

Lesson Nine



Forestry Issues Investigation



CONCEPTS

1. Environmental issues arise when at least two parties have different viewpoints associated with an environmental problem.
2. Environmental issues in forestry are complex.
3. Issues can be dissected into individual parts to help understand and resolve them.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. Identify the components of an environmental issue.
2. Extract the factual and relevant information from the article pertaining to a current forestry issue by applying the skills necessary to investigate issues.
3. Propose alternative solutions to an issue and outline consequences associated with each solution.

TEACHING SITE

Indoor classroom with chalkboard and/or overhead projector

MATERIALS

Chalkboard and chalk
Copies of the article for every two students
Copies of the Forestry Issues Investigation worksheet for every two students
Paper and pencils

LESSON TIME

One 50 minute class period

NUTSHELL

In this lesson, students will acquire the skills necessary to investigate issues related to forestry. They will read an article concerning current issues in forestry and extract relevant information from the article. Students will discuss, in a small and a large group setting, the reasons why conflicts arise when managing forests.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Make copies of the article and **Forestry Issues Investigation Worksheet** for students. Prepare overheads of the **6 Steps for Investigating Environmental Issues** and **Forestry Issues Investigation Worksheet**.

VOCABULARY

- ✎ **Problem** – is a situation or experience that is difficult to deal with.
- ✎ **Issue** – occurs when there are at least two different viewpoints based on a problem.
- ✎ **Belief** – is something that a person thinks is true about an issue.
- ✎ **Persuasion** – involves verbally motivating people to take action.
- ✎ **Consumerism** – involves putting economic pressures on a business or industry, to force a change in how they do business.
- ✎ **Political action** – involves trying to persuade an elected official or government agency to conform to your same values.
- ✎ **Legal action** – is taking legal or judiciary action, such as a lawsuit, or taking out a legal restraint, such as an injunction, to prevent a person or organization from carrying out an undesirable environmental behavior.
- ✎ **Ecomanagement** – involves physically maintaining or improving the existing ecosystem.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This lesson deals with the investigation of environmental issues related to forestry. Issue investigation is an important part of environmental education. It leads students to become environmentally knowledgeable and responsible citizens – citizens that are ready to take action. It is important that students understand the processes involved in issue investigation in order to act responsibly. Numerous methods for investigating issues have been developed. This activity introduces a 6-step process that will enable students to break down an issue into several different components (issue, players, beliefs, values, etc.). Using this information, students will identify the actions proposed to resolve the issue and evaluate them in regard to possible consequences.

Throughout the Forestree Unit, we have introduced students to the human components of the environment. One commonly accepted framework for developing environmentally literate citizens involves ecological knowledge, issue investigation, and citizen action. The overall objective of that framework states that, "The environmentally literate citizen is able and willing to make environmental decisions which are consistent with both a substantial quality of human life and an equally substantial quality of the environment. Furthermore, this individual is motivated to act on these decisions either individually or collectively." In other words, environmental knowledge leads to stewardship or action.

Hungerford, et al., have laid out four subcomponents of developing environmentally literate citizens. These components, like the components of an ecosystem, are interdependent, and must be taught together. They develop in conjunction with one another, through increased knowledge and experience.

The first subcomponent is **ecological foundations**. The concepts include: individuals, populations, interactions, interdependence, limiting factors, energy transfer, biogeochemical cycling, community, ecosystem, succession, and man as an ecological factor. Having a sound background in science prepares a person for being environmentally literate. Students have covered forestry-related scientific knowledge in the first lessons of this unit.

The second component is **personal awareness of environmental issues and human values**. This awareness includes understanding the way in which human cultural activities and individual behaviors impact the environment. It is essential that individuals understand the need for thorough investigation of an issue, the roles of differing human values, and the need for clarifying personal values. An environmentally literate

citizen will be aware of the importance of responsible citizen action. Understanding the role humans and their values play in environmental issues is paramount to creating the attitudes necessary to lead someone to environmental action. Students have explored the role of values in the previous lesson, and will be exploring an environmental issue in this lesson.

The third factor in creating environmentally literate citizens is **the investigation and evaluation of environmental issues and their solutions**. This factor deals with the skills necessary to investigate issues. The skills Hungerford, et al, suggest are the abilities to:

1. identify and investigate an environmental issue using primary and secondary sources of information
2. analyze issues to determine the perspectives associated with the issue
3. identify the cultural and ecological implications of those positions
4. identify alternative solutions to the issue and evaluate those alternatives
5. identify and clarify personal values in regards to the issue in question

The Forestry Issues Investigation lesson is most concerned with the third factor. By the end of the lesson, students will have the skills necessary to thoroughly investigate any environmental issue.

