CITIZEN ACCESS PROJECT

A study
of citizen access mechanisms
in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Conducted by the Department of Natural Resources
Office of Planning
and the Department of Administration
Management Analysis Division

SEPTEMBER 1991

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 1991, the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources requested that the DNR Office of Planning and the Management Analysis Division of the Department of Administration undertake a joint project to research citizen access channels in the DNR. The purpose of the project was to establish whether improvements could be made in the department's strategies and to make recommendations toward a more effective citizen access system.

Interviews were conducted with 141 department staff members with front-line citizen participation experience. This staff included division directors, regional administrators, bureau directors, and members of the commissioner's office staff. In addition, interviews were conducted of 122 members of stakeholder groups and 11 states experiencing success in this area.

Findings

The stakeholder group representatives indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the department, citing easy access, department responsiveness, and the DNR's willingness to work with them as key reasons. Their major means of contacting the DNR were by telephone, in person, or by mail or fax.

DNR staff members see these contacts as woven into the fabric of their daily worklife and as an increasing proportion of a growing workload. They employ a variety of methods to gather input, listing more than 100 in the interviews, and see steady improvement in their capability to tailor interactions with citizens to bring about constructive two-way communications. Appreciation is increasing for the role that citizens can play in ensuring informed and publicly supported decisions.

Staff members estimated that they spend 20 to 50 percent of their time in activities related to citizen access. The department has a substantial investment in citizen access; trends identified by staff and managers include a growing demand for input, increasingly complex issues in the public forum, and increasing workload, with few additional resources anticipated.

Conclusions

The diversity in mission, constituencies, and access mechanisms has created effective and disparate approaches in each division. The challenge in such diversity is to maintain flexibility and to provide direction and focus that will allow continued improvement in a changing environment. What staff and managers say is lacking are the departmental systems and strategies that support quality and efficiency, and a vision that acknowledges citizen access as central to the DNR's future.

Recommendations

A three-year approach is recommended to meet this challenge:

I. Establish a learning environment
II. Create a citizen access vision
III. Invite strategic-level citizen participation
IV. Create pilot projects on initiatives
V. Articulate clear expectations for staff

INTRODUCTION

Like all public agencies, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources works for the citizen. The ability to effectively communicate with the public and meaningfully use public input helps determine organizational health, credibility, and effectiveness. Commissioner Rodney Sando initiated this study to learn how accessible the DNR is to citizens and how access to the department can be improved.

Project purpose

This study examines citizen access from the viewpoint of employees and citizens. The purpose of the Citizen Access Project is to:

1. identify existing DNR channels that citizens use to gain access to department decision making,

2. learn how difficult or easy it is for citizens to influence DNR policies and programs,

3. interview resource agencies in other states about their successes and failures in citizen access efforts, and

4. create recommendations for a citizen access system that incorporates constituent input into department-wide planning and decision making.

Project design

The DNR Office of Planning and the Management Analysis Division of the Department of Administration collaborated on this project from May through September 1991. The project's purpose was accomplished by:

1. holding focus groups with DNR employees and interviewing senior managers to analyze past efforts of involving citizens in planning and decision making,

2. conducting a telephone survey of external stakeholders for their perceptions of meaningful citizen access,

3. interviewing other states' resource agencies about effective citizen access mechanisms, and

4. creating recommendations for a coordinated system based on the gathered information.

Project staffing

This report represents a team effort. Sue Laxdal, a senior management consultant with the Management Analysis Division, provided the initial proposal and project design. Ms. Laxdal was responsible for preparing the internal section of the report, formulating the

recommendations, and producing the finished document. Don Buckhout, Ron Sushak, and Tim Kelly from the DNR Office of Planning provided valuable assistance and insight. Katherine Barton, also from the Office of Planning, served as project manager. Other contributors included Sharon Pfeiffer, an independent consultant, and C. J. Olson Market Research, Inc.

Assumptions

This study was based on several assumptions.

1. Numerous positive citizen access efforts currently exist in the department.

This study assumes that DNR employees have a high level of commitment and dedication to their role as public servants. One way the DNR demonstrates its commitment is by providing numerous citizen access channels throughout the organization. Many employees spoke highly of the usefulness of citizen input and the many ways it improves project effectiveness and efficiency. Frustrations expressed by staff referred to their inability to provide more citizen participation rather than questions about its value to the decision-making process.

2. Citizen access addresses public decision making.

In this report, "citizen access" refers to the channels citizens use to influence DNR policies and programs. The concept of citizen access differs significantly from customer service. Customer service focuses on the attitudes and practices demonstrated by employees in customer interactions. The length of time it takes to get a permit and the accompanying customer treatment is one example of customer service. On the other hand, citizen access addresses how difficult or easy it is for a citizen to initiate a new trail or another similar project. It is the DNR's ability to allow citizens easy access to decision making that is the subject of this report.

3. Citizen access mechanisms frequently develop in a haphazard manner.

This study used the New England saltbox house as an analogy to characterize the history of citizen access. The New England saltbox house symbolizes an excellent concept diminished over time by unplanned additions. Originally, this structure met a critical housing need by providing shelter in a simple, square structure. Over the years, however, owners made needed additions according to family size and popular social trends. Some families added a second story as the family grew. Others added a rumpus room in the '50s. An extra bathroom provided convenience as the parents aged. After many years of these innovations, residents discovered that the plumbing didn't work and the electrical system was outdated and dangerous. In short, the once appropriate structure could no longer meet the original need. Adding on was no longer an option because the house needed fundamental change.

