working Committee also gathered current natural resource data on what was available in the forest at the time of the planning process. The public was also provided with management alternatives and their corresponding advantages and disadvantages. By using a combination of this information, management decisions could be made that will take into account the best interests of Hixon Forest and its users. The use of the local media like newspaper, radio, and television on public input events made participants aware of the upcoming opportunity to provide input.

The role of public education is to find ways to enhance the natural, self-directed learning process. Its job, therefore, is to plan and help carry out learning activities related
to public issues. This is done by involving participants early and identifying issues that matter to them. It is also very helpful to anticipate how sensitive the public is to a particular issue. Those responsible for providing information must anticipate issues that will provide a focus for educational programming (Dale & Hahn, 1994; Barrows, 1993) and remember that different participants will use the information differently. The time spent predicting issues pays off by giving managers time to do advanced planning. The reputation for fairness, balance, and credibility is important for the educator. This is accomplished by selecting and framing issues in a way that enhances the likelihood of effective and democratic education. It is important to remember that issues look different to different stakeholders, so the job is to help these different interests understand each other. The educator must note different perceptions about the issues without being biased toward one interest. Also, many issues exist at the same time and compete for participants' energy and time. Generally, though, citizens will engage in issues that they think will affect their quality of life, and any perceived injustice or costs to this quality may motivate some people to participate (Dale & Hahn, 1994). However, individuals trusting the government may have less incentive to participate and are more likely to remain passive (Laurian, 2004), so public officials must find the appropriate levels of trust to ensure that everyone is involved in participation.

The public's understanding of the issues is shaped by the news media, and the media is influenced by interpretations by officials and experts. More often than not, however, personal experience is a stronger motivator than media perspective. An educator needs to help participants articulate the ways that issues touch their lives by
involving participants in exploring a problem and framing a question. Not everyone will participate willingly, or be easily recruited, so the educator needs to extend an invitation to people whose points of view need to be included. They may also need to offer assistance to those affected, but not involved or well represented in the policy making process. This is very necessary because decisions may be blocked by those views not considered or they may be undermined by unrepresented factions (Dale & Hahn, 1994).

Delivery of educational information should be tailored to the participants in order to:

- Foster motivation;
- Give clear objectives;
- Respect the participants' abilities by building on what they already know; and
- Provide opportunities for feedback.

Delivery methods are then complemented by supplemental materials provided by experts. In order to ensure that relevant and credible information is being used, appropriate experts must be selected. They must be respected individuals in their field, and the information that they provide must be pertinent to the issue at hand. Educators may need to help experts in fitting their contributions into a larger context in which a multitude of factors play a role in decision making. At the same time, educators must provide the public with the opportunity to understand something of the experts' methods. One way to do this is by allowing participants to seek out their own relevant expertise. The facts and knowledge provided by experts are very instrumental in proper decision-making, but facts are boring and meaningless without proper interpretation. Because of this, data
interpretation must be a collaborative process of citizens and experts working together to find ways to help everyone to understand the methods needed to gather and interpret data. It is also important to note that repetition of data is to be avoided, except for clarification purposes. Inappropriate representation of information may make participants feel like they are being forced to understand the data without proper educational procedures. Just as crucial, however, is that the educator must clarify what is interpretation and what is fact (Dale & Hahn, 1994).

The public education process needs to be conducted with a complete factual record. This helps people separate facts from values, beliefs, wishful thoughts, misconceptions, and emotions (Barrows, 1993). Value differences and factual differences need to be resolved in order to reach a mutually acceptable decision (Dale & Hahn, 1994). A better understanding and analysis of the factual record can help everyone focus more clearly on the essence of an issue. This is most effective if delivered before participants have taken strong stands, because any possible debate will be less rigid and emotional (Barrows, 1993). An educator needs to involve programs in which citizens can gain a more realistic understanding of both the worth and limitations of experts' research-based knowledge. They can therefore guide the process toward a shared, credible information base that combines scientific knowledge, local knowledge, and procedural information (Dale & Hahn, 1994).

Educators must be conscious of the views and opinions of the participants. They need to care about all of the participants and understand their situations and values. This is done by showing concern for participants on the side of an issue that will be hurt by
certain information. Educators need to listen to all of the views and empathize with everyone's perspectives. Ultimately an educator needs to know, respect, and respond to the concerns of the audience (Dale & Hahn, 1994; Barrows, 1993).

In order for the public to devise opinion on issues, they require information that is beyond what is normally available through mass media, including:

- Identifying an array of alternative solutions;
- Clarifying the consequences of different choices;
- Maintaining attention to issues until people have a chance to come to grips with it;
- Helping interpret contradictory information and disagreements among experts;
- Clarifying jargon, code words, and other language used in confusing ways;

and

- Conveying evidence that attention will be paid to the participants' views (Dale & Hahn, 1994).

Enlightened participant self-interest is most effective in guiding behavior if individuals have sufficient knowledge about the current conditions and the consequences of various possible changes. Proper knowledge of alternatives and consequences is essential for intelligent choices (Barrows, 1993). The educator must present the range of alternatives, but avoid describing them as "pros" and "cons" or "advantages" and "disadvantages."

What is an advantage to one participant may be a disadvantage to another (Ty Baumann, personal interview, January 21, 2004; Dale & Hahn, 1994). After informing participants of the alternatives and consequences, the educator must value the right of the individual
to make his or her own choices. As the participant makes these choices, there invariably
will be controversy and criticism. The educator must be able to withstand this conflict,
though, and not avoid it. Chances are, if it is not addressed immediately, conflict will
only escalate throughout the process and make any subsequent decision-making virtually
impossible. A proper educational program will benefit groups without good knowledge
of an issue more than groups that already clearly understand the alternatives and
consequences (Barrows, 1993).

Public education is an on-going and ever-changing process. Information
exchange is reciprocal and educators need to learn as much from the participants as the
participants learn from them (Twarkins et al, 2001; Dale & Hahn, 1994). Educators must
also let participants know that they are aware that information is only part of the
answer—that other factors including the reactions and value judgments of participants
will influence the outcome. Educators need to realize that unanticipated issues will
emerge while others will fail to materialize. Ultimately the education program must be
objective and neutral. If it produces major shifts in the attitudes of individual
participants, it may actually move people farther apart, making issue resolution more
difficult. On the other hand, a program that stimulates only minor changes in attitudes
may increase the likelihood of finding common ground (Dale & Hahn, 1994).

Information

In a participation process, accurate and timely information is key. Information
must relay the proper message to its readers and they should be allowed ample time to
comprehend it. When an ultimate decision has to be made, informed decision makers
will make informed decisions (Blouin, 1998). The amount of information needed is
dependent on the size of the project; large-scale projects require more information in
order to cover all of the different aspects involved. For smaller-scale projects,
information documents do not have to be lengthy. Information packets usually include
historical data and recent findings, information about agency accomplishments, issues or
proposed actions, and names and numbers of officials that people can contact for input.
They also can include relevant maps and schedules. It is suggested that technological
information from maps and websites should be kept low-tech and be a “process in
progress.” In this way participants do not view it as final and concrete, especially when
they have not had the opportunity to provide input (Michael Ries, personal interview,
January 14, 2004). This information should be sent to all stakeholders including adjacent
landowners, interest groups, educational institutions, and affected private organizations
(Koontz, 1999). Written information can be brief but it must be accessible to everyone.
The information must be understandable and use languages and ideas which the audience
will find familiar. Information dealing with sensitive issues (e.g. locations of endangered
species or archeological sites) needs to be provided but it should be kept vague (Michael
Ries, personal interview, January 14, 2004; Michael Horn, personal interview, January
13, 2004; Ty Baumann, personal interview, January 21, 2004). This is necessary to avoid
possible destruction or vandalism by members of the public. To be most effective it is
given prior to meetings or other public participation methods and is targeted to specific
issues (Twarkins et al, 2001, Wilcox, 1994). Before distributing information, agencies
need to consider what frame of mind the audience is in. Agencies should ask themselves:
What do the people expect and what do they know already (Wilcox, 1994)? It also may be necessary to package information differently for different groups. Information does not only have to be gathered by the governing agency; participants can gather and release information of their own. However, all information must be factual and legitimate if it is to be considered in the planning process. Perception is reality, and people support or oppose agency management actions based on information (or lack thereof) that may or may not be accurate (Redelsheimer, 1996).

Generally in the beginning, information focuses on current conditions, trends, causes of problems, or effects on different groups. In the Hixon Forest planning process, participants were informed on the history of Hixon Forest, the current trends of recreational activities, and the agenda for the overall planning process. The information is kept vague at first and details are developed at a later date. This limits the possibilities of participants to focus on specifics instead of relating the information to the continual planning process (Michael Ries, personal interview, January 14, 2004; Michael Horn, personal interview, January 13, 2004). Later the focus changes to alternative solutions and evidence predicting the consequences of alternatives. Finally, information discusses aspects of the final plan and evaluation results (Dale & Hahn, 1994). If somewhere during the planning process, agencies wish only to provide information to the participants, without soliciting opinions—it must be stated clearly why this is the case. All comments and input should be taken seriously by all participants, in order for a true participatory process to succeed (Wilcox, 1994). The role of information is invaluable. Agencies must ensure that citizens are properly informed from the start.
Techniques for Public Education

Field Trips

Agency personnel guide participants on a field tour of the project area. They usually consist of one stakeholder group or groups of like interests. This provides an opportunity for scientists and agency personnel to interact with different members for mutual learning (Walker & Daniels, 2001).

Newspaper Advertisements

Display advertisements are printed in a commonly read section of the newspaper. Typical uses are for notification of public meetings, events, workshops, or for application to public advisory committees. Advertisements reach a wide audience, particularly if sized and spaced appropriately. They are also relatively inexpensive. One must be sure to select the appropriate newspaper for the area and run ads more than once and within an appropriate time frame before the event (Macpherson, 1995). Examples of the advertisements for public meetings used in the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan can be found in Appendix C, Appendix F, and Appendix G.

News Release

A news release is typically a one page notification to area media of an upcoming event or the availability of information on a newsworthy event. News releases are used to generate media interest in media-oriented events, such as press conferences, field tours, or public meetings. They are easy to prepare and can be faxed to the appropriate contact. The contact list must be kept current or the news release will have a minimal effect (Macpherson, 1995).
Website

A website's interactive nature involves people much more than when they are simply receiving information. They provide the opportunity for continuous feedback and show stakeholders that their comments are desired. Stakeholders provided many comments for the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan (see Appendix H). They provide high impact by using interesting graphics and links to other sites for additional information. Websites are very time consuming, however, and they must be continually maintained and updated in order for viewers to want to come back and use the information provided throughout the life of the project.