The fourth factor is **taking appropriate citizen environmental action**. This involves taking individual or group action to resolve an issue and evaluating the actions taken in regard to the quality of life and the environment. This lesson focuses on identifying action that is already proposed in dealing with an issue, and evaluating with regard to possible consequences of those actions. It is important for students to understand that there are many different kinds of action that can be taken to resolve an issue: persuasion, political action, consumerism, legal action, and ecomanagement.

Persuasion involves verbally motivating people to take action. It can include debating and letter writing.

Consumerism involves putting economic pressures on a business or industry, to force a change in how they do business. Boycotting a company is a type of consumerism.

Political action means that you are trying to persuade an elected official or government agency to conform to the same values you hold. Lobbying, voting, and supporting particular candidates over others are forms of political action.

Taking legal or judiciary action, such as a lawsuit, against a person or organization qualifies as **legal action**. Taking out a legal restraint, such as an injunction, to prevent a person or organization from carrying out an

undesirable environmental behavior is also legal action.

Ecomanagement involves physically maintaining or improving the existing ecosystem. Examples of ecomanagement include reforestation, landscaping, restoring stream habitats, and installing bird boxes.

If students find that they feel strongly about an issue, they are encouraged to find a way to take action on that issue. They should, however, realize that there is a method to deciding what action to take. This method will be briefly explained towards the end of this lesson. Teachers can have students decide on an action to take regarding either a forestry-related issue or other issues and implement the action as an extension activity.

NOTE TO TEACHERS

Many teachers shy away from teaching issue investigation because the issues can be controversial and the teacher may think it is not his or her place to introduce those topics in the classroom. However, it is issue investigation that teaches students to make informed decisions about environmental issues. As the teacher, you will not be sharing your values and opinions, but guiding the students to explore issues and identify the values of the people involved. In doing this, the students should begin to develop their own values and opinions of the issues being studied. This is an important lesson in the Forestree Unit and we encourage you to spend as much time as the students need to cover the concepts of issue investigation.

ACTIVITIES

Developing Investigation Skills (20 minutes)

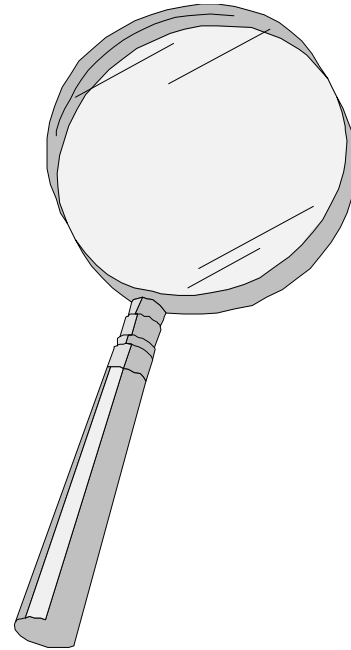
In order for your students to effectively investigate and evaluate environmental issues in forestry, they need to have certain skills. This lesson will provide students an opportunity to practice those skills on an issue affecting the field of forestry today. Tell your students that they are going to learn how to investigate issues in forestry.

Tell students they will soon be reading an article relating to forestry issues. They will need to be able to extract information from this article to investigate the issue thoroughly. As you discuss the steps they will be taking, show the **6 Steps for Investigating Environmental Issues** overhead. Students should copy the steps in their log book, so they can look back on them, if necessary.

Ask students, "What do we mean by an environmental problem?" *Something that is wrong with the environment. It could be pollution, deforestation, etc.* Ask students to tell you what an issue is. *An issue occurs when there are at least two different viewpoints based on a problem. The issue may be about the best way to solve the problem, but it also could be about whether or not*

the problem exists. Ask your students what they think the first step in investigating an issue should be. *Identifying what issue is at stake.* Identifying the issue in the article basically means picking out the main topic of the article.