This image provided a valuable touchstone during the course of this project. There is a strong parallel between the way citizen access procedures have developed and the history

of the New England saltbox house. Many positive mechanisms began to allow citizens access to the department, meeting a felt need at that time. Adding new mechanisms over the years has created more than 100 channels for citizen access, often unrelated. The result is a complex group of well intentioned and often useful actions involving many people with no structure or coordinating system. This study examines the existing citizen access system, compares it with those of other states, and recommends steps for improvement.

4. To improve citizen access, one must look at the organization as a system.

One finding from this study is that citizen access channels exist throughout the DNR. Citizens interact with employees regularly by telephone, at meetings, through letters, and even at church. Many employees commented that citizen interaction is often hidden in regular workloads. It is frequently an "add on" to job responsibilities, with no distinct identity. Although pervasive, citizen access is often invisible precisely because it occurs in so many different forms.

Because citizen interaction is a part of almost everyone's job, improving access requires looking at a broad range of organization activities. Karl Albrecht provides a useful model in *Organization Development.** According to him, organizations are systems. Four major subsystems -- social, administrative, strategic, and technical -- compose the larger system.

> The *social system* includes the human aspects of the organization, such as the employees themselves, roles and relationships, power, status, authority, values, norms, the reward system, social climate, and the "grapevine." The key measure of the system's effectiveness is the quality of work life.
>
> The *administrative system* includes administrative processes and other aspects needed to manage the organization's information: policies and procedures, support staff and equipment, reporting mechanisms, and formal channels of communication flow. The key measure of the system's effectiveness is its response time.
>
> The *strategic system* includes plans and planning systems, the senior management team, the chain of command, written directives, formal guidance, and the management information system. The key measure of the system's effectiveness is management's strength.
>
> The *technical system* includes staff, skills and information in the technical realm, performance standards, work processes, capital equipment, and resources and materials used to accomplish the organization's mission. The key measure of the system's effectiveness is productivity.

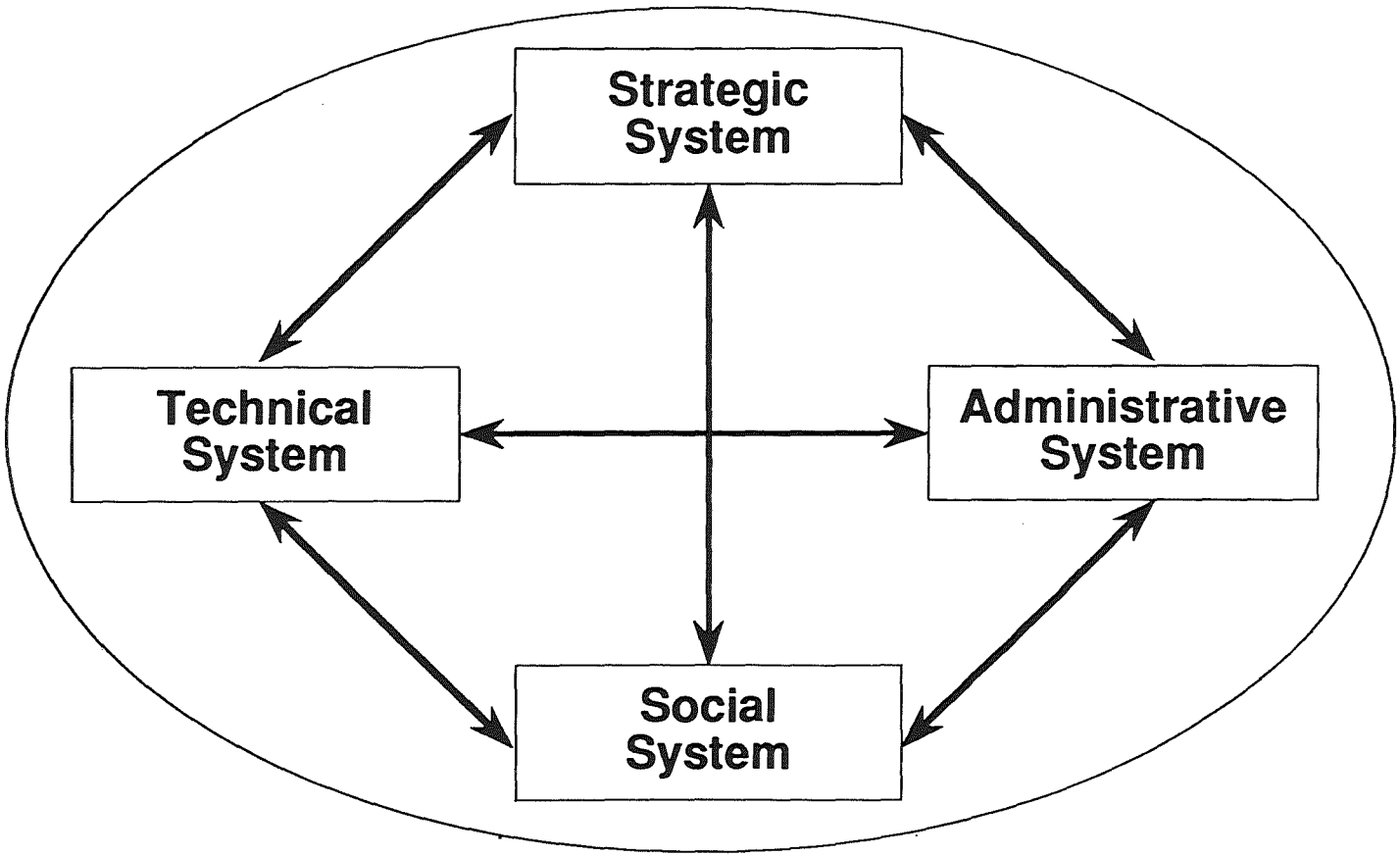
---

* *Organizational Development*, Karl Albrecht, Prentice Hall, 1983.