Television and Radio

Provide a guest for radio or television talk shows. The format may include answering questions from telephone callers or from a studio audience. Public access television channels often have a regular time slot for this type of program and can provide production advice and assistance. This format enables agency personal to show that they have been receiving and paying attention to public input and that they can respond to controversial issues in a non-confrontational setting. It typically does not yield much input and it is uncertain how many people it reaches (Macpherson, 1995). Television and radio programming should be used throughout the participation process.
Techniques for Public Involvement

Personal Surveys

Personal surveys are one-on-one interviews where questions are asked and responses are documented during a conversation. This can be done with a pen and paper, tape recorder, typewriter, laptop computer, or any other method where it will be ensured that all information is documented accurately and completely. They focus on identifying and understanding participants’ feelings or values on particular topics (Macpherson, 1995). Interviews should begin with a brief overview of the purpose of the participation process. From there, they should proceed with questions concerning perceived issues and concerns, the participants’ level of interest, and ways that the individual or group wants to be included in the process (Transportation Research Board, 2002). Personal surveys obtain information about public values in the form of priorities among objectives, opinions about alternatives, and preferences among alternatives. They are ultimately used to ascertain public perceptions and desires (Tworkins et al, 2001; Keeney, Von Winterfeldt & Eppel, 1990). Personal surveys should be informal and loosely structured, and they can be conducted individually or in groups. If done properly and if appropriate questions are asked, they encourage participants to “buy in” and support the research. They result in an improved understanding of stakeholder issues and characteristics, provide ideas for appropriate public involvement techniques, and build agency credibility (Transportation Research Board, 2002). Surveys can increase the likelihood of response by explaining their importance and assuring participants of confidentiality. Many times it is helpful to use visual aids when necessary (Salant & Dillman, 1994).
Personal surveys are the best tool for obtaining in-depth and complex information. More thoughtful answers are usually obtained because participants have time to concentrate on their responses. The greatest disadvantages are the time and money that are needed to construct and administer the surveys, and properly training and supervising interviewers (Macpherson, 1995; Salant & Dillman, 1994). Other possible disadvantages include the hypothetical nature of the questions and influence of the survey designer in administration and interpretation (Keeney et al, 1990).

The way that questions are posed is a key factor in determining types and numbers of responses. The question should be framed in such a way that it lends itself to discourse and education. Also, the question should be stated in a way that all of the participants will find acceptable (Dale & Hahn, 1994). The following are tips on how to form personal survey questions:

- Make sure that respondents are willing to answer;
- Make sure items are clear and unambiguous;
- Avoid “double-barreled” questions (using “and” or “or” in the question);
- Avoid negation in the question;
- Avoid biased questions (Do not start the question with “Don’t you agree that…” or “Do you agree or disagree with…”) because this may lead the participant into responding in a way that they are not comfortable with;
- Avoid abbreviations and jargon;
- Use complete sentences;
- Make accurate statements;
• Do not assume that participants are knowledgeable about the subject—verify what they know and then ask the question;
• Make questions relevant to respondents (if not, give them options of “Don’t know”, “Have no opinion”, or are “Undecided”);
• Give clear, short items, they should understand the question quickly; and
• Inform them if you want brief or lengthy answers (Babbie, 1998; Salant & Dillman, 1994).

The previous tips apply to both oral and written surveys. If using a written survey only, use the following tips as well:
• Make sure format is spread out and uncluttered (do not put more than one question on a line, do not abbreviate, and make sure to provide enough space for an appropriate answer);
• Include clear instructions and introductory comments (e.g., “In this section we would like to know what people consider the most important community problem”);
• Make the appearance of the questionnaire attractive;
• If trying to recall a particular event in the participant’s life, use cognitive design, which is a series of questions that encourages them to remember that specific event or time period; and
• When using closed-ended questions, keep the list of answers as short as possible and make clear if you want “one answer” or “as many answers that apply” (Babbie, 1998; Salant & Dillman, 1994).
Interviewers should conduct themselves in a professional manner. They should be personal and friendly and interested in what the respondents say without prying. They should wear neat, modest clothing. The primary purpose for interviews is to listen. Interviewers are not there to persuade, debate, correct perceptions, refute assertions, or sway the input to support the agency point of view (Redelsheimer, 1996). They should not talk down to respondents and when asking questions, they should avoid being too specific or too vague. Interviewers should make a point to thank respondents even before conducting the survey. In order to administer an accurate survey, interviewers should be properly trained and learn ahead of time about the survey and the background of the project. A supervisor may also be necessary to field any difficult question or solve problems. It is also recommended to pretest the survey on a group that is not relevant to the issues or concerns of the project (Babbie, 1998; Salant & Dillman, 1994). Questions asked to the Hixon Forest stakeholders addressed the three main areas of management discussion: recreational uses, forest management, and wildlife management. There is no formal questionnaire although all interviews followed a similar format and asked the same basic questions (see Appendix D).

Public Meetings

Public meetings present information to the public and obtain informal input from citizens. They can be organized in different formats such as open houses, round tables, strictly informational, or problem-solving—depending on what is needed at that particular time. Held throughout the planning process, they can be tailored to specific issues and can be formal or informal. Public meetings are flexible and can be scheduled
at specific milestones or phases within the participatory process. They also can provide for early, timely citizen input if held in the initial stages of the process. Scheduling these opportunities demonstrates progress toward involving citizens in projects and programs. They provide a place to identify positions and report a consensus or divergence of opinion to the agency. Anyone may attend, whether as an individual or as a representative of a specific interest. Public meetings help monitor citizen reactions to agency policy, proposals, and progress. By observing reactions at periodic meetings, agencies and citizens are made aware of opinions and stances. If held early enough, these opinions may be analyzed and responded to before they become solidified or difficult to modify. In some instances, it may be appropriate to hire a professional facilitator to lead a meeting, especially if the issue to be discussed is highly divisive or controversial. A “discussion document” helps prepare citizens for participation if distributed prior to the meeting. An agency organizes a public meeting and prepares pre-meeting materials, including meeting announcements and agendas, displays, audio-visual materials, and any mailings or publicity that may be necessary. Appropriate ground rules for public meetings should include:

- Recognizing the legitimacy of concerns of others;
- Accepting responsibility to come to a meeting prepared for discussion;
- Listening carefully and sharing discussion time with others;
- Encouraging everyone to participate; discussing with intent to identify areas of agreement, to clarify differences, and to search for common understanding; and
Establishing a speaker's time limit. The agency provides meeting summaries in written form, describing areas of agreement and disagreement, making sure that all points of view are clearly and fairly stated.

Public meetings do not always allay citizen doubts about agency credibility. Although they improve the possibility of adequate citizen participation, meetings must be frequent enough to demonstrate agency concern about public involvement. Public meetings must be held early in the process and reasonably frequently thereafter to dispel citizen fears that they are perfunctory or that the agency is not listening to their concerns. Large meetings may intimidate citizens and restrain commenting (U.S. Department of Transportation, 1994). Publicity for public meetings must be taken very seriously. Often, the key reason for low attendance at public meetings is not a lack of interest, but a lack of awareness (Laurian, 2004).

Focus Groups

A focus group is a tool to gauge public opinion. Formats can be for visioning, brainstorming, or problem-solving. It is a way to identify customer concerns, needs, wants, and expectations. It can inform sponsors of the attitudes and values that customers hold and why. It can help drive development of policies, programs and services and the allocation of resources. A focus group is a small group discussion with professional leadership. These small group activities are often perceived as the most important and most frequent choice for public participation (Floyd et al, 1996). It is a meeting of a carefully selected group of individuals convened to discuss and give opinions on a selected few topics. A focus group has these basic features:
- A carefully crafted agenda, with five or six major questions at most;
- Emphasis on gathering perspectives, insights, and opinions of participants through conversation and interaction;
- Identification of major points of agreement and divergence of opinion;
- Minimal presentation of material;
- Gleaning, not shaping of opinions and perspectives;
- Eight to twelve participants; and
- Understanding that the participants’ role is to give personal insights and perspectives.

A focus group leader explores attitudes in depth through follow-up questions. It offers an opportunity to get behind people’s expressed attitudes and assess policy direction and program objectives. The small size of the group lowers barriers to speaking out without criticism of comments by others. Spontaneity in responding produces fresh information. Many focus groups have found that participants readily volunteer ideas and comments that have not been recorded elsewhere. Focus groups can elicit and explore attitudes and responses in depth as a basis for broader participatory efforts. A focus group provides citizen input from otherwise unrepresented individuals. It can be used to marshal expert opinion on a specific plan, and it can be used to compare opinions. Individuals within the group may react to others opinions or bring up their own ideas. A focus group is tailored to assess public reactions. It helps agencies or organizations understand overall public reactions to programs or policies at a single point in time.
Focus groups need facilitators as leaders. They are essential to hold the group to the agenda, to elicit opinions from all participants, and to keep a single participant from dominating the discussion. The benefits and drawbacks of internal versus external facilitators are explained in the next section. A focus group provides solely qualitative data and is not statistically representative of society at large. A focus group brings no public consensus (U.S. Department of Transportation, 1994). Before the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan focus group, a series of questions were drafted to initiate discussion between the participants (see Appendix E).

Facilitation

Facilitation is used in any step of the public input process where there is more than one interested party in a meeting or focus group discussion. Facilitation is very important in any public participation program because it:

- Keeps meetings focused and on the subject of decision;
- Has a person present to manage the process;
- Accomplishes goals in a more timely manner; and
- Gives the group a sense of accomplishment.