The next step is identifying *who* is involved in the issue. Ask yourself, “Who are the key players?” There are at least two sides to every issue, sometimes even more. Once you have done this, you need to know the key beliefs for each side, and what their key values are pertaining to the issue. Beliefs and values are two separate things, not to be confused with one another. Review with your students what a value is (covered in Lesson 6). *A value is the worth something has to a person. There are different types of values.* Ask them what a belief is and how it is different from a value. *A belief is something that a person thinks is true about the issue. They believe it to the best of their knowledge to be a fact, even though it may not be a fact. It is not the same as what they desire or want (a value).*



Ask students, “Once you know what the issue is, the players involved, and what they believe and value, what do you think you need to do?” *Figure out what each player’s position is on the issue.* Ask yourself, “What action does the player recommend to solve the issue?” “What do they want to do?” You should also try to identify the type of action proposed by each player. There are five different types of action. Ask your students, “What do you think these types are? **Persuasion** (e.g. letter writing), **consumerism** (e.g. boycotting a business), **legal action** (e.g. lawsuit, injunction), **political action** (e.g. lobbying a legislator, voting), **ecomangement** (e.g. re-forestation, landscaping). Some types of action may be better suited to an issue than others.

The last step in this process is evaluating the proposed actions. Ask students, “Why would we want to evaluate an action?” *You must identify the consequences of these actions – what will happen if a particular action is implemented?* Ask your students what kinds of consequences they think actions can have. *Social, environmental, economical, legal, political, etc.* The consequences of actions could bring about the results desired, but could also make things worse. It is essential to think about all consequences, good or bad. By knowing the consequences, people can make better decisions about whether or not a particular action will bring about the results that they want.

Analyzing the Issue (20 minutes)

Have students find a partner. Pass out the **Forestry Issue Investigation** worksheet. The worksheet reflects the steps that you have just discussed with the class. Explain to your students that they will use this sheet to analyze an issue. Take a few minutes to read through the sheet with them, allowing them to discuss any questions about it.

Pass out the provided article to the pairs of students. Tell students that as they read through the article with their partner, they need to look for the answers to the questions on the worksheet. By answering these questions, students will begin to break the issue down into its components.

After the students have had time to read the article and fill out the worksheet, have the class come together and discuss their findings. You should go through the worksheet, one component at a time. Ask students what their answers were. Write students' answers on the chalkboard or overhead. If there are different opinions on certain components, take time to discuss why students have different answers.

**Note: The purpose of this lesson is to help students learn the skills necessary to dissect environmental issues. The article provided was chosen to address these skills. If you feel that a different issue would benefit your students, please use the following guidelines when choosing an appropriate article. The article should 1) focus on an environmental issue related to forestry, 2) include 3-5 different perspectives and, 3) provide enough background information so that students can define the problem at the root of the issue.*

CONCLUSION (10 minutes)

Tell students there are many different issues facing forestry and the environment. With the skills they used today, they will be able to effectively analyze these issues. As they move through life, they can use these steps to investigate issues in newspapers and magazines, issues on the television and movies, and issues that arise in conversations with other individuals.

Ask if any of your students feel strongly about the issue that was just discussed. Tell your students that taking action is the last step in investigating environmental issues. *(This is something that they can do on their own, or as an extension activity. You are just going to let them know the appropriate steps to take when deciding to take action.)* The students have already looked at all sides of the issue. The next step is identifying possible alternative solutions to the issue.

Brainstorming is an excellent tool to use for this step. Ask students what types of action they could take on an issue. *Review: persuasion, consumerism, political action, legal action, and ecomanagement.*

Students should try to include all types of action when brainstorming alternatives.



What do they think should happen next? *Evaluate the alternative actions.* Students should think about the good and bad consequences (social, environmental, economic) of the different alternatives. They should also think about their available resources (time, skills, people) – will they truly be able to carry out the action effectively? They must make sure that the action is consistent with their values related to this issue.

Finally, based on their evaluation, they would pick the best feasible option. Once chosen, they would implement the action, and then evaluate the success of their action based on their desired results.

These steps can be taken regarding any environmental issue. Encourage your students to take action on an issue that they feel strongly about, but remind them to thoroughly investigate the issue before deciding what type of action to take.

Student Log Book

Have students discuss the last part of the Issue Investigation in their log books. Ask them to analyze the actions presented for each player in the story and the positive and negative consequences involved. These consequences may be a result of the action or a result of achieving their overall goal.

SEEDS TO GROW

As an extension activity, pick out local issues related to forestry and/or the environment. Have students go through the issue investigation process. Continue the process into action, following the steps outlined in the conclusion. Students should find alternative solutions to the issue, evaluate those alternatives, and decide on the best action to take. They should then implement their chosen action, and evaluate its success once implemented.