In order to successfully improve citizen access at the DNR, changes must be made in each of the four subsystems. Unless all four areas are included in an improvement scheme, steps taken in any one area will have short-lived benefits.

The Albrecht model served as a guide to view the organization and create project recommendations. Suggestions for improvement intentionally target a wide spectrum of people and activities, understanding that a comprehensive approach will ensure positive long-term results.

THE ORGANIZATION AS A SYSTEM



FINDINGS and CONCLUSIONS

Findings: Current methods of citizen access

Satisfaction levels

The survey of DNR stakeholder groups indicated a high level of satisfaction in an overall sense by 70.9 percent of those contacted. Of the 122 groups contacted -- 54 percent of which have paid staff -- 83.8 percent said the department was accessible, 76.5 percent said that access was easy, and 78.7 percent said the information they received was credible. This high level of satisfaction was predicted by DNR regional and central office staff, who indicated that stakeholders with a lot of experience with the department would rate the department as accessible. A belief exists among DNR staff that 90 percent of the citizenry are rarely if ever heard from because they rely on the department to do a good job and trust that they are doing so until an issue arises that they view as personal. Appendix C reports complete stakeholder survey data.

Channels of access

Multiple channels for citizen access are used by citizens and staff. More than 100 different mechanisms were identified as used by citizens to influence decisions. Staff members consciously, if informally, use these mechanisms to keep in touch with citizen views. Key stakeholders use the telephone, face-to-face discussion, and the mail or fax as their most common methods of contact. Regional staff members reported face-to-face contact as most common. Staff members in the St. Paul office indicated a high use of telephone contact.

Telephone A telephone call to the information number for the regional or St. Paul offices is often a starting point for citizens interested in communicating with the DNR, and direct calls to one discipline or another are also common. The information center in St. Paul receives 500 to 700 calls a day for information. Regional administrators also receive calls, which they respond to or refer to divisions. Sometimes division personnel refer issues to the regional administrators for resolution because the questions cross division lines. Directors and commissioner's staff reported that they receive many calls requesting action or decision making. Staff reported that the number of calls is increasing due to the growing concern for the environment and a better educated citizenry in general.

Meetings The stakeholder group representatives indicated that 50 percent of them had contact with the DNR through public meetings. This was an area where staff indicated some frustration, citing mixed results for meetings and disappointing turnouts, weak agendas, and poor leadership.

Surveys The Parks and Recreation Division surveys park and campsite users to monitor the quality of service. Complaints are often handled on the spot. When a series of similar complaints occurs, changes in policy can and do occur. The Information and Education Division has surveyed citizens at the Minnesota State Fair the past two years. The Metro region surveyed its substantial mailing list. Data from a recent marketing study establishes the base line for measurement. The St. Paul office reported more frequent use of surveys than did the regional administrators or managers.

Legislators Legislators are yet another source of input to influence decision making. Staff cited many instances of contact with a legislator who was acting on behalf of a constituent group or individual. Legislators also have called meetings, inviting the DNR to respond to citizen concerns. These legislator meetings are not viewed as effective by staff, who said they feel that they serve as promotional vehicles for legislators rather than authentic input mechanisms.

Volunteer programs Volunteer programs for such matters as safety and trail development put division staff and regional administrators in touch with hundreds of people on a one-on-one basis or in small informal groups.

Other methods The department also has used advisory committees to gain information from citizens in specific cases. Examples of issues are state parks, work on public accesses, aqua culture, and mineral and real estate management practices. Interagency and joint federal/state projects are used on an ad hoc basis. In addition, both key stakeholder groups and staff reported a steady flow of written communication.

Conclusion: Current methods of citizen access

Citizen access is built into the daily work at the Department of Natural Resources. Both stakeholders and staff indicated high levels of contact and said that the contacts are useful. Staff said they are frequently in touch with citizens who want information or resolution of a concern. Stakeholders reported fairly easy access to the DNR staff. Staff and stakeholders agreed that a variety of formats is used to achieve highly satisfactory access. Staff and stakeholders also agreed that one-on-one telephone and in-person contacts are the current dominant methods of access. Key stakeholder groups are satisfied customers.

A multiple-channel approach to citizen participation has served the department well at the operational level. It currently deals with issue-specific needs and does that fairly well, although it tends to be reactive. It demonstrates an openness and willingness to work with citizens. However, there are few formal mechanisms for influencing decisions and policy at the strategic, long-range level.

Findings: Staff experience with citizen access

Critical success factors Staff experience indicates four keys to positive citizen participation -- preplanning, citizen involvement early in the process, a proactive and positive attitude on DNR's part, and risking frank and open interchange.

Characteristics of negative experiences The characteristics of negative experiences, according to DNR staff, include inadequate planning, little commitment on the part of participants or DNR to come to some conclusive action, unplanned involvement of citizens, going through the motions of involvement because it is required, and political manipulation.