A good facilitator is an expert at managing the dynamics of the group doing the work. They are responsible for ensuring participation, handling silences, helping the group maintain focus, knowing when to move on or slow down, avoiding repetition, and dealing with problem people. They pace the group, offer a variety of possible ways to approach problems, and wait for agreement on a particular process. Above all, the facilitator is
responsible for meeting everyone’s needs (Enriquez, 1996; Dale & Hahn, 1994). The facilitator has many different roles:

- The Opener: Opens communication channels and initiates discussion, or facilitates better communication if the group is already talking;
- The Legitimizer: Reminds all parties to recognize the right of others to express opinions and be involved in decisions;
- The Process Facilitator: Lays down ground rules for the meeting and often formally leads the discussion, especially in the early sessions;
- The Trainer: Educates participants who may lack skills or preparation in the processes of negotiation and problem solving;
- The Resource Expander: Provides procedural assistance to the groups and links them to outside resources that may lead to more informed or varied viewpoints;
- The Problem Explorer: Examines a variety of viewpoints and helps the group achieve consensus;
- The Agent of Reality: Uses critical as well as creative thinking to question and challenge group members who have extreme and unrealistic goals; and
- The Leader: Mobilizes the group’s resources to achieve goals (Enriquez, 1996).

To be most effective, the facilitator should be from a neutral third party. He/She should be someone who is respected and who is knowledgeable about the community. Possibilities include: a community head, a member from a regional planning committee,
or a county-based University Extension faculty member (Michael Ries, personal interview, January 14, 2004; Michael Horn, personal interview, January 13, 2004; Ohm, 1999). Using an external facilitator encourages the participants to view the meetings as balanced; therefore communication is more open and honest. It also serves another vital function by allowing agency personnel to interact with participants. There needs to be diligence by the agency to trust the facilitator. He/She needs to have clearly defined roles like helping design the process, and organizing and leading public meetings (Twarkins et al, 2001). A good facilitator is also someone who can micro-focus on parties’ contributions, allowing him/her to work on those aspects of the dispute that he/she deems important and in the order that he/she chooses (Burgess & Burgess, 1996). The disadvantage of using an external facilitator is any costs that are involved. Agencies can also use an internal facilitator. This will usually reduce expenses. However, the facilitator must inform participants ahead of time of his/her role, and he/she must strive to consider every opinion equally and without bias (Ty Baumann, personal interview, January 21, 2004).

Public Comment Period

After a particular study is completed, but before it is considered final, a waiting period of about a month may be allowed for any interested member of the public to submit written comments about it to the decision-making body. It enables all parties to decide what their level of commitment is to furthering or opposing the project. It addresses issues of fairness and openness by providing one last chance for everyone to
express an opinion. It does not allow for interaction, learning, or compromise, however; each group is just taking a position (Macpherson, 1995).

Public Hearings

Public hearings are formal settings where public comment is received by the final decision makers. A highly structured format is used, often with a designated hearing officer present to officiate. Typical public hearings are not designed to present project information, but are strictly opportunities to create official records of public comment. They are often used to receive public comments on draft or final project alternatives. There is no opportunity for education or exchange of information. If the hearings are not preceded by a good education or involvement program, the comments may not be focused on the problem addressed by the project (Macpherson, 1995).

Other Options

Other options for public involvement include charrettes, citizen advisory committees, and working groups. Additional options for public education are newsletters, information repositories, information line telephone numbers, door hangers, and public kiosks—just to name a few. They are used for issues that are not covered by the media and for audience segments that need more detailed information (Dale & Hahn, 1994). The key is to understand the local groups and their differences, and tailor the approach to what works best for the stakeholders, not what is most convenient for the agency (Transportation Research Board, 2002).
Evaluation

Evaluation of the public participation process is a vital component to the success of the plan as a whole. Many times, however, the importance of evaluation is overlooked and not taken into consideration either during or after the course of the process. A continual evaluation of the participation and education procedures is necessary to ensure that everyone involved is being kept informed of any changes that occur. Proper planning requires constant re-evaluation and analysis (Moote & McClaran, 1997). When done correctly, a constant evaluation of participation can identify weak areas in the plan, and thusly, corrections can be made in a timely manner to identify possible improvements or prevent the same errors from occurring more than once. Stakeholders will know when processes are not accomplishing their intended outcomes, so it is up to the agency and the participation planners to be on top of things so that they do not appear negligent or uncaring. The concept of maintaining trust will be evident in the way that planners handle difficult situations and find alternatives to procedures that are not performing well. Some issues will not become apparent until after the participation process is over. When this happens, planners must recognize those problem areas and ensure that the same errors will not happen again in future decision making endeavors. Most importantly, the outcome of participation must not be predetermined (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000). The whole intent of public involvement is to design a plan that takes the public’s considerations into view, so that the final plan can satisfy the needs of as many constituents as possible.
Public Input Plan for Hixon Forest

March 18, 2004
# Table of Contents

Goals, Objectives, and Mission Statement .............................................. 1
Role of the Working Committee ................................................................. 2
Role of the Steering Committee ................................................................. 2
Role of Stakeholders and the General Public ............................................. 2
Role of the Park Board .............................................................................. 3
Role of the Mayor & Common Council .................................................... 3
Relationship of the Roles and Process for Information Exchange ............. 3
Public Input Timeline ................................................................................ 4
Identified Stakeholder Groups ................................................................. 5
Public Awareness Items ............................................................................. 5
Items to be Addressed by Public Education .............................................. 5
Website ....................................................................................................... 6
Field trip/Media Day .................................................................................. 7
Public Input Meetings ............................................................................... 7-9
Stakeholder Meetings .............................................................................. 10
Focus Groups ............................................................................................ 10
Public Comment Period ........................................................................... 11
Public Hearings .......................................................................................... 11
Things to Remember .................................................................................. 12
Tips for Survey Questions .......................................................................... 13
Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan Schedule ........................................... 14
Goals of the Public Input Component to the Master Plan

All five of the following goals are important to public input. While obtaining information to improve the quality of the decisions is obvious, the methods used in gathering information must always keep all five goals in mind.

1. Inform the public of what is happening and why.
2. Incorporate public values into decision-making.
3. Improve the quality of decisions.
4. Increase trust between institutions and the public.
5. Reduce conflict.
(Cote & Bouthillier, 2002)

Objectives

Based on the stated five goals, the public participation process then has six intended objectives to fulfill.

1. To ensure that the widest range of public values is considered.
2. To assist in determining socially desirable management directions.
3. To set bounds on choices for practices, strategies, and policies.
4. To bring unique local knowledge and insight into decision-making.
5. To provide strong forums for citizen learning about the views and positions of the other stakeholders, along with management options and alternatives.
6. To provide a forum for addressing and resolving conflicts and attempting to develop consensus.
(Duinker, 1998)

Public Involvement Mission Statement

With its goals and objectives established, the mission of the public input process for the comprehensive plan for Hixon Forest is as follows:

Recognizing the importance of public opinion and desiring a process of impartial public involvement, it is the intent of the City of La Crosse to design and implement a public participation process that addresses current issues and public concern through educational programs and interactive workshops so that public knowledge and insight can be utilized to assist in the formulation of a Comprehensive Plan for Hixon Forest.
Roles in the Decision-Making Process

Working Committee

The working committee is made up from staff persons of City Departments as well as staff from the Hixon Forest Nature Center, the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Additional resource professionals will be added as key inventories are completed. These will include ecologists, foresters, wildlife specialists, etc. The rationale is to incorporate the best professional/technical information into the plan. A UW-La Crosse Recreation Management Master’s Degree Candidate (and his advisor) are participating in the process as members of the Working Committee. The Master’s Degree candidate specifically is targeting his graduate research project on alternatives for public participation and is assisting in designing the public participation process. This student will then assist the Working Committee in laying out a public participation process for this planning effort. The roles of the Working Committee will be to:

- Obtain Ecological Inventories and Management/Land Use History
- Obtain Property Acquisition History
- Arrange and Organize Public Input
- Facilitate the drafting of the Comprehensive Plan
- Serve as Technical Advisors to the Steering Committee

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee will be made up of three members of the La Crosse Board of Park Commissioners and two to three members of the Hixon Forest Nature Center Board. The Hixon Forest Nature Center has had a partnership with the City for over 20 years, and the City feels that this group has had the long-term stewardship mission for Hixon Forest and therefore logically should be represented on the Steering Committee. The roles of the Steering Committee will be to:

- Oversee Public Input Meetings
- Interpret information from Public Input
- Provide direction to the Working Committee regarding plan content and policy formulation
- Recommend draft comprehensive plan to the Board of Park Commissioners

Stakeholder Groups and the General Public

The Stakeholder Groups and Public Visitors of Hixon Forest will provide input on appropriate uses of the forest. While the intent of this process is to gain as much input from the public as possible, it must be recognized that the forest will be managed as a natural resource first, and some proposed uses may be limited by the forest’s ability to withstand those uses. Both verbal and written comments will be obtained from these groups during the planning process. The comments and concerns of the stakeholders and general public will be reviewed by the Steering Committee and thus considered by the Park Board, the Mayor, and the Common Council during development of the Comprehensive Plan for Hixon Forest.
**Park Board**

The Board of Park Commissioners has oversight over all City Parks including Hixon Forest, and as such is responsible for preparing various park plans. The Board is the long-term steward of Hixon Forest, the City’s premier natural park. Its duties concerning the plan include:

- Receive periodic updates from Steering Committee and Working Committee
- Attend Public Input Meetings
- Review and approve draft and final Comprehensive Plan
- Recommend final plan to Mayor and Common Council
- Lead entity/advocate for plan implementation

**Mayor & Common Council**

Ultimately, it is the Mayor and Common Council who will adopt the Comprehensive Plan for Hixon Forest. If the Working Committee, the Steering Committee, the Board of Park Commissioners, the Plan Commission, stakeholders and the general public reach consensus in an open and collaborative fashion, the Mayor and Common Council should fully endorse the final plan. The overriding goal of this process is to have meaningful public involvement without any single group feeling that they either did not have a voice in the process, or worse, that some particular group had a louder voice than any other group. Each of the potential stakeholders must feel that their voice counts.

