COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET SERIES

#4 – *The Environmental Resources Inventory Process*

Development of a detailed, natural and human resource data base helps incorporate environmental concerns into community economic and social plans. The following steps and accompanying worksheets will aid the community to inventory local resources and take steps to integrate environmental concerns into the decision-making process.

A. Assess status of local planning and information

Begin with the *Taking Stock* questionnaire in Fact Sheet #2. A core group of elected officials, commission members, or community activists can complete the questionnaire as a method of reviewing the status of environmental resource protection and management in the local planning effort.

Upon completion of the questionnaire and checklist, the community will have:

- assessed the status of: local planning, current information and documentation, and development controls
- summarized concerns about managing local environmental resources
- identified critical community environmental resources for further investigation
- identified topics needing outside assistance before further action can take place

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COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET SERIES

#1 – OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

#2 – TAKING STOCK
A questionnaire to summarize information about the community and consider how to manage environmental resources.

#3 – INFORMATION IN LAND USE PLANNING
Describes how to integrate environmental information into community land use plans

#4 – THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES INVENTORY
A one page overview useful for explaining the inventory process to potential users.

#5 – INVENTORY WORKSHEETS
Inventory the community environment, open space lands, and land in consideration for changed uses. Worksheets identify what questions to ask, and are best completed with the assistance of a technical advisory. Fact sheets for some topics are included in #9, Support Resources.

#6 – DEVELOPMENT IMPACT ANALYSIS
What is it and how to use it?

#7 – POTENTIAL IMPACTS FROM DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES
Provides a worksheet to guide review of potential impacts from a proposed development along with an example, summarizing potential impacts from construction activity.

#8 – HOW TO SET UP THE IMPACT PROCESS
The Leopold Matrix and instructions.

 # 9 — SUPPORT RESOURCES
Provides background information about air quality, cultural features, floodplain protection, groundwater, shorelands and wetlands, the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA).

B. Involve people with first-hand knowledge of local resources

Bringing people together with a variety of perspectives and values will allow an exchange of information and can foster an understanding of the quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of the community's resource. This becomes an important step in building community consensus and establishing a community vision for resource use.

C. Create an inventory task force

An inventory task force might include: a planner, the engineer for the community, local representatives from agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources or Soil Conservation Service, members of local environmental organizations, and knowledgeable citizens. Representatives of the local media should also be involved to keep the community informed. The task force or local officials could choose to create several sub-committees depending on the community size or diversity. For example, sub-committees may be formed to investigate surface water and drinking water resources, land resources, agricultural resources, and human resources.

D. Obtain a suitable base map of the locality or region

A local map is used to organize community details in one place and help planners to visualize potential development conflicts or complements. When resources are plotted on the local map, every citizen has access to community information which could be affected by local decisions.

At a minimum, the base map should show:

- district boundaries
- urban service area boundaries
- local government and special district boundaries

A community map can be created on paper or electronically if the county has its land records in a computerized geographic information system (GIS). If the community does not have a geographically accurate map including the above information, various government agencies may be able to provide a map to start from. Topographic maps from Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey or maps developed by a regional planning council or a county planning department could be used as the base map. Check resources available from the US Census Bureau, or county offices such as emergency government, land conservation or land records. A community may also wish to acquire up-to-date air photos and have its own maps made.

E. Gather data about elements of the natural environment

The *Environmental Resources Inventory* worksheets, available in Factsheet #5, provide a format which could be used to guide the data gathering process. Available worksheets include:

Study Area/Topic Description: an overview of study area or topic and summary sheet for describing progress and results

Natural Resources: geographic setting and resources, agricultural land resources, surface water features

Human Resources: aesthetic qualities, water supply, cultural features, plant communities, human health, wildlife and wildlife habitat, waste reduction

The task force can choose and describe one or more specific study areas or topics. The task force could study a geographic region of the community; a natural resource category (such as wetlands, bluffs, or waterways) as it occurs throughout the community; or a resource problem (such as water supply or wildlife habitat). Each community can tailor the inventory according to its needs. The choice of areas or resources to be studied should relate to the community vision identified through Steps for Getting Started in the Community.

F. Describe important features and locate on the community map

After identifying and locating resources or sites of interest, the task force will need to review each one to determine its present use, concerns about the resource or site, a detailed description of resource features, and sources of data for additional information about the resource or site. The Natural Resources Inventory worksheets help the task force frame questions to ask about each resource by providing categories to investigate with a short description of the significance of each category. For example, the Geographic Setting and Resources worksheet reminds the task force to check drainage, soil types, elevation and slopes, mineral, stratigraphy and rock types. The task force will also need to determine whether a visit to the site would improve their ability to make recommendations about future uses. Enter the information gathered through this process onto the base map using a resource "map key" or overlay.

G. Evaluate the relative quality of community natural resources

Once the inventory is completed, the community task force may wish to further study how the resource should be treated in future land use decisions. Evaluation can include investigating the quality of the resource and its resource use possibilities. In this context, "use" does not imply human intervention. For example, a community may choose to designate space for cultural, natural systems, or recreation uses.

H. Include new findings in the community land use plan

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