Technical support Staff expressed a need for additional technical support tools. They said that little technical support is available to assist those attempting to use citizen participation methods. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are different

in each location, if they exist at all. The customer service program conducted within the department was viewed by many staff as very useful. However, the knowledge of citizen participation methods and approaches was seen as uneven across the department. "How-to" training is acquired on a catch-as-catch-can basis.

Conclusion: Staff experience with citizen access

A growing base of staff has solid experience in the field. These employees expressed frustration with managing large groups, working with the media, and handling persistent citizens with an axe to grind. They requested tools to plan and implement public meetings and other interactive events with citizens to enhance their effectiveness.

The department has a substantial investment in citizen participation. Managers' time alone was estimated by interviewees as between 20 and 50 percent. With the amount and the variety of participation steadily increasing over the past decade, there is a need to provide tools to use citizen participation opportunities wisely.

Findings: Unidentified priorities

Staff and managers agreed that citizen participation is not currently coordinated, measured, or planned. They acknowledged the importance of citizen involvement in decisions and policy making. Few ways of monitoring or measuring improvement were reported. Staff members said they see citizen participation as essential to conducting DNR's business of protecting and managing the natural resources of the state, and they said that support resources and strategies are lacking to send the message of its overall importance to the organization.

Conclusion: Unidentified priorities

Because citizen access programs have no formal budget, are not assigned priority in position descriptions, and are not the subject of planning or training, DNR staff members see them as added on to their "real" jobs, just one of many tasks that should be done. Staff and managers want priorities to be assigned in order for them to make informed resource allocation decisions.

Findings: Ad hoc approach

DNR staff described the current citizen access system as evolving, fragmented, flexible, open, disjointed, reactive, and centralized. They acknowledged strengths in the current approach to citizen participation -- the intent to tailor approaches to specific needs and the commitment of staff to involve citizens whenever possible. They identified as weaknesses its lax approach, with little or no follow-through and minimal investment of staff time, due to multiple priorities and the requirement that it be a largely volunteer effort.

Staff and managers expressed concern that a more formal citizen access mechanism at DNR could potentially be dominated by people with the most political influence or the loudest voices, with no mediating participants. There is also concern about how to include citizens without jeopardizing the resources they are assigned to protect. They fear that giving increased weight to citizen input will slow operational decisions and remove responsibility from the staff. The citizen boards that govern the Wisconsin DNR and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency are viewed as negative examples of this, primarily because of the amount of staff time invested for return on the mission, and the long, drawn-out processes that are involved.

Conclusion: Ad hoc approach

Loss of flexibility to respond to regional needs and concerns is feared, as is the additional work that staff envision as an outcome of increased citizen involvement. Initiatives in this area have to clearly address the flexibility issue, and the value-added dimension to their work must be demonstrated. The scope of responsibility held by citizens and staff needs to be spelled out in any improvement efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A three-year approach is recommended toward a more formal and efficient system. The approach should set clear guidelines, define roles in advance, and provide processes for ongoing improvement. It should allow alternatives for involvement at many levels. Foremost, it should be given strategic direction, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and clear priority in managers' responsibilities.

A strategic plan for citizen access should be articulated by the management team, based on input from this study. This strategic vision and supporting goals should articulate what citizen participation should or could do for the department. None of the states surveyed has dealt comprehensively with citizen participation, nor have they translated philosophy into strategy. Minnesota can become a model in this area.

The system as designed should include an affirmation of current division efforts and create an attitude of continuous improvement in support of the department mission and purpose. The three-year phased approach should engage staff at all levels in the design and development of an experiment in citizen access. This approach may be the most effective way to improve access and move toward an understandable, efficient, accessible system.

A three-year phased approach to developing a department-wide citizen access system can be accomplished through five activities:

I. Establish a learning environment

Purpose: To build confidence with a more systematic approach and to provide staff with basic skills in public meeting procedures, conflict resolution, data collection and documentation, and measuring/monitoring methods for evaluating effectiveness.

Goal: To increase competence in methods for managing citizen participation and to build skill in the process of involvement.

Benefits: Improved capacity to involve citizens appropriately and effectively in the department's decision- and policy-making activities. Department-wide awareness of the importance and priority of citizen access activities. A common language and toolkit for carrying out programs and activities.

Approach: Three-year training program design. Program piggybacking. Program monitoring.

Three-year training program design:

a. **Year One: Confidence- and competence-building processes.**

   Examples: Media training. Public meeting process checklists, surveys, and survey follow-up, do's and don'ts on dispute resolution. Processes of positive involvement. Simple measurement and monitoring mechanisms. Citizen access definitions.

b. **Year Two: Developing common support systems.**

   Examples: Building and using a data base. Extending involvement of the ordinary citizen. Using advice from citizen groups. A formal problem-solving system.

c. **Year Three: Standard approaches, formalizing measures.**

Program piggybacking:

To weave training on citizen access improvement into the fabric of department operations, use operational meetings to regularly deliver messages and training regarding citizen access, its importance and priority in the department.

Examples: The senior management meetings four times a year, the fall managers' conference, IRM, agriculture and other initiatives, the leadership program, division schools.

a. **Year One:** Internal marketing through education and training within established events. Coordinated discussions across initiatives on citizen access strategies.

b. **Year Two:** Training in evaluation and monitoring systems.

c. **Year Three:** Department conference to share approaches that work.