**Relationship of the Roles and Process for Information Exchange**

![Diagram showing the relationship of the roles and process for information exchange between the Working Committee, General Public, Stakeholder Representatives, Steering Committee, Park Board, and Mayor & Common Council.](diagram.png)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Input Schedule</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hixon Plan Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 24, 4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Initial Steering Committee Mtg (with Working Com.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 21, 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Joint Working/Steering Committee Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Trip/Media Day</td>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>Contact Stakeholder Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Input Web Site</td>
<td>Up by week of April 26-30</td>
<td>Public Input Web Site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Input Meeting</td>
<td><strong>May 5</strong></td>
<td>Public Input Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Interviews</td>
<td>Week of May 10-14</td>
<td>Stakeholder Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>Week of May 17-21</td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June through July</td>
<td>Finish Resource Inventories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of June 14-18</td>
<td>Joint Working/Steering Committee Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of July 11-17</td>
<td>Joint Working/Steering Committee Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of August 1-7</td>
<td>Joint Working/Steering Committee Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Report on Nat. Res. Inv.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Public Input Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Input Meeting (tentative)</td>
<td>Week of August 9-13</td>
<td>Develop Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Public Input Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Input Meeting</td>
<td>Week of October 25-29</td>
<td>Present Recommended Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Comment Period</td>
<td>November 1-18</td>
<td>Public Comment Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Public Comment Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Hearings (4-5)</td>
<td>November 18 – December 11</td>
<td>Public Hearings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Public Hearings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Adoption</td>
<td>December 9</td>
<td>Council Adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Council Adoption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: Follow up/evaluation
**Identified Stakeholder Groups**

Adjacent landowners (Milson Court, Rim of the City Rd, Cty Rd FA), Alpine Inn, ATV/snowmobile groups, Audubon, birders, botany club, City of La Crosse Park & Recreation Department employees, equestrian interests, Forest Hills Golf Course (Holtz & Associates), Hixon Forest Nature Center, Human Powered Trails, Mississippi Valley Archeological Center, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, National Weather Service, Neighborhood Associations, Nordic Ski Club, orienteering interests, prairie enthusiasts, River City Running Club, ROTC, school district or education subcommittee, Sierra Club, Viterbo Environmental Club, Wild Ones, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the general public.

**Public Awareness**

Media Relations

- Press Releases
- The La Crosse Tribune (editorial board)
- Community Calendars on all local media
- Channel 19 – Live at Five, Contact
- Mary Meehan-Strub at UW-L Extension radio show
- Media Day

Newspaper Advertisements (Display Ads):

- At least one before each meeting starting about 2 weeks before

**Items to be Addressed by Public Education**

- Roles of the Park Board, HFNC, and Stakeholders
- The purpose and need for the Comprehensive Plan
- Presentation and evaluation of Plan alternatives
- Natural Resource management options with explanations, advantages, and disadvantages
- Recreation use options with explanations, advantages, and disadvantages
- Use restrictions based on natural resource protection and land use restrictions
Web Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Posting</td>
<td>Week of April 25-30 (survey development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from Public Input Meeting, Stakeholder Meetings and Focus Groups</td>
<td>Week of May 24-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from Resource Inventories</td>
<td>Last weeks of June and July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from Second Public Meeting</td>
<td>Week of August 22-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update</td>
<td>Week of September 26-October 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from Third Public Meeting</td>
<td>Week of November 7-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from Park Board Meeting</td>
<td>Week of November 28-December 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from Council Meeting and Final Plan</td>
<td>Week of December 12-18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Web Site Contents Include:
- History of Hixon Forest and Hixon Forest Nature Center
- Relevant inventory data to the present and land use management history
- Explain purpose and background of the planning process
- Explain roles and limitations of public and stakeholder involvement
- Tentative schedule of public participation process (emphasized as tentative)
- Information from public comments
- PDF of Public Input Plan
- PDF of Comprehensive Plan after it is adopted
- Photographs
- Online survey

Tips for Web Site:
- Design it specifically for public education and input of the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan
- Colorful and attractive homepage
- Email link for public comment 24 hours per day
- Links to City of La Crosse and Hixon Forest Nature Center websites for public to gain additional information
- Ticker to count number of visits for evaluation of usage
### Field Trip/Media Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send Letters to Identified Stakeholders and Educational Organizations</td>
<td>April 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send News Releases to all local Television Stations</td>
<td>April 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Trip/Media Day</td>
<td>April 24 (afternoon)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Format:**
- Members of the Nature Center can give demonstrations and guide trips
- Educate public on uniqueness of Hixon Forest and what it has to offer
- Educate public about history and resources of the forest
- Provide information on upcoming public involvement meetings
- Incorporate children
- Depending on demand, it may be necessary to host multiple trips

### Public Input Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Tribune, Article 1-2 wks before PIM</td>
<td>March 29-April 2, article late April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Meehan Strub/WLSU radio show</td>
<td>March 29- April 2, air late April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send Letters to Identified Stakeholders</td>
<td>April 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Newspaper Ad</td>
<td>April 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Calendar</td>
<td>April 26-May 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper article (Media Day)</td>
<td>April 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover Story, Contact, Live at Five</td>
<td>Contact March 29 – April 2, air week of April 19-30?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Public Input Meeting (Present Conditions and Issues)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week of May 3-7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Newspaper Ad</td>
<td>August 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Release</td>
<td>August 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Public Input Meeting (Present Information from previous public input and Alternatives)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week of August 9-13</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Newspaper Ad</td>
<td>October 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Release</td>
<td>October 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Tribune, Article 1 week before PIM</td>
<td>October 11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Meehan Strub/WLSU radio show</td>
<td>October 11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Calendar</td>
<td>October 18-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Public Input Meeting (Draft Recommendations)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week of October 25-29</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Format for First Public Input Meeting:

| Date and Time          | • Week of May 3-7  
|                       | • Weeknight from 4:30-8:30 p.m. |
| Location              | • Neutral Site (e.g. school or university)  
|                       | • Must have ample parking space  
|                       | • Must be accessible to participants with disabilities |
| In attendance         | • Working Committee, Steering Committee, Moderators,  
|                       | Recorders, Park Board, Council, Plan Commission |
| Near entrance         | • Supply a meeting agenda with ground rules for all participants  
|                       | • Provide color coded nametags for participants  
|                       | • Sign-up sheet for participants to identify themselves and their stakeholder group affiliation (if they have one)  
|                       | • Attain information about participant availability for Focus Groups |
| 4:30 – 5:15 Freeflow  |  
| 5:15 – 5:45 PowerPoint|  
| Presentation          |  
| 5:45 – 6:30 Freeflow  |  
| 6:30 – 7:00 Presentation |  
| 7:00 – 8:00 Round Table |  
| Charette              |  
| 8:00 – 8:15 Reports/  |  
| Presentations         |  
| 8:15 – 8:30 Closing Remarks, etc. |  
| Poster Boards         | • 3 surrounding presentation areas with similar information as website  
|                       | • Comment cards provided for public to write down concerns  
|                       | • One agency personnel stationed at each to field questions and discuss issues with the public |
| Presentations         | • 30 minutes long in PowerPoint at 5:15 and 6:30 p.m.  
|                       | • Begin with introduction of project and thank participants for attending  
|                       | • Use of visual presentations to convey information about current issues and inventory materials |
| Round Tables          | • 1 discussion period for one hour (7:00 – 8:00 p.m.)  
|                       | • Participants discuss major issues in separate tables according to color code on nametag  
|                       | • Each table has a neutral moderator and one information recorder  
|                       | • Each table selects representative to report to larger group |
| At end of Meeting     | • Solicit information about other stakeholders who are not currently involved |
| After Meeting         | • Send information from the meeting to all participants |
Tips:
- Members from particular stakeholder groups should be broken up into separate round tables as much as possible to avoid an overrepresentation of views.
- Many of the participants selected should not have a rigid stance on the issues so that fresh ideas and alternatives can be brought up.
- Provide punch, coffee, and cookies.
- Adryan Slaght should attend for documentation purposes.

**Layout for First Public Input Meeting**

![Layout Diagram]

- PowerPoint Presentation
- Maps
- Natural History Inventory
- Discussion Tables
- Recreational Use
Stakeholder Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Stakeholders</td>
<td>Week of April 26-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform participants of their meeting</td>
<td>Week of May 3-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>date/time/location</td>
<td>Week of May 10-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Format:
- Hold meetings at a neutral site like a school or library
- Interview one to two members of each stakeholder group
- Interviews should be conducted by an interviewer and a recorder
- Thank participants for their cooperation
- Prepared format of questions will be used for all interviews
- Document participant names and stakeholder group affiliation with questionnaire results
- During interview, gather information on any other stakeholders that may need to be involved during the process

Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform participants of their meeting</td>
<td>Week of May 10-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>Week of May 17-21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Format:
- Hold meeting at a neutral site like a school or other municipal building
- Address topics in 5 or 6 questions to be covered during meeting
- Groups contain 8-10 individuals that represent their particular stakeholder group
- One agency personnel should attend
- Use a trained, professional facilitator
- Topics will be written on a blackboard or other media to ensure that everything is covered appropriately
- Keep it informal
- Set a time limit of 1 hour
- Hold meeting during work hours and after work on a weekday
- Adryan Slaght should attend for documentation purposes only
- Thank participants for their cooperation
- Inform participants about upcoming events
Public Comment Period

- Gives the public one last chance to submit written opinions
- Deadline for submission is about one month
- Enables all parties to decide what their level of involvement will be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information posted at Main Library prior to</td>
<td>April 26-May 21, August 2-27, October 18-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and after all 3 PIMs</td>
<td>November 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin accepting submissions</td>
<td>November 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline for submittal</td>
<td>November 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public Hearings

- Last chance for participation
- All citizens can participate
- Gathers public comments and opinions for public record
- Hold at city municipal building
- Decision making body will oversee meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Newspaper Ad</td>
<td>November 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television/Radio coverage</td>
<td>November 14-December 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send News Release</td>
<td>November 14, 28, December 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Newspaper Article</td>
<td>November 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Hearings (4-5)</td>
<td>Park Board – November 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan Commission – November 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highway, Property, &amp; Utilities Committee – December 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committee of the Whole – December 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Council – December 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Things to Remember