WEB LINKS

About.com— <http://forestry.about.com/education/scilife/forestry/library/blartdex>

National Forest Roadless Policy— <http://roadless.fs.fed.us>

Environmental News Service— <Http://ens.lycos.com>

E magazine— <www.emagazine.com>

Ecolonomics— <www.ecolonomics.org>

Topic index for forestry issues— <www.metla.fi/info/vlib/Forestry/Topic/>

Society of American Foresters Journal of Forestry— <www.safnet.org/pubs/jof>

SciCentral articles, reports, databases, and directories for renewable resource issues— <http://www.scicentral.com/B-forest.html#articles>

U.S. Forest Service roadless policy— <http://www.cnie.org/nle/for-24.html>

References

American Forest Foundation. 1996. Exploring Environmental Issues: Focus on Forests. Project Learning Tree. Washington D.C.

Durbin, Kathie. 1996. Tree Huggers: Victory, Defeat, and Renewal. The Mountaineers. Seattle, Washington.

Hungerford, et al. 1973. Investigating and Evaluating Environmental Issues and Actions: Skill Development Module. Stipes Publishing Co. Champaign, IL.

6 STEPS FOR INVESTIGATING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

1. Identify the issue
2. Identify the key players
3. Identify the key beliefs
4. Identify the key values
5. Identify actions proposed by the players
6. Evaluate consequences of the actions – social, environmental, economic, etc.

This article is a composite of three different stories that appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on November 17th and 18th, and December 3, 1999.

Forest Service plan sparks controversy in Wisconsin

On Oct. 19, 1999, the national government published its plan to preserve some of our National Forests as 'roadless' areas. These areas would be restricted from logging operations and forest road building. The plan intends to target forested areas that are already without roads or that have poor quality roads. The plan also targets the critical areas for protecting animal habitat and water supplies.

Paul Strong, a spokesman for the Forest Service in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, said that their local forest service agency was directed in October to add "protections" to all of the areas in the Nicolet and Chequamegon National Forests that did not currently have roads. Of the 1.6 million acres that comprise the two Wisconsin forests, about 74,000 acres are in that category. 2.75% of the National Forest in Wisconsin is currently protected as wilderness areas that have no roads or buildings. The Forest Service plan protects about 4.5% more of the National Forest land in Wisconsin from motorized vehicle access and operations such as logging.

"There are already 11,000 miles of roads through the National Forests in Wisconsin," Strong said. This plan would restrict the building of any new roads only in the protected areas, not in the rest of the forest. Across the country, national forests have about 40 million acres designated as 'roadless' areas. "These lands for the most part had few developed areas or roads but had no restrictions on the use of them either," said Strong. "In Wisconsin, some may have been logged before and had low maintenance roads built on them, that is an analysis we have to do. I suspect there will be strong opinions voiced from a variety of standpoints on the Forest Service Plan,"

A Forest County official says he is fighting the U.S. Forest Service plan that could ban logging and road-building on about 74,000 acres in two national forests in Wisconsin. Forest County Board Chairman Erhard Huettl joined a standing-room-only crowd at the first of two public hearings on this proposal Monday in Crandon. The second meeting was on Tuesday in Park Falls.

"I want to let the Forest County residents know what I intend to do as Forest County Board chairman to stop this plan from being rammed down our throats, I also want to say that this is not a threat; it is a promise", said Huettl on Monday. He has also appointed a three-member County Board committee to respond to the Forest Service plan. At least a half-dozen semi rigs filled with logs sat in a high school parking lot where Monday's meeting was held. The crowd sent a clear message that access to National Forests should be kept for recreation and logging since these are two major sources of employment and revenue for the counties in northern Wisconsin.

The Forest Service said a plan was needed because of strong public sentiment for protecting our current 'roadless' areas. Supporters say those tracts of land offer "clean water, biological diversity [and] wildlife habitat." They also promote "forest health, dispersed recreational opportunities, and other public benefits."

The federal government feels that it can no longer afford expensive road-building and road maintenance in the forests. "The public has questioned the logic of building new roads into

'roadless' areas when the Forest Service doesn't even have the funding to maintain its existing road system. Indeed, the Forest Service has a growing \$8.4 billion maintenance and reconstruction bill and receives only 20% of the annual funding it needs to maintain its existing 380,000-mile road system," said a representative for the Forest Service. There are more miles of U.S. Forest Service roads than there are highways throughout the entire country.

The Forest Service issues contracts to log about 110 million board feet of lumber annually from the forests, he said. "The logging contracts are generally worth up to \$8 million," he said. Opponents of the proposal say banning activities on the lands could harm some rural communities in Wisconsin that depend on access to the forest for the timber products industry and for recreational uses.