Program monitoring:

To focus attention on citizen access through simple documentation, and to review how citizen access is being used in new initiatives and programs, include citizen participation as a category in work planning for new and old projects, and review in operations meetings.

II. Create a citizen access vision

Purpose: To provide vision and focused direction for department efforts.

Goal: To create a strategic plan -- using the data collected from staff in this project -- that provides a common, credible story supporting an investment in time and money by department management and staff.

Benefit: Established and applied principles for citizen involvement in decisions and policy making, and ensured organization-wide attention to this effort.

Approach: Articulate a simple, clear statement of vision and values for which there is accountability. Identify focus areas for staff a year at a time. Require aligned citizen access goals in work plans of the divisions and bureaus.

Examples: Increased minority participation in public meetings. Increased urban participation in fish and wildlife meetings. At least two formal input sessions per region on issues of your choice. All regional staff and managers attend one citizen access training event a year. Broadened ordinary-citizen participation through surveys.

Examples of values: Regional empowerment and representative input.

a. **Year One:** The commissioner's office can review its long-range goals and progress quarterly with senior managers. The Bureau of Information and Education can design support materials and a communication strategy.

b. **Years Two and Three:** Annual review and restatement of vision and new focus.

III. Invite strategic-level citizen participation

Purpose: To involve citizens in a strategic dialogue toward developing long-term strategies.

Goal: To explore the potential of a strategic-level input mechanism and opportunities for citizens to access and influence priorities and the strategic thinking of the department.

Benefits: A controlled experiment for a department-level input mechanism for department strategy and policies. Support for department initiatives. Increased stakeholder understanding of the complexity surrounding natural resource management.

Approach: One or two high-quality events in Year One of a three-year effort where citizens would be asked in a disciplined process to provide input and recommendations toward the strategic direction of the department. Pre-meeting goals, participant evaluation, and staff review can set the stage for quality learning. Participants can be representative and a cross-section of viewpoints. If there is more than one event, different people can be involved appropriately. The first-year effort's evaluation can determine the course for the second and third years.

Examples of opportunities: Citizen input on directions, public vs. private use rights, conflicting mandates, resource management policy, economic and opportunity costs of projects.

IV. Create pilot projects on initiatives

Purpose: To dramatize a new pattern of anticipatory planning regarding citizen involvement.

Goal: To visibly demonstrate the importance of citizen involvement in decisions and policy making and to link initiatives.

Benefits: Sufficient time and resources budgeted for citizen involvement. The proactive use of involvement will build constituent participation.

a. **Year One:** Define and designate pilot project(s) on commissioner's initiatives and describe clearly the elements of being a pilot project.

   Example projects: IRM teams, "Streamers" (STRMRS), agriculture, Lake of the Woods.

   Example "pilot" responsibilities for staff: Citizen involvement plan, quarterly reports to senior management, measurement methods.

   Example "pilot" responsibilities for senior management: Champion: speak on behalf of, support financially, define its success, evaluate for learning, publicize internally and externally, support kick-off and closure.

b. **Years Two and Three:** Designate new initiatives.

V. Articulate clear expectations for staff

Purpose: Define the citizen access roles and responsibility levels of department staff.

Goal: To objectify authority and accountability and lay the groundwork for inclusion in the position descriptions and performance review system of the department.

Benefits: Department staff are involved as stakeholders in citizen access. Clarifies how each staff person is responsible for citizen involvement.

Approach: Promote citizen participation as a responsibility of all staff and management. Articulate clear roles and responsibilities for citizen participation to include expectations for regional administrators, division directors, commissioner's staff, and all other staff. Empower these employees through communication, recognition, and performance management activities such as annual reviews. Identify "designated hitters" who represent the department on certain issues or in a region, and defer to them.

Example of roles:

Commissioner's Management Team: Champion, communicate vision, values and priority.

Directors: Set policy, transmit vision, reinforce the commissioner's message, delegate, commission the field.

Bureau administrators: Guard the quality of the effort and results through service.

Regional administrators: Act as coaches and convenors for activities in the region -- coordinate across divisions at the regional level. Guard the comprehensive perspective. Represent the commissioner in the region.

Regional supervisors: Build work plans and objectives, authorize citizen participation activities, field interactions, and coach performance.

Area supervisors: Provide input for work plan, carry out the program and document results, for their area.

Non-supervisory field staff: Provide input for area regional work plan and implementation support.

Central office staff: Provide implementation support and serve as professional resource to the regions.

The commissioner's management team, directors and bureau administrators are the storytellers who articulate the importance and the priority and the reasons why.

The regional administrators are the translators.

The regional supervisors are the catalysts.

The field supervisors and central office serve the local staffs.