- Do not underestimate the people
- For the process to succeed, there must be an elevated level of trust between all participants
- Help people to widen their perceptions of the decisions and to clarify the implications of each option
- Continuously review and widen membership (Wilcox, 1994)
- Multiple perspectives need to be included
- The process is ongoing, a decision is not an endpoint (Dale & Hahn, 1994)
- Stakeholders need to be given all information from the beginning
- If stakeholders desires cannot be accommodated, they must be given viable alternatives (Ty Baumann, personal interview, January 21, 2004)
- Not everyone will wish to participate at the same level, some will want full participation while others may only wish to be informed
- Stakeholders need to know how seriously their opinions were taken and how their input changed agency decisions (Walker & Daniels, 2001)
- Participants deserve continual praise and acknowledgement for their cooperation
- Information needs to be accurate, current, and given up front
- Information is a two-way street, agency personnel should be receiving as much as they are giving
- Keep information vague at first, then develop details later (Michael Ries, personal interview, January 14, 2004; Michael Horn, personal interview, January 13, 2004)
- Should not use negative terminology like “pros” and “cons” (Ty Baumann, personal interview, January 21, 2004)
- Sensitive information should be kept vague, no specifics (Michael Ries, personal interview, January 14, 2004; Michael Horn, personal interview, January 13, 2004; Ty Baumann, personal interview, January 21, 2004)
- Use low-tech for maps and websites—it then looks like a work in progress, not finalized. The public will trust it more. (Michael Ries, personal interview, January 14, 2004)
- External facilitation should be done by someone that is respected and knows things about the community. Examples include community heads, someone from a regional planning committee outside of the participating agency, or a local University-Extension faculty member. (Michael Ries, personal interview, January 14, 2004; Michael Horn, personal interview, January 13, 2004; Ohm, 1999)
- Possibly involve the participants in information gathering like resource surveys
- Make information available to non-English speaking participants
- Make venues accessible to disabled participants
**Tips for Survey Questions**

- Items should be clear and unambiguous
- Avoid using "double-barreled" questions (using "and" or "or" in the question)
- Avoid negation in the question
- Avoid biased questions (do not start the question with "Don’t you agree..." or "Do you agree or disagree with...")
- Avoid abbreviations and technical jargon
- Do not make questions personal
- Do not assume that they are knowledgeable about the topic—verify what they know, then ask the question
- Questions should be relevant to the respondents (if not then give them options of "don’t know", "have no opinion", or are "undecided")
- Give clear, short items. Respondents should be able to understand the question quickly
- Inform respondents if you want brief or lengthy answers
- Use complete sentences and make accurate statements
- Format should be spread out and uncluttered

*(Babbie, 1998; Salant & Dillman, 1994)*
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Evaluation of the Public Input Process

Overall, the public input process for the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan went very well. There was a tremendous response from stakeholders and the public, with participation from multiple recreational groups, environmental supporters, educational officials, and individuals with previous knowledge of Hixon Forest. This response made the use of public input that much more legitimate. The community of La Crosse, Wisconsin and the users of Hixon Forest displayed a genuine knowledge of the history and current status of Hixon Forest. Along with this, they showed a level of caring about the future and direction of the forest which will make for final plan decisions that are grounded and well thought out. Thusly, a Comprehensive Plan will be forged that is in the best interest of the overall health of the ecosystems that make up Hixon Forest as well as the users that enjoy spending time there.

The Working Committee

A team of members in a committee format is needed in a situation where long lasting rules and guidelines are sought because individuals of the committee will fulfill certain strengths or weaknesses that are absent from other members. A lively and productive discussion between members of differing backgrounds can be used to resolve conflict between members or unknown barriers by using a multitude of ideas and opinions to arrive at an agreed solution. The Working Committee did an excellent job of
working as a team and cooperating on ideas. The experience of certain members with public participation made the process easier for those members who had never been involved with public input gathering before.

The committee was very focused on setting up the venues for public input in a manner that catered to the needs of the participants. At the same time, committee members wanted to ensure that thorough resource inventories were collected of Hixon Forest so that proper information could be conveyed to the public. Because of these two items, knowledgeable decisions could be made regarding the management of the forest. The Working Committee was exactly that, a group of individuals working together to ensure that the public input process was available to the stakeholders of Hixon Forest and that everyone was informed about the opinions or concerns of others. Essentially, they were the people in the trenches, making sure that all aspects pertaining to the management of the forest would be covered and handled appropriately. As a whole the Working Committee communicated the necessary information to the decision makers so that a thoughtful and thorough Comprehensive Plan could be made on the uses and activities surrounding Hixon Forest. This was accomplished by planning regular meetings with the Steering Committee in order for them to be aware of periodic updates or changes in the public input process. Joint meetings between the Working and Steering Committees were mostly scheduled once a month throughout the process, with occasional meetings occurring twice a month.
The Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was there to ensure that the Working Committee fulfilled their responsibilities as well as being a liaison of information to the Park Board. Not every aspect of the operation of the Steering Committee was conducted in an orderly, professional matter, though. Conflict arose between members who disagreed about certain roles that the committee was responsible for. Of particular note was the issue of forest management and how much responsibility the committee had in proposing and initiating a forest management plan. A certain individual was outwardly vocal on his/her idea about forest management and repeatedly vocalized his/her opinion. As part of the information gathering assemblage, the Steering Committee must be able to listen to the views of others while sharing the opinions of the members, and use all viewpoints to develop a compromise for the final decision. For a fair and supported outcome it is vital that all viewpoints, from participants, information gatherers, and decision makers, all be considered when formulating the final decision.

There were also some members of the Steering Committee who did not participate in the public input meetings. Since these are venues of major information exchange between the public and the policy makers, it is essential that those who are responsible for gathering information that will be the basis for management decisions, be there to acquire that information first hand. Steering Committee members need to be able to interact with the stakeholders and other participants in order to get a direct feel for their concerns and opinions so that they can make knowledgeable, confident recommendations. By relying on deciphering that information second hand, facts will be
misinterpreted and desires will be misread. It is crucial that all of the members of the
Steering Committee have the same base of information to ease in the transfer of that
information to others along the decision making process.

Public Input Meeting #1

The first public input meeting went very well and was very well orchestrated. An
“open house” forum was used because of the familiarity of the process to the lay person.
The average citizen may not feel comfortable in a setting that is overly formal or
autocratic. Being able to mingle freely with managers and having the opportunity to
voice their own opinion made for an interactive and progressive meeting. Also, for those
who did not feel comfortable speaking up in front of others, it was not required.

Participants could simply sit back and listen to the thoughts of the rest of the gathering.
By in large, however, the participants at this meeting were more than willing to vocalize
their opinions. This made for a very informative meeting that helped to drive the public
input process.

At the first public input meeting, poster board demonstrations were placed around
the area which displayed mapping information on the currently known resources in the
forest as well as descriptions of the public input process. Along with this, a computer
generated presentation was used to display information regarding the history of Hixon
Forest and the process for designing the Comprehensive Plan. After the presentation,
participants broke out in three groups to discuss the three major management topics;
recreational uses, forest management, and wildlife management. Each group only
handled one of the topics and they were led by members of either the Working
Committee or the Steering Committee. Participants were asked to vocalize their opinions on the topic while listening to the opinions of others. This achieved the goal of education between the participants as they were able to discuss their personal beliefs while being given the opportunity to understand the views of others. A time limit was given to force the group to generate a collective decision on how the particular topic should be managed. It seemed that individuals really learned valuable information from their counterparts and people really got to see where other people's values lied. Also, people were very considerate and understanding to the views of others, which made coming to a consensus much easier. Later, group leaders announced the decisions of the group to the rest of the meeting participants so that the others who were not involved in that particular discussion could gain an understanding of what was decided. The entire process was repeated a second time in case of any late arrivals or so participants could be involved in discussing an alternate topic. The process proved to be educational for both the participants and the committee members, which really was the goal of the meeting.

There were approximately 40 participants which was a satisfactory amount, but it seemed that a most people were interested in discussing recreational uses and trail issues. There was a large amount of discussion regarding recreation, while forest management and especially wildlife management did not garner as much interest. It is vital that participants understand the issues regarding all of these topics because they all affect one another. There were also participants who stayed for both discussion groups, and because they had a strong interest in one particular issue, they chose to participate in both discussions of that particular issue. This led to them dominating the discussion in that
particular field and at the same time they were not able to get a first hand feel of the other issues being discussed in the other groups. This could be seen as a weakness in the process because the Working Committee desires equal participation between participants and education of participants on all of the issues. However, the groups were led by untrained facilitators who were not readily capable of policing the discussion. Also, participants need to be given the freedom of choosing which area(s) they would like to participate in so that they do not feel controlled or domineered by the organizers of the public input process, in this case the Working and Steering Committees. Aspects like this are hard to control at the start, though. Nevertheless it was great to see so many people interested in the future of Hixon Forest. The meeting served its purpose of education and introduction and it was an invaluable springboard into the public input process.

Strengths of public input meeting #1.

- Served the purpose of introduction and education;
- Many participants (over 40) attended which represented a broad array of concerned individuals and groups;
- Discussion groups allowed participants to recognize the views of others;
- Participants appeared cordial and understanding to the views of others; and
- Legitimized the need for a Comprehensive Plan for Hixon Forest as the vast majority of participants agreed that a plan was necessary.
Weaknesses of public input meeting #1.

- Some participants engaged in both discussion groups and dominated discussion on the same issue; and
- Not all of the issues elicited equal amounts of discussion.

Stakeholder Interviews

Starting in the month of May, 2004 and running into July, 2004 were the stakeholder interviews. These were set up as individual or paired interviews with members of stakeholder groups. Interviews were conducted at a convenient time and location by the participant. The interview format was similar for each participant and questions were asked in a similar order. Private one-on-one interviews were chosen because of possible intimidation factors faced by some participants. Particular individuals may not feel comfortable speaking up in a public venue but may exhibit lower inhibitions when asked in a private setting. Their opinions are just as valuable as those individuals who are more comfortable vocalizing in public so it is important that a public input plan incorporates a technique that allows for the collection of information from all interested parties. Private interviews, whether conducted personally or over the phone, are an excellent way of doing this. People feel comfortable in a familiar environment and the informal atmosphere of the interviews makes for an affluent method of information exchange. These particular interviews progressed efficiently and the interviewees appeared very loose and willing to divulge information. Also, because the interviews were conducted after the first public input meeting, the questions asked were designed to gather follow up information from the feedback given previously. This allowed decision
makers to be able to gain specific details on the reasoning behind the participants' decisions and it also showed the participants that the entire public input process is making progress towards resolving final decisions.

**Strengths of the stakeholder interviews.**

- Conducted in an informal manner which made for a comfortable setting for participants;
- Obtained information from a broad array of different interests;
- Flexible scheduling of interviews to accommodate participants; and
- Accumulation of more detailed and specific information from Public Input Meeting #1.

**Weakness of the stakeholder interviews.**

- Time commitments needed for the interviewers to conduct many interviews over an extended period of time.