"If Washington D.C. takes away local control of our national forests, it will have tremendous effects on the future of the entire industry," said Nadine Bailey, president of the Timber Producers Association of Michigan and Wisconsin. "This could mark the beginning of the destruction of logging in Wisconsin. I consider this to be the precursor to the type of forest closure that ruined the industry in the northwest region of the United States." Bailey is urging all 1,300 members of her organization to write letters to the U.S. Forest Service voicing opposition to the plan, which has strong support among state environmental groups.

Environmentalists have said more needs to be done to protect forest lands from destructive logging. According to a midwest representative for the Sierra Club (a national environmental group), the federal government will not take away the power local citizens exercise in deciding the future of the forests. Rather, the government "wants to return the forests to the people" while regaining control from "the industry, which has pretty much destroyed the national forests," said Carl Zichella, regional spokesman for the group. "This is the kind of hysteria we're going to hear from the industry," he said, adding that the Clinton plan "will have a minimal, if any, effect on the industry. Timber harvests from national forests account for no more than 10% to 11% of logs cut in the state."

Carl Johnson, a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said he witnessed the negative impact of logging when he worked in Vilas County at a camp run by the state Department of Natural Resources. Campers using the facilities at nearby Big Lake were angry to see the timber being harvested so close to a campground. "What they liked about (their vacations) was the musky fishing and stuff like that," Johnson said. "National forests give people the same feelings. In a place where there are no vehicles, no roads - it's nothing you can describe on paper.

Forestry Issues Investigation

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

	WHO ARE THE PLAYERS?	WHAT ARE THEIR KEY BELIEFS?	WHAT ARE THEIR KEY VALUES?	WHAT ACTION WOULD THE PLAYERS LIKE TO TAKE?	WHAT TYPE OF ACTION IS THIS?
PLAYER 1					
PLAYER 2					
PLAYER 3					
PLAYER 4					
PLAYER 5					
PLAYER 6					
PLAYER 7					

Forestry Issues Investigation

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

	WHO ARE THE PLAYERS?	WHAT ARE THEIR KEY BELIEFS?	WHAT ARE THEIR KEY VALUES?	WHAT ACTION WOULD THE PLAYERS LIKE TO TAKE?	WHAT TYPE OF ACTION IS THIS?
PLAYER 1	National Government/ Forest Service	Protecting wilderness areas is necessary for animals, clean water, etc. Roads are expensive to maintain.	Biodiversity Economics	Preserve roadless areas through creation of legislation.	Legal
PLAYER 2	Forest County Board	New restrictions threaten logging industry. Residents should have a say so on the issue.	Jobs Freedom Recreation	Formed committee Have public hearings	Persuasion Political
PLAYER 3	County Residents	Extra protection threatens logging, which is a major source of jobs and revenue.	Jobs Revenue	Attend hearings, voice opinions	Persuasion Political
PLAYER 4	Timber Producers Association (opponents)	Extra protection threatens local economy and the logging industry.	Jobs Economics Local control	Letter writing	Persuasion
PLAYER 5	Environmentalists	More should be done to protect forests.	Local control Freedom Biodiversity	Speak out to protect wilderness areas.	Persuasion
PLAYER 6	Recreationalists (campers)	Timber harvest negatively affects recreation.	Recreation Aesthetics	Voice opinions and/or find a new camping area.	Persuasion Consumerism
PLAYER 7					

High Tension Over Proposed Power Line

Compilation of articles-Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Apr. 16, 1999; Duluth News Tribune May 23, 2000; AP Nov. 29, 2000; The Bee Feb. 28, 2001

A high-voltage power line between Duluth, MN and Wausau, Wis., would help Wisconsin meet its growing need for electricity, according to the draft environmental impact statement on the proposed project.

The existing 345-kilovolt line, from Minneapolis to Appleton, has frequently been pushed to capacity, forcing utilities in Wisconsin to scramble for alternative power supplies to feed demand on summer days. In the summer of 1997, unexpected heavy flows of electricity over the line caused a "near disaster" that nearly set off blackouts across parts of the Midwest, the utilities said in calling for the new transmission line.

That event, and electric shortages the last two summers, prompted Gov. Tommy G. Thompson and the state Public Service Commission to push utilities to beef up their infrastructure by adding new power plants and building a new transmission line.

"This transmission line, as proposed by Wisconsin Public Service and Minnesota Power, will go a long way to assuring Wisconsin residents will have affordable energy while at the same time helping to improve electric reliability," Thompson said in a prepared statement.

Wisconsin Electric Power Co. of Milwaukee also expressed its support for the project.

"The utilities are pulling together for what is best for Wisconsin in the long term," said spokeswoman Maripat Blankenheim.