CITIZEN ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION CALENDAR

YEAR ONE

I. Learning environment

Media training
Public meeting processes, tools
Internal marketing through education and training within established events
Coordinated discussions across initiatives on citizen access strategies
Citizen access as category on work planning for new and old projects

II. Vision

Commissioner's office vision, value statements with work plan requirements
Quarterly review of goals
Information and education support materials for training and vision

III. Strategic participation

One or two citizen strategy input events

IV. Commissioner's office defines and designates pilot projects

V. Commissioner's office defines roles and ensures recognition and evaluation

YEAR TWO

I. Learning environment

Determine data base experiment
Ordinary citizen involvement strategies
Formal problem-solving system for citizen access training

II. Training in evaluation and monitoring systems

III. Annual review and new strategies: new focus

Appropriate events

IV. Pilot projects on initiatives

Designate new initiatives
Evaluate first-year pilots
Communicate learning through operational meetings

V. Communication of vision

YEAR THREE

I. Learning community

Standard approaches to basic citizen access mechanisms
Training in measurement
Citizen access conference for the department

II. Review and restatement of vision: third-year focus

III. Strategic-level event

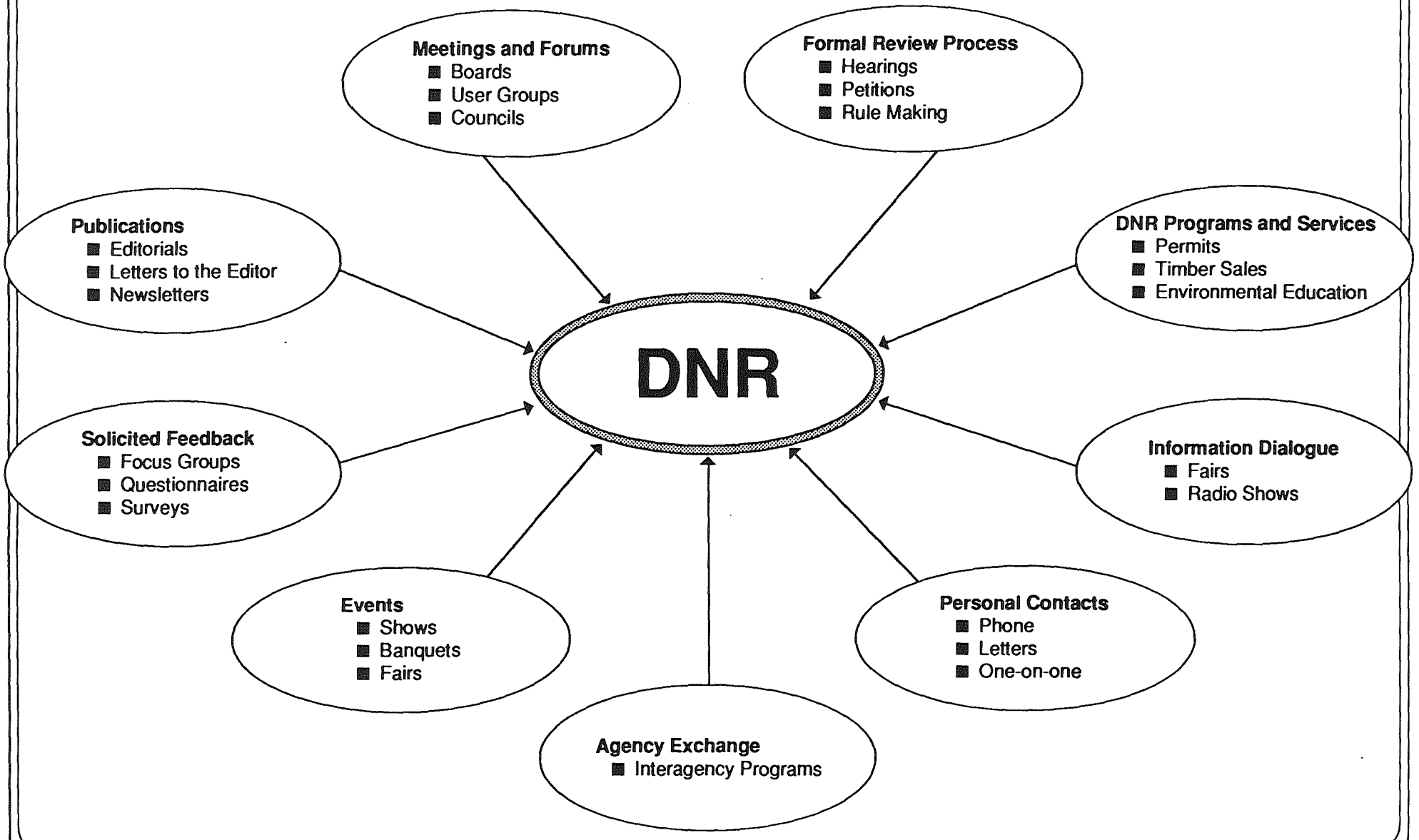
IV. Designate new initiatives

V. Complete citizen access toolkit with standard approaches, checklists, contexts, role definitions

CITIZEN ACCESS PROJECT

APPENDICES

WHAT METHODS ARE USED TO GATHER CITIZEN INPUT?



A. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Thirteen focus groups of a total 141 DNR employees with front-line citizen access experience were conducted by the project group. Questions concerned their past experience with citizen participation, the current system, and the potential of an improved system.

Past experience with citizen participation

1. In what ways do you currently receive information, suggestions, and concerns from citizens? Do you actively pursue citizen participation in decision making? If so, how?

Constant scanning for information occurs through an array of different citizen encounters. More than 100 different examples were listed during focus group meetings. These are summarized on the previous page and illustrated below.