**Focus Group**

Later in the month of May, 2004, was a focus group. Intentions were for multiple focus groups but there were only enough interested participants to make up one focus group. The focus group was used to let participants with dissimilar views be able to recognize each other's viewpoints as well as the reasons behind them. In a smaller sized session, with an experienced moderator, it can be a very constructive way for participants to understand each other or at the very least, gain knowledge of one other's perspectives. Such was the case of an equestrian owner who wanted to allow horseback riding back in Hixon Forest. Other participants were opposed to horses in the forest, but with the focus
group interaction they got to hear the viewpoint of someone who felt opposite to them and it appeared that they were willing to compromise somewhat with the horseback rider's requests. This focus group was led by a college professor of psychology with previous experience in group moderation. Just like the stakeholder interviews, questions were designed to progress from the information gathered from previous public input events. The moderator did an excellent job of utilizing information from all of the participants. Equally as important was the control of the discussion where participants were not allowed to ramble on with extraneous remarks. On the contrary, participants were forced to answer questions completely while sticking to the subject at hand. This allowed the focus group session to concentrate on the proper issues while keeping with the allotted amount of time. Because of proper time management, a plethora of topics were covered by the focus group members in a session that did not drag on. Participants were given the opportunity to witness first hand, issues of contention and issues of consensus. In the end, everyone who was involved with the focus group received a deeper understanding of the issues and obtained the added knowledge to be able to make better decisions in upcoming public input events.

Strengths of the focus group.

- Allowed for participants with differing views to recognize each other's standpoints;
- Use of experienced mediator allowed for controlled and productive discussion; and
• Accumulation of added information from the Stakeholder Interviews.

Weakness of the focus group.

• Did not have enough interested participants to make up multiple focus groups.

Public Input Meeting #2

The second public input meeting was held in late September and was used to review the information gathered at previous public input sessions. There were also results from natural resource inventories completed by biologists from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Bartz (2004) conducted an ecological assessment that inventoried the floral composition of Hixon Forest. Later, Thompson (2004) performed a breeding bird survey to determine the species composition of birds within the forest. Both of these surveys were then utilized in the second public input meeting. This meeting was set up in a similar fashion to the first meeting with poster board displays of maps and survey information, and a computer generated slideshow detailing previously gathered public input. After the presentation, audience participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or give feedback. Unlike the first meeting, this meeting was set up as a public forum where participants took turns expressing their opinions out loud in front of the rest of the group. The discussion was mostly cordial and kept with the issues at hand except for a few minor instances, which made for a productive meeting. Opinions did not sway drastically from what was said earlier in the year so this will make for better grounded decisions and added support for those decisions by the public. This meeting was organized well and the participants seemed to enjoy the opportunity to voice their opinions and be involved with the management direction of Hixon Forest.
Strengths of public input meeting #2.

- Informal setting led to open discussion between participants; and
- Allowed for public display of information gathered from natural resource inventories.

Weakness of public input meeting #2.

- Not as many participants as Public Input Meeting #1.

The Use of Modern Technology

The lack of use of modern computer technology was disappointing. The initial Public Input Plan outlined the creation of a website designed specifically for the Hixon Forest public input process. A website was never launched and the only computer based feature was a link from the City of La Crosse Planning Department website. This gave a brief overview of the input process with an address for comment submittal. In this age of technology a computer is found in almost every home and it is the first source of information to most Americans. Because of this, a computer designed website should have been utilized more both for public input and education. Citizens could have downloaded information about Hixon Forest and the planning process and had a better grasp of the issues in order to make better decisions regarding management of the forest. They could also have browsed pictures of the forest and have been able to visualize what specific areas of the forest currently look like. Updating of the information of the website on a continual basis by the Working Committee would show that the planning process was proceeding and that public input was being used to shape decisions. Without this ability, however, a powerful media for input and education was lost. Fortunately the
other input events did superb jobs of gathering input so the lack of computer technology was not a limiting factor.

The Use of the Media

The use of local television, newspaper, and radio was also severely under utilized as public information resources. Overall there were only a few newspaper ads, a very brief television spot and a half hour radio interview used for the entire planning process. It was expected that the local newspaper would publish an article and that there would be television coverage of the public input meetings, but these things never happened. La Crosse, Wisconsin is a medium-sized town with a population of about 50,000 people and the outlying communities contain approximately 20,000 more people. These citizens depend on local media to gather information on local events so the media located in La Crosse would be a valuable tool for educating the public (Michael Horn, personal interview, January 13, 2004; Michael Reis, personal interview, January 14, 2004; Ty Baumann, personal interview, January 21, 2004). There were strong attempts by the Comprehensive Plan supervisor to contact and use the local media but these attempts did not materialize on a consistent basis. It was our fault as a Working Committee not to ensure the use of the media during the public input process. I would advise anyone developing a Public Input Plan to prioritize the use of the media to advertise and inform the public of their opportunity to provide input on decisions that affect them. The use of local television and radio, as well as computer websites and/or electronic feedback mail sites should be utilized as much as possible so that information can reach a wide audience and everyone involved will be equally educated. Only once decision makers know that
they have used these outreach techniques to gather a broad array of stakeholders, can they be assured that they will hear all of the viewpoints that will be necessary to make thorough, complete management decisions.

**Information Derived from the Public Input**

Hixon Forest is a key resource to the people of La Crosse, Wisconsin because of its proximity to the city and the recreational and environmental opportunities that it provides. By using public input in the formation of a management plan for Hixon Forest, the Working Committee was assured to receive an ample supply of information from a broad array of stakeholders. One adjacent landowner had lived next to the forest for decades and spoke up for keeping Hixon Forest as it was. It seems this person did not approve of change or a management structure for a piece of “public” land. Land that this person thought should be open to any use chosen by the discretion of the user. This person was in the minority though, as most of the stakeholders welcomed the idea of a written management plan to guide and propel a new future for Hixon Forest. With proper structure Hixon Forest can be utilized to their maximum potential for both recreational users and the natural resources that are found there.

Because of the natural resource base in the forest, the Comprehensive Plan would be written to protect those resources first and foremost. Public uses would be allowed in areas of Hixon Forest only when it was verified that there could be no damage or setback to any natural resources found there. This was an important issue and one that most of the stakeholders were content with. They viewed Hixon Forest as a valuable feature to the area and were concerned about its preservation.
Creation of Additional Trails

Some user groups were mainly interested in expanding recreational opportunities by creating more trails for new and different experiences. They explained that they were growing tired of experiencing the same sets of trails every time they visited the forest. In order to create additional trails, user groups were supposed to consult the Hixon Forest Nature Center (HFNC) and explain the type of use for the trail and its proposed location. After approval by HFNC, the proposal would be brought before the Park Board of Commissioners (Park Board) where they would decide whether to approve creation of the trail or not. Recently some user groups bypassed advisement by HFNC and brought the proposal straight to the Park Board. Some trails had thus been constructed without the consent or knowledge of HFNC, which may have permanently damaged sensitive forest resources.

The Comprehensive Plan would now set stringent guidelines that advisement by HFNC is mandatory before the creation of new trails. Both the user who is proposing the trail and HFNC would be required to sanction the creation of a new trail. Because of their close association with Hixon Forest for 21 years, HFNC would be given the opportunity to verify whether a new trail would be appropriate or not. The Working Committee felt that the first hand knowledge that HFNC had acquired of the resources in Hixon Forest was too invaluable to overlook. Therefore HFNC was respected as a very knowledgeable source regarding the recreational carrying capacity of the forest. Only after receiving information from both entities would the Park Board be able to make a final decision whether the trail is allowed or not. This is an important step in ensuring
that the natural resources of Hixon Forest are not being taken advantage of by
overzealous recreational groups.

Forest Management

An important element that was revealed during the public input process was that
there were many participants who stated that they were comfortable with letting forest
management decisions be decided by foresters and other professionals in the field. This
implies a high level of trust between these participants and forest managers. Evidently
this trust had been established previously and carried over to the Hixon Forest planning
process. This is important because these participants show confidence in the abilities of
the decision makers so there will be less likelihood of resistance to decisions and
management techniques can be implemented sooner. Managers can therefore design
techniques that will promote forest sustainability and know that they will have the full
support and cooperation of the public.

White-tailed Deer Management

Another surprising view that came from a majority of the stakeholders was
support for reducing the Hixon Forest deer herd. Many participants noted their
observations of the deer and how their numbers were increasing. They also observed the
physical state of most of the deer and how they appeared thin and weak. It was
reassuring to hear how the public was aware of the close relationship between the large
deer herd and the impact that it has on forest health. They know that deer numbers had to
be reduced so that plant species could have an opportunity to regenerate and establish
themselves. The public was also aware of the danger of deer/car collisions that would
happen if herd numbers continued to grow. This is a product of a biologically educated
public who does not allow personal emotions to hinder necessary wildlife management.
Both the use of sharpshooters and controlled deer hunts were proposed as methods of
reducing deer numbers. Support of these methods is likely due to the large percentage of
families who actively deer hunt in the surrounding areas and view deer hunting as a
completely acceptable activity.

Participant Representation

There was not equal number representation of all of the stakeholder groups as the
recreational group Human Powered Trails (HPT) was always well represented at public
input events while other groups would have less representation. Members of HPT were
always vocal with their views of trail creation and expansion and other participants would
always listen to what they had to say. However, HPT was in the minority as most
stakeholders did not support the creation of more trails. Even though HPT tried many
times to convince other users that more trails are a feasible idea, in the end the addition of
more trails was discontinued unless approved by the Park Board of Commissioners. This
goes to show that even the most vocal and persistent stakeholder opinion does not always
become part of the final plan. In this case majority ruled and the view of the largest
collective number of participants outweighed that of the best represented single group.

Management of Future Land

The participants were also very concerned about management of future land
acquisitions. Even though it was stated to them early on in the planning process that this
Comprehensive Plan would not govern future land additions, the participants continued to
address apprehension over this issue. More than likely participants did not want current management decisions to blanket additional parcels of land. They wanted to know that their supported recreational activity, if not allowed within the current boundaries of Hixon Forest, could still exist at sometime in the future. For example, HPT wanted the possibility of creating new trails. Also, even though horseback riding was not allowed in the existing acreage of Hixon Forest, equine supporters wanted to know that it could be possible on expanded areas of the forest. The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan was to address the current boundaries of Hixon Forest so management decisions of future land acquisitions would not be under the jurisdiction of the current plan. This is because many times, depending on the known resources of a parcel of land, that land may have management restrictions or stipulations contingent with the sale. Therefore the City of La Crosse has to operate within these stipulations, and opposing management techniques are prohibited. The current Comprehensive Plan would provide guidelines on how management decisions would be made after any stipulations are met. The public would have the opportunity to provide input, but only after resource inventories have been conducted to see what activities would be appropriate. So even though a certain activity may not be allowed within the current boundaries of Hixon Forest, it still could be possible in the future. This seemed to be acceptable to most of the stakeholders who’s desires could not be currently met.