David Benforado, executive director of the Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin, which represents 82 communities that own and operate their own electricity systems, also backed the proposal.

"We want it built tomorrow. We hope that there are no obstacles that will pop up," he said.

But it could come at a cost to the environment. The proposed 250-mile-long, 345-kilovolt Arrowhead-Weston line that Minnesota Power and Wisconsin Public Service Corporation want to build has a greater potential to harm the environment than three possible alternative lines elsewhere in Wisconsin, the draft EIS found.

The Arrowhead-Weston line, however, is the only one that utility companies have asked to build.

"Part of our legal requirements is to look at alternatives," Public Service Commission of Wisconsin spokeswoman Annemarie Newman said.

The draft EIS also examined the possible environmental impacts of using different routes for the Arrowhead-Weston line and considered the need for the project.

One thing it did not do was make a recommendation for or against the project.

The PSC began mailing copies of the 500-plus page statement Friday.

"It's too early to comment on the draft," said Ed Garvey, Madison attorney for the group Save Our Unique Lands, which opposes the line. "We haven't even had our experts take a look at it."

Garvey said his office is sending the draft EIS to SOUL's experts today.

“Then it's just question of continuing to marshal public opinion, which doesn't need much marshaling, because just about everyone we know is opposed to it,” he said.

A number of people in Northwestern Wisconsin oppose the proposed line because of fears over its potential impact on property values, health and the environment. Project supporters say the line is needed to increase the reliability of the region's electrical system.

“I am concerned for all of the farmers and other landowners who make a living off of this area,” said Margaret Buchberger of Marathon City. “Since this land represents their livelihood, this proposal means life or death for them.” She said her family uses the land for logging and plans to grow ginseng, but a power line would cut across the farmland and prevent the use of large machinery needed for logging.

“The Public Service Commission will ultimately decide whether the line should be built, whether some modification of this project should be built, or if this project should not be built at all,” said Jeffrey L. Butson, public affairs director for the PSC.

He said there was a clear division on the proposal by Minnesota Power and Wisconsin Public Service Corp. for the 345,000-volt line, as expressed at various public information sessions held by the commission.

“Primarily we are hearing (from the public) that this project ruins their land,” he said. “It basically cuts across their land which will, they believe, affect their property value should they choose to sell. They did not intend to use the land for that purpose. A lot of these people retired on their land and use it for recreation,” Butson said. “There are also growing concerns about some of the health issues associated with a power line.”

But business representatives view the line as a plus for economic development.

“Reliable power is very important to encourage new businesses into town, and some businesses rely on it for other reasons,” Butson said.

Minnesota Power manager of public affairs John Heino hadn't seen the draft EIS by mid-afternoon Monday. But he was pleased that it's been released.

“It's an important document that begins the process of considering the potential impacts on the environment,” he said. “We are anxious to consider ways that we can build this badly needed line and do it in a way that minimizes the impacts on the environment.”

Picking a route for the line, provided it is built, is one way to minimize environmental impacts. The draft EIS broke the proposed line into three segments, each containing three possible routes. Each route has its own pros and cons.

The three routes in the Oliver-Exeland, Wis., segment illustrates that. One route maximizes the opportunities to put the transmission line on existing rights of way. Another route would minimize the contact people would have with the line but cuts across at least eight forests greater than 1,000 acres in size. Such forest fragmentation can affect species such as timber wolves. The third possible route would combine advantages of the first two, but may need tribal approval to use an existing transmission line right of way through the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation, the draft EIS said.

From Exeland there are two possible corridors to Weston: a northern one running near Tripoli and one running near Owen. “Forest fragmentation is a very serious concern on all of the Tripoli routes,” the draft EIS said. “Limited access to construct the new line across many wetlands and streams is also a significant environmental concern in the Tripoli sector.” The northern segment, by comparison, has a lower potential of breaking up

forests. The tradeoff is that this segment's routes ``are primarily in an agricultural landscape... impacts on farm operations could be an important concern."

If the proposed line is built along one of the Tripoli routes, more than 10,000 acres of county forests would be impacted, according to SOUL intervenor Linda Ceylor. She quoted testimony presented by Price County Forester Pete Bartelt at a public hearing in Tomahawk explaining the negative effects of siting the transmission line through the county forests.

Egtvedt acknowledged that there would be a loss of overall income to the county if the line was located through county forests, but said the county would gain some income because the trees which would be cut down along the route and the right-of-way could be sold and the county would receive payment for the use of the land.

He said the damage to the forest ecosystem would have an adverse impact only in areas with small blocks of forested land, but stated he did not know the overall effects of a transmission line on forest fragmentation.