Meetings and forums

Board meetings, user groups, councils, requests for news articles, public meetings, legislators' meetings, meetings with other disciplines, local units of government, citizen advisory groups, aqua culture committee, public access committees, conflict resolution meetings, sportsmen's groups

Formal review process

Hearings, petitions, rule making, after formal review process, support or non-support for statutes

DNR programs and services

Permits, timber sales, environmental education, wetland forums, firearm safety programs, film loan service, library photo file, information center, youth outreach program, volunteer programs such as adopt a park, watershed management projects, state parks and trail councils, volunteer delivery of services

Information dialogues

Fairs, radio shows, visits to regional offices

Personal contacts

Telephone, letters, one-on-one with users, networking, informal contacts such as church, etc., "grapevine," secondhand from other divisions, legislators, regional staff, agency management, individuals who are angry about a specific issue

Agency exchange

Interagency programs, peers in other states, municipal level governments, federal agency joint projects

Events

Trade shows, banquets, fairs, fishing events, the State Fair and the information booth, sponsorships

Solicited feedback

Focus groups, questionnaires, surveys, funding drive feedback attachment

Publications

Editorials, letters to the editor, newsletters, letters to the editor in *Volunteer* magazine's Viewpoints column, EQB *Monitor*, internal memos, reactions from divisions regarding brochures

Political process

The legislative process, special interest group lobbyist, LCMR, organized groups, county commissioners, elected officials

2. Is what you do now the same as or different than 10 years ago? What changes have occurred -- positive or negative?

Focus groups reported an increased workload as public expectations rise regarding their right to participate:

> The workload has doubled.
>
> Staff spend more time developing more information and informing stakeholders.
>
> The public is demanding more interagency coordination; i.e., memorandums of understanding.
>
> There is more public contact of all kinds, including increased interest in cooperative ventures, more partnerships, and a sense that communication should be a two-way street.

Focus groups said that staff are better able to work with the public now:

> Internally, there is a positive attitude change; staff are more aware and know it is important to deal with social issues; they see that seeking input is a better way to get the job done and know they must base action on information.
>
> There are more complex issues and more sophisticated customers who have taught the staff the hard way; staff is better trained than 10 years ago.
>
> Staff are more systematic, utilize media to communicate processes, do more surveying and work more with other divisions, and have broader involvement than a decade ago.

Credibility of field staff has increased, they have better relationships with sportsmen clubs, and are more open and receptive to ideas.

Many focus groups commented that citizens are better educated and more sophisticated about issues:

There are more conservation and environmental groups, more narrowly focused groups, more effective special interest groups; groups have formed coalitions and become more professional.

The public is generally better educated and more aware.

3. Who provides input to you?

There is a wide variety of stakeholders with interest in department work. Examples are: sportsmen, user groups, shoreland and riparian land owners, professional organizations, environmental and conservation groups, permit and license buyers, special interest groups, community leaders, many units of government, and individuals.

4. What channels do they use?

Staff indicated that channels vary according to the stakeholders' degree of concern:

They felt that about 90 percent of stakeholders are seldom heard from. For these people, phone calls and letters are often the beginning of contact. The channel depends on what they want to influence. The information center and the State Fair survey are key channels for reaching citizens. One region cited quarterly meetings for input from citizens.

Another group is more skilled and knowledgeable. These people take a disproportionate amount of time and attention of staff. They learn how to use groups, and often play DNR staff off against one another. They will use any opportunity for their own ends, and sometimes use the media or lawsuits to force an issue.

In addition, legislators contact DNR on behalf of both individual citizens and organized groups.

5. What is the best experience you have had with citizen participation? What made it successful?

Several keys -- involvement, attitude, preparation, and risk-taking -- were identified by participants:

Early and local involvement at all phases is appropriate to the project. Sometimes DNR was sought out. Events took on a cooperative tone, and gave citizens a real stake in the outcome, gaining credibility for the DNR.

There was a sense of approachability and two-way communication based in a desire to find a solution; DNR asked for and got a response. One result was a humanized bureaucracy.

Time was invested in pre-planning of participation, process, information, and persistent follow-through allowed a relaxed disciplined climate. Many times, that effort was acknowledged and appreciated.

In many examples staff took a calculated risk, sometimes admitting mistakes, and/or compromising; one-on-one skills, customer service training, and the ability to appreciate differences helped put agendas "on the table" instead of under it.

6. What is the worst experience you have had with citizen participation? What made it the worst?

Several themes emerged strongly in participants' analysis of difficult experiences.

Central to all of them was inadequate planning and preparation for encounters with the public, poor organization, including space, information, promotional strategies, and processes for decision making that put DNR at a disadvantage from the beginning. The complexity of many issues is now requiring more preparation in advance.

Another area discussed was little desire for or commitment to an outcome or resolution. Agreements would disappear and reinforce the negative attitudes already at play. There was a feeling in these cases that there was a hidden agenda.

Narrow, late or no involvement was cited as another factor related to time pressures for staff. A lack of DNR responsiveness or of public acceptance of decisions fostered by mutual distrust was often at play in these events. Often misinterpretation or distortion of information was a factor in these occasions.

An "input-because-it-is-mandated" attitude and after-the-fact efforts to gain input have hampered success.

Finally, inappropriate or unmanaged political participation was a source of many undesired results.

The current system

7. How would you describe the current citizen participation system?

There is a sense that the current reality is evolving, and communication is better than in prior years.

Disjointed, fragmented, inconsistent and haphazard were the most frequent terms used to describe the system, followed by diverse, random, confused and chaotic, incomprehensible and often misunderstood. The current mode is seen as reactive.

Staff also felt that the current system is flexible in meeting needs. It is fairly open and responsive, and is expanding the scope of its work.

Staff view citizen participation as an endless task largely driven by the central office; some described it as arbitrary and bureaucratic.