Discussion

The use of public input in organizational decision making is becoming more prevalent and widely used than any time in the past. Many agencies like the National
Park Service, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and local organizations like Three Rivers Park District in Hennepin County, Minnesota utilize public input on a continual basis in order to formulate management decisions. In most areas of the country the amount of public land is shrinking or access to the available land is being limited. Because of this, the public will demand to have a say on what opportunities will be available to them as they search for areas to engage in their favorite recreational activities. There is also a growing trend of land donation by civic and private groups to public agencies. Many times these endowments come with stipulations set forth by the donating party. When this happens, these groups are being actively involved in the decision making process and they are using that power to shape the future of land management.

The preservation of the natural resources on public land needs to be a priority. Along with this, managers need to balance the public’s desire for recreational activities. These activities, when in the legal framework of society, are invaluable to people’s ability to rest and unburden themselves from the pressures of the modern day. The best way that managers can formulate management decisions is by incorporating the users and other stakeholders who have come to depend on that land for personal enhancement. To do this, a Public Input Plan needs to be created and implemented that includes public involvement into final decisions. Only when this involvement is taken seriously and it has an impact on the end decisions, can managers declare it as a success.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR AGENCY PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS
Public Input on the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan: A Case Study

I have been informed of the following statements:

- The purpose of this study is to gather information on optimal procedures for conducting public input meetings.
- My participation will involve answering a series of interview questions based on my knowledge of conducting such meetings.
- Any information that I release will be used to draft a Public Input Plan for Hixon Forest in La Crosse, Wisconsin.
- Any information that I release may be viewed and therefore be used by other public agencies who wish to organize public input meetings.
- Interviews will take place at my job site during normal business hours and will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.
- I may stop the interview process at any time if the need arises and resume participation at my convenience.
- My identity will not be kept confidential, however, since I am a government employee and the information that I release is considered public information, I will be at no risk to criminal or civil liability. Also, the information will not be damaging to my financial standing, employability, or reputation.
- My participation is completely voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without penalty.

Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to Peter J. Harrison (608-793-1967), the principle investigator or the study advisor Dr. Steven Simpson, Department of Recreation Management and Therapeutic Recreation, UW-L (608-785-8216). Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to Dr. Garth Tymeson, Chair of the UW-La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (608-785-8124).

Participant_________________________ Date__________

Researcher__________________________ Date__________
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PUBLIC AGENCY PERSONNEL
Interview Questions

- How did you inform the public about the upcoming meeting(s)?
- What was your timeline of events?
- Which process works best for public discussions- Focus Groups or Round Table?
- How did you ensure that everyone with a vested interest was informed of the meeting(s)?
- How did you educate the public? (work stations, news releases, web page, news letters, press conferences)
- What information did you give the public and what information was restricted?
- Did you involve the media in either advertisement or coverage of the meeting(s)?
- What are the optimal formats for the meeting(s)?
- How did you select and use an unbiased mediator?
- How did you ensure fair representation for all of the stakeholders?
- How did you inform stakeholders of their roles and limitations?
- How did you ensure accurate representation of all relevant facts?
- How did you ensure that meetings proceeded efficiently and within time boundaries?
- How did you ensure proper documentation of the information that was gathered?
- Can you identify any procedures that were counter productive or need modification?
- Can you identify any procedures that were especially productive?
- How did you change procedures throughout the process that did not work?
- How did you determine what was financially feasible to do?
- What do you have for literature stating your processes?
- What other advice can you give?
APPENDIX C

ADVERTISEMENT FOR PUBLIC INPUT MEETING #1
Are You a Bird Watcher? Biker?
Do You Like to Hike?

The City of La Crosse is embarking on the **FIRST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR HIXON FOREST** in the 91 year history of the park. We would like to hear your thoughts about appropriate uses for the park. If you have insights, recommendations, or are simply interested in the process, please come to the first of three scheduled Public Input Meetings.

**Where:** Main Shelter, Myrick Park

**When:** Wednesday, May 5, 4:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The Schedule for the meeting is as follows*:
- 4:30 – 5:15 Mingle
- 5:15 – 5:45 PowerPoint Presentation
- 5:45 – 6:30 Mingle
- 6:30 – 7:00 PowerPoint Presentation
- 7:00 – 8:00 Round Table Exercise
- 8:00 – 8:15 Reports/ Presentations
- 8:15 – 8:30 Closing Remarks

*Please note that there will only be one round table exercise, to be held at 7:00 p.m. Note: The 5:15 presentation will be repeated at 6:30

For additional information, please contact the City Planning Department at 608-789-7512, or on the web at www.cityoflacrosse.org/Planning/Planning.html
APPENDIX D

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Stakeholder Interview Questions

Identify issues that you would like to discuss in greater detail (rec, natural, forest mgmt).

* Identify possible solutions to those issues.
* Are there opportunities we are missing?

Opinions regarding trails (share the trail, increasing number of users, increasing number of trails, etc.)

Opinions regarding forest management (natural succession vs. holding at certain succession stage, etc.)

Opinions regarding deer management (no harvest, harvest, necessity, etc.)
Hixon Forest Focus Group Proposed Questions
Thursday, May 20, 2004

General Questions:

1. Thinking about the future of Hixon Forest, what current practices/policies/programming MUST remain?

2. Thinking about the future of Hixon Forest, what would you like to have changed or developed?

3. Identify forces that will encourage or impede ideas from #2.

Specific Questions:

RECREATION

Regarding the number of trails in the forest, are there: not enough, enough, or too many?

Are there locations where no more trails should be allowed, and other areas where new trails could be allowed? If so, where? Should there be protocol for building new trails?

Is horse riding an appropriate use of the forest?

FOREST

Is harvest of standing timber in the forest acceptable?

Is harvest of windfalls or exotic species acceptable?

Is chemical treatment acceptable in the forest?

Are controlled burns acceptable in the forest?

*(does not address species composition, stages of succession, etc)*

WILDLIFE

Should the deer population in Hixon Forest be managed? If so, which of the following methods are acceptable? (controlled archery, handicap, open to all, capture & relocate, birth control)

Should the forest be managed to provide habitat for certain types of wildlife?

*(provide Dr. Morgan with additional info)*
APPENDIX F

ADVERTISEMENT FOR PUBLIC INPUT MEETING #2
Hixon Forest
Public Input Meeting

The City of La Crosse is holding the second of three public input meetings for the preparation of the **Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan**. We would like your input. If you have insights, recommendations, or are simply interested in the process, please come to this meeting.

Where: Three Rivers House,
724 Main Street

When: Thursday, September 23, 4:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The Schedule for the meeting is as follows:
4:30 – 5:15 Mingle
5:15 – 6:00 Presentation
6:00 – 6:45 Feedback/Mingle
6:45 – 7:30 Presentation
7:30 – 8:00 Feedback
8:00 – 8:15 Closing Remarks

For additional information, please contact the City Planning Department at 608-789-7512, or check the web at: www.cityoflacrosse.org/Planning/Planning.html
Hixon Forest
Public Input Meeting

The City of La Crosse is holding the third of three public input meetings for the preparation of the **Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan**. Contents of the draft plan document will be presented at this meeting. We would like your input.

**Where:** Main Library Basement, 800 Main Street

**When:** Wednesday, October 27, 4:45 – 6:45 p.m.

The Schedule for the meeting is as follows:

4:45 – 5:15 Open House
5:15 – 5:45 **Presentation**
5:45 – 6:45 Discussion
6:45 Closing Remarks

For additional information, please contact the City Planning Department at 608-789-7512, or check the web at: [www.cityoflacrosse.org/Planning/Planning.html](http://www.cityoflacrosse.org/Planning/Planning.html)
APPENDIX H

WRITTEN AND ON-LINE COMMENTS
Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan
Written Comments – PIM#3
Wednesday, October 27, 2004

Under Future Land Additions, add: cross country skiing and runners*

*i.e. current runners and potential new children running center

Bill Ferguson

The education of school children should be one of the first considerations. I have been a volunteer naturalist for 17 years and 100,000 children have had the opportunity to learn about nature and enjoy our forest.

Phyllis Schreiber

Recreation (B): some authority rests only with the Park Board and some decisions do not need to go to common council.

Should wordage just say “park board” or “or in some instance common council” or similar?

Sandy Clark (park board)

Thank you for leaving out the commercial logging. That activity could open canopy, fragment the forest; and lead to disturbance of understory, soil compaction, and erosion.

Please don’t allow the bicycle group to avoid working with the HFNC for the common good.

Hopefully the concept of fragmentation does not include temporary breaks in the canopy to allow for sustainable growth and health of the forest.

Our Hixon Forest trail system is probably the most cost effective place of recreation in the City. Hopefully this plan will encourage continuing efforts to provide for safe multiple use trails. Thanks.

Fred Skemp
11/09/04
EMAIL COMMENTS

11/03/04
Thanks for the presentation last Friday at the library.
I think that Hixon forest management should use a model the management of the state forest at Menominee and suggest that the Park Board and the Hixon forest board take the time to take a tour of that forest. It will show how a healthy forest should be managed and all of the good that will come out of such management.

Robert Skemp
Paul Stry Director
11/04/04

Good day, Adryan! I wanted to commend you on your efforts on the plan so far. I was impressed with how well the disparate concepts were merged into a cohesive plan. Of course, there are some parts that I am disappointed in, but overall, I think it is a good plan. Managing for the "health" of the forest is a bit vague, though.

As I mentioned at the meeting, I would request that the wording in the plan regarding invasives be as general as possible when distinguishing between native and non-native invasives. By nature, invasives are a threat to our forest and their management should not be determined based on their place of origin. I am afraid that it would potentially tie our hands in the future. Ideally, all mention of exotic/native/non-native would be removed from the Invasive Species section of the plan.