Pat Berg, Athens, asked Egtvedt what WPS could do about their stand of maple trees in the Ogema area. She said the route would bisect the entire stand and make it impossible for the family to continue to operate their maple syrup business. She was told some type of settlement would be made for the trees that had to be cut down but the family would not be reimbursed for the loss of possible income.

In response to questions from David Ludwig, an attorney for the Public Service Commission, Egtvedt said the transmission lines should use as much of the existing corridors, like highways and railroad rights-of-way as possible. He said the potential impacts of the proposed transmission line won't be known for years.

The Arrowhead-Weston route has the highest number of acres of county forest, the most miles of state trails, the most rivers listed in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory, and the most river and shoreline miles of Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters, the draft EIS said.

``These factors indicate an area largely dominated by natural landscape features that could be seriously harmed by the construction of a major high-voltage transmission line," the draft EIS says.

But the proposed Arrowhead-Weston line would also cross the area with the lowest density of roads and humans. That could translate to fewer landowners concerned over property values, health and safety.

The public has until July 5 to comment on the draft EIS. The state will use those comments as it prepares the final EIS, which could be completed by mid- to late-August. The PSC has to wait at least 30 days after the final EIS is released before it can begin public hearings on the project.

Ski Area to Add 50 Runs and Seeks Park Land for Condos

By Amy Kimmes | Wausau Daily Herald | Compilation from July 6 & 10, 2001

Downhill skiers will find 30 new runs when Granite Peak Ski Area opens this season and can expect about 20 more runs the following winter, the owner said Monday.

Charles Skinner Jr. said the expansion is progressing quickly, which he said is good news for skiers and for nearby businesses that benefit from the tourism.

But environmentalists say it's destroying the hill's ecosystem, and many came to a four-hour public meeting Monday in Wausau to voice their concerns. Granite Peak already clear-cut 29 acres for the 30 new runs on the east side of Rib Mountain, and it plans to clear another 29 acres for the west-side expansion.

Critics also questioned the state Department of Natural Resources' unprecedented plan to sell or swap state park land to Skinner so that he can build rental lodging near the ski runs. The development would include one central building of 60 to 70 upscale rooms and about 15 double-unit cabins for families and larger groups.

Dawn Narron, 75, wants all the expansion to stop.

"I want them to get the heck out of there," Narron, a town of Texas resident, said in a telephone interview before the DNR held the public meeting at the University of Wisconsin Marathon County. "They shouldn't be tearing the mountain up. The mountain belongs to the people. The (DNR) is putting money into the pockets of investors and the guy (Skinner) putting it up."

Skinner, a Duluth resident who also operates Lutsen Mountain north of Duluth, signed a 30-year lease with the state to operate the Rib Mountain ski hill owned by the DNR. Skinner secured \$7 million last summer from several sources, including a team of nine local banks.

Without the expansion, downhill skiing would have no future in Rib Mountain, he said. Granite Peak must also offer lodging to survive long-term, Skinner said.

"I wouldn't do it if it weren't necessary for the ski area," he said. "But it's necessary for the park's survival in the decades to come."

Dave Daniels, northern region parks and recreation specialist for the DNR, said Skinner has come up with funding that previous owners could not generate.

"It has been fallow for a long time," Daniels said.

DNR officials said they probably would swap land with Skinner, instead of selling property, because they want to keep the park at its current 412 acres. The state already has helped Skinner by buying 40 acres for about \$140,000 to allow for the ski hill's west-side addition.

Skinner wants 20 acres at the base of the hill on which to build the rental units, Daniels said. The state would want 20 acres of equal value in return.

The deal requires federal approval, said Tom Watkins, a DNR official in Madison.

"Whenever you change the park boundaries, (the federal government) gets involved in the review and approval," Watkins said.

The public will be kept involved in the process, DNR officials said.

“But the important thing is that at this point there is no decision at hand regarding the land trade or sale,” Watkins said.

The current lease places land value at about \$5,000 an acre at Rib Mountain State Park. The land will be reassessed and appraised to determine its current value.

Dennis Holzem, 53, town of Weston, supports Skinner’s expansion plans and said he understands the need for rental lodging.

“It’s high time that we make something out of Rib Mountain State Park,” said Holzem, who skied there about 80 times last season.

“I sometimes wonder if (rental units) are really necessary, but I have to trust the business end of it,” he said. “Seeing how poorly used the ski hill is during the week, rental units could solve that problem.”