Under Wildlife, I would also like to see some education regarding the black widow population that has become established in our bluffs. They are potentially more life-threatening than our local rattlesnake species and education is key to saving both people and spiders. I am hoping that the "education" will not include locations for either rattlesnakes and black widows, other than vague generalities ("in the forest" or "in the bluffs"). There is always the possibility for extermination when people learn the whereabouts of "threatening" species.

It would be nice if there was some sort of phone service available from the parking lot, for safety reasons. I know it was mentioned that the city was contemplating the restrooms and water situation, and I have long advocated for some type of emergency phone somewhere in the forest.

I also have grave concerns about commercial logging and selective cutting in the forest. Selective cutting isn't defined in scope, and theoretically, you could selectively cut 3000 acres if you wanted. Selective cutting seems to be the more common choice for timber
management, and all it means is that you select the exact trees that you want harvested. the other option is clearcut.

since the plan covers only existing forest land, and future lands are governed by different rules, i don't know why commercial logging is being allowed at all. it just seems that by allowing "commercial" logging, you open up the possibility of money-driven harvesting. the justification could be a blow-down or whatever, but the real motivator could be money. allowing ANY logging for "test plots," whatever those may be, could be disastrous!! i hope that has been removed from the plan after the last meeting.

i also noticed that commercial logging of non-native tree species is not prohibited, and i think that distinction should also be removed. we have many trees in hixon forest that are non-native, both invasive and non-invasive, and i think that they are an integral part of the forest and shouldn't be held to different restrictions.

guess that's about it. i look forward to the Memorandum of Understandings that will help to clarify some management issues. i would also be interested in reading the Long Range Plan in its final state before it appears at the park board meeting. it is too hard to read and assess a plan at a meeting where it is being held up for discussion.

again, thank you for your efforts and thank you for carefully considering all the comments you get.

cheers...andrea benco
APPENDIX I

DRAFT OF HIXON FOREST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan
Policy Recommendation Summary

GOAL:
The goal of this comprehensive plan is to foster management of Hixon Forest as a natural resource first, protecting significant natural areas, restoring natural habitats, providing opportunities for education as well as low impact recreation, and promoting the overall health of the forest.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

General Objectives
A. The existing forest canopy of Hixon Forest shall be maintained to the extent possible. Fragmentation of the interior forest canopy shall be discouraged.

B. Those stands noted in the Ecological Assessment of Hixon Forest as being suitable for old growth, shall be managed for old growth forest conditions. This includes, but is not limited to stands 8, 23, and 29.

C. The management for intolerant communities (such as oak woodland or savanna) shall be focused upon existing edge and open areas, excluding native prairie remnants. This includes, but is not limited to stands 12, 15-18, 20-22, and portions of 23, 24, and 29.

D. Remnant oak opening sites shall be restored to or remain as oak openings.

E. Prairie remnants found on scattered sites throughout the forest shall be protected and restored to remain as prairie remnants. Management priority shall be placed on those remnants most threatened by succession.

F. The use of fire, as well as selective cutting and tree girdling may be used in order to carry out these management objectives, as well as to enhance biodiversity, attempt to restore natural processes to the forest, and reduce potentially hazardous situations.

G. Commercial logging of native tree species shall be prohibited except in the case of salvage operations, and for test plots. Any revenues generated from the sale of lumber from the forest shall go back into the forest for habitat management.
H. The McBain Property and the fallow field located along the west side of CTH FA shall be managed for establishment of oak savanna or for opportunities to allow natural succession to occur. Additional openings within the forest that consist of non-native vegetation shall be evaluated for opportunities to add to the existing closed canopy.

I. Prairie establishment efforts on the east side of CTH FA shall continue to be encouraged.

J. The reforestation project located in the central portion of the lower forest shall continue to be promoted and evaluated.

K. Removing, destroying, or harvesting of native plants shall be prohibited, except for management purposes. The harvest of mushrooms, nuts, and berries shall continue to remain an allowed activity.

Invasive Species
A. Removal of invasive exotic tree species (such as black locust) shall be focused primarily on the forest edges.

B. Removal of invasive tree species within the interior of the forest shall be a secondary priority due to potential negative impacts on forest interior species as well as the potential for regrowth from root shoots, or more rapid growth of other invasive species once the canopy is removed.

C. Removal of invasive tree species shall take place in an incremental fashion, and be coordinated with replanting efforts prior to or following any invasive tree species removal efforts.

D. The removal of invasive woody shrub species (such as buckthorn, honeysuckle) is a management priority. Efforts should focus on those areas where the invasive species have not yet become dominant in the under-story.

E. The use of herbicides shall be allowed for the management of non-native invasive species when fire or mechanical removal methods are ineffective. Herbicides should be biodegradable and used in the smallest doses possible to still be effective.

F. The Wisconsin Manual of Control Recommendations for Ecologically Invasive Plants shall be used to guide exotic invasive species management.

Wildlife
A. The deer herd must be actively managed in order to restore balance within the forest and promote overall forest health. Failure to control the deer herd will limit opportunities for the success of other management activities, and thus should be considered a top priority.
B. Use of sharpshooters for deer herd management is a preferred management option. However, due to budgetary constraints, the use of strictly controlled archery hunts is also to be considered an acceptable management alternative.

C. The City shall consult with the DNR prior to any active management of the herd in order to estimate deer population, develop harvest management goals, etc.

D. Prior to any hunt, a public hearing involving the community shall be held in order to educate the public about deer damage. All abutting property owners will be contacted for additional input prior to any hunt. Notice will be posted in the La Crosse Tribune.

E. Deer exclosures shall be established throughout the forest in order to evaluate/demonstrate deer herd impacts in differing habitat types. Cooperation should be sought with the UW-La Crosse Biology Department or similar entity for assistance in evaluation.

F. Impact on interior bird species habitat shall be a consideration when evaluating any proposed activities within the forest.

G. Rattlesnake awareness and education shall be promoted to visitors of the forest.

**RECREATION**

A. No motorized recreational vehicles shall be allowed within Hixon Forest.

B. Addition of new trails within Hixon Forest is highly discouraged; however, ultimate authority rests with the Park Board and Common Council. Individuals Parties requesting new trails shall be required to consult with representatives from the Hixon Forest Nature Center prior to approaching the Park Board.

C. Additional trails should not be approved on non-disturbed or relatively non-disturbed lands. Reconstruction, rerouting, and other maintenance activities on pre-existing trails shall be allowed.

D. Horseback riding shall be prohibited in Hixon Forest.

E. Trails in identified sensitive areas (such as remnant prairies) shall be evaluated for possibilities to provide access without damaging the resource. Closure and re-routing should be considered in order to protect the resource.

F. Efforts shall be taken to establish the Hixon Forest Nature Center, Human Powered Trails, or other similar entity to act as a trail clearinghouse, posting trail closure and opening information in order to protect the condition of the trails during poor conditions.

G. No overnight camping shall be allowed within Hixon Forest.
H. Recreational activities that significantly increase threats to personal safety or potential for negative impacts on habitat, promote erosion, reduce tranquility, etc. shall be prohibited. This includes activities such as paintball, use of recreational motor vehicles, rock climbing, etc.

MISCELLANEOUS
A. The City and the Hixon Forest Nature Center (HFNC) shall develop a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which gives the HFNC and its Natural Areas Committee consulting authority on proposed activities of significance within the forest. Activities of significance shall include but not be limited to such things as proposed new buildings or trails, proposals for timber harvest, proposals for overnight use of the forest, and proposed special events. The definition of "activities of significance" will be further defined within the MOA between the City and the HFNC. Consultation shall be required for all proposals requiring approval from the Board of Park Commissioners.
B. The City shall develop and post signage that clearly identifies boundaries of Hixon Forest.
C. All signage within Hixon Forest shall be of uniform theme and design. All signage other than trail signs shall include the words "Hixon Forest" and shall be approved by the Board of Park Commissioners. Existing signage shall be grandfathered, and shall adhere to this policy as signs are replaced.
D. Management activities which are intended to promote the health of the forest shall have priority over all other activities within the forest.
E. The City shall evaluate the possibility of hiring a full time naturalist, biologist, or other resource specialist dedicated to management of the forest.
F. The City shall establish a segregated fund dedicated to the management of Hixon Forest. The City shall place the first $20,000 into the fund and solicit donations from the public and private community foundations for the purpose of managing Hixon Forest.
G. Increasing ADA accessibility within the forest shall be pursued by the City as trails are reconstructed, modified, and maintained. Accessible routes shall be of natural, non-paved surface to the extent possible.
H. Portions of lower Hixon Forest have been identified as potentially archaeologically sensitive. Prior to any activities which include digging into the ground, the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center (MVAC) shall be contacted to evaluate the site. If any artifacts are found during excavation efforts, the MVAC shall be contacted in order to further evaluate the site. Current City Ordinances shall apply.
I. The City shall evaluate the possibility and location of restroom and water facilities within the forest.
J. The Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan shall be revisited by the Board of Park Commissioners on a five year basis, or in the case of significant land additions. At this time it will be determined whether an update is needed or not, or whether an entire plan rewrite is needed.

**FUTURE LAND ADDITIONS**

A. No motorized recreational uses shall be allowed on future land additions.

B. Careful evaluation of new properties shall take place by the City, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, and Hixon Forest Nature Center representatives to determine need for ecological assessment. Assessments should take place when non-disturbed, unique, or significant resources are suspected or known to be present, or when the size of the parcel warrants additional discovery efforts.

C. If significant natural features are found, a management plan for the parcel in question shall be written prior to hearing proposals for any activities. The level of public involvement sought will vary based on the significance of the addition (with additions of greater significance requiring greater levels of public involvement).

D. Only those activities determined to be non-detrimental to the resource shall be allowed.

E. In those areas identified as being undisturbed, or having greater restoration potential, creation of additional trails shall be discouraged.

F. Fragmentation of habitat within new parcels shall be discouraged. Non-remnant prairie openings shall be evaluated for possibility to provide additional contiguous tree canopy.

G. In the case of addition of new land, trails should be evaluated as to whether their presence would contribute to fragmentation by being located on newly formed interior areas.

H. Future trail construction on new parcels shall be located on disturbed lands and edges of the property to minimize associated negative impacts such as fragmentation, etc.

I. Prior to developing trails on any future land additions, a trail advisory group consisting of representatives from the biking community, hiking community, equestrian community, City government, and Hixon Forest likely trail users shall be formed to evaluate proposals. Notice shall be posted in the La Crosse Tribune.