“That ski area is probably the single biggest tourist draw for the whole Wausau area,” said Roger Jolly, 52. “I’m totally in favor of utilizing whatever space (Skinner) needs to make the hill even more attractive to skiers and snowboarders.”

Tony Schultz, 21, of Athens opposes Skinner’s upgrades.

“I’m concerned about the environmental devastation and the declining water quality and the fact that they can pump water from the river (to make snow),” Schultz said. “This is a public land being manipulated by a guy with money. I’m just amazed that so many people are willing to defend this guy’s profits.”

“The DNR has been entrusted to protect our public properties and have done us a disservice by even thinking of selling or trading lands for private development,” said Al Opall, a Rib Mountain resident and member of Save Our Mountain Environment.

Opall said he’s not against skiing or improvements on the hill, but he is against additional development that would eat up state park land.

Skinner can make improvements within the existing property to make a living on the ski hill, Opall said.

Wisconsin Green Party member Donna Krause of Wausau agrees.

“We’re letting a private business make a profit off state lands,” Krause said. “It’s putting money into Skinner’s pockets, not the community’s.”

Billboards, Trees at Odds

By Raegan Isham | Wausau Daily Herald | July 10, 2001

A proposed state budget amendment would allow businesses and billboard owners to cut down trees and shrubs along any road, street or highway, but critics hope to block its passage.

If the amendment is approved, the state won't have to issue permits.

The "result is going to be an excessive cutting to expose signage," said Chuck Mitchell, president of Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin. Large billboards are a nuisance, he said.

The amendment to the state's budget, which was added by the Senate caucus, would allow businesses and billboard owners to remove or trim vegetation along public rights-of-way if certain criteria apply. That includes if the vegetation interrupts the view of the business or sign for more than six seconds if a driver is traveling at the posted speed limit, the owner pays for the trimming or removal of vegetation and the cost for cleanup and disposal and state funds won't be used to pay for the trimming, removal or replacement vegetation.

The budget needs to be approved by the Senate and Assembly and Gov. Scott McCallum before owners can remove vegetation.

The Department of Transportation is in a difficult position, said David Vieth, director of the DOT's Bureau of Highway Operations. The department is asked to protect vegetation and provide a pleasant experience for travelers along highways, but the visibility of signs and businesses also is important for tourism.

"Certainly we know there's a high value to businesses being seen by traffic," Vieth said.

When signs along highways become hidden by trees or other vegetation, it diminishes the value of the sign for the advertiser and sign owner, Vieth said.

The amendment was co-authored by Rep. David Ward, R-Fort Atkinson, and Sen. Roger Breske, D-Eland. Ward said he was contacted by outdoor advertising representatives in his district who said it was difficult to get permits from the DOT to remove vegetation in front of billboards. Most of the vegetation was naturally grown, Ward said.

If the billboard can't be seen by drivers, it is useless, Ward said. He wants to make sure the investment of the business or billboard owner is protected and that removed trees or shrubs are replaced with similar vegetation at the owner's expense.

Bill Mitchell, general manager of Lamar Advertising of Central Wisconsin in Marshfield, said if the amendment passes, it will help make billboards that are blocked by vegetation more visible.

"Basically all we're trying to do is cut vegetation in most cases that's grown up since the billboards have been erected," he said.

The vegetation that is removed is replaced with something smaller such as a shrub that won't block the billboard.

Right now, businesses or billboard owners can apply for a permit from the DOT to remove the trees or ask the department to remove it. The DOT will remove vegetation only if the sign or business was there first and then became blocked.

If the DOT has a crew remove the vegetation, the removal costs are charged to the person requesting the removal, Vieth said.

Cornel Hausler, a Merrill resident and a member of Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin, said the possibility of allowing businesses and billboard owners to cut down vegetation at their choosing is “mind-boggling.”

“This is going to be devastating to the environment. ... They’ll have a right to cut down anything,” Hausler said.

Not only do trees and other vegetation give Wisconsin a scenic appeal, they prevent erosion, produce clean air and provide habitat for animals, Hausler said.

If the amendment is approved, the DOT won’t have to issue permits.

“We don’t want to see any more billboards than we have to,” Chuck Mitchell said.

The state DOT owns and manages 150,000 acres of land along highways. This helps erosion and noise control as well as scenic appeal, Chuck Mitchell said.

“We would like to see the status quo,” Chuck Mitchell said. “We think the DOT does a nice job, we think it’s their jurisdiction.

“We think it’s a travesty to see private citizens operating on public lands to suit their private purposes. Those are public lands for the use and for the aesthetic values of the public,” Chuck Mitchell said.