8. What are the strengths of the current system?

Staff felt that access is getting easier, and that there is a serious attempt to tailor citizen participation projects to needs; they feel that staff try to do it effectively and are committed to getting input. They feel that the regions are doing a lot with few resources.

9. What are the weaknesses in the system?

There is a tendency to focus on topics as opposed to broad strategies. This can keep a narrow perspective narrow and result in bad decisions. Also, staff time and expertise are rationed, with participation being seen as adding to the workload, not lightening it.

10. How is it structured?

The system tends to reflect top management preferences.

It is a loose structure, if there is any structure.

There is little or no follow-up to encounters or events.

Minimal staff time is invested.

11. How do you think citizens would rate the current citizen participation system?

Reviews anticipated by staff were mixed. Positive sentiments expressed included the belief that the system is improving with experience, and becoming more accessible and responsive. On the high end, one staff member said that 98 percent are satisfied.

On the other end of the spectrum, staff used such words as confusing, frustrating, unavailable, "don't know how to make it work," to describe the way they thought citizens experience the system.

12. How do you use information that you receive from citizens?

Staff said input is used to make decisions, gauge consensus, modify plans and programs, document issues that stakeholders may have, and get a reading on workable solutions. It also is used to help build educational strategies for the department.

Others felt that the process for using it is lacking in planning or formality; therefore,

it is hard to know whether anything tangible results from the input. Still others felt that input is virtually ignored.

13. How useful do you believe current citizen participation is?

Staff members said they think that citizen participation is essential to DNR, supporting cooperation, better decisions, and solid partnerships, thus helping to diffuse special interests.

Staff said they wondered how to achieve higher meeting attendance. They felt they have gone the extra mile needed and not been rewarded by stronger attendance. They would like in particular to broaden the participation of the silent majority in order to balance the vocal minority.

Many staff felt that participation now will minimize their future work, building long-term acceptance and credibility with users and volunteers.

Many felt that the source of the data should inform its usefulness, considering the negative but also the positive points of view.

The potential of an improved system

14. What should the role of citizen participation be in decision and policy making? What should citizen participation do for you?

The key role identified is that of adviser; staff saw this role as having limits that allow protection of the resource to remain a focus. In an advisory capacity, citizen participation should:

Enhance and build legitimacy through real input on decisions and policy.

Identify new trends, concepts, track changing values of the citizens, know and understand broad views on subjects.

Demonstrate clearly the desire to hear from constituents.

Secondarily, balance representation and perspective, including vested internal interests, buffer between the extremes.

The citizen boards at the PCA and Wisconsin DNR were cited as examples of what not to do, in terms of giving up authority. Problem solving and solution finding were seen as important.

15. What are some possible benefits of improved citizen participation? How could it make your job easier? What are pitfalls of improvement?

Recurring themes mentioned by participants included becoming more comfortable with receiving and using input, helping to set priorities, fostering support for funding, generating new ideas and knowledge, freeing up time for other things as input processes will be more manageable, increased volunteerism, and non-confrontational problem solving.

Staff could also see pitfalls to improving participation. Fears included giving away decision-making power, holding the urban-rural tension, longer and expensive processes, and encouraging short-term values to override long-term interests.

16. What is currently blocking the formation of a quality citizen participation system in your division or bureau, and in the department?

Staff saw several major blocks to an improved system:

Dedicated funds limit sources for additional resources and give the DNR prescribed missions. Another resource in short supply is the time to do more citizen participation.

Not being proactive and not taking responsibility for formation prevents further success.

DNR is diverse and no one solution or strategy will work in all places. A narrow approach will not work in such diversity.

There is concern about who speaks for the resource in an expanded system.

Uninformed and unorganized citizenry can consume huge amounts of time.

Decision-making gridlock can occur easily with citizen involvement.

17. How should a citizen participation system work? What parts and pieces are important to include? What would you like to see as part of an effort of improving citizen access?

Staff described components of a system:

Field staff equipped to do citizen participation, empowered and accessible staff in the regional offices.

A system that is responsive and communicates well internally and externally, more locally based, and requiring more events and meetings.

A system that provides a direction-setting function for DNR and established criteria for improvement in the department.

An accessible system that informs citizens and publicizes important issues; meeting and working with different boards for different issues, with predictable schedules of events and communication.

A system that ensures that the silent majority is heard and also represents them, with stakeholders involved in discussing the design.

Possibly task forces for short-term and boards for long-term work.

18. If a department-wide system is developed and implemented, by what criteria should it be judged?

Criteria identified by staff were:

Good work and products

A broader perspective on our part and stakeholders'

Sound decisions regarding the resource

Citizen satisfaction levels maintained or increased

Fairness and balance in representation

Objective measures such as a survey baseline to mark changes

19. If you were designing a better citizen participation system, what "do's and don'ts" would you keep in mind?

Do:

Improve internal communication across and within divisions, and see that efforts are well communicated.

Create a system that has many different roles defining and supporting a strong DNR role; consider an informal process that allows flexibility.

Create broad involvement, finding many ways to involve ordinary citizens while guarding against politicizing efforts that serve individual interests. They suggested that the role of citizens be advisory.

Develop good standards and management practices, driving new decisions down to the lowest levels. Ensure that members of formal bodies include DNR.

Make use of what is in existence.

Don't:

Create an unmanageable program

Make new efforts central office focused

Give away decision-making authority

Overreact to individual citizens

Ask for input if you do not intend to respond or don't want to know

B. INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Regional administrators, division directors, the commissioner's management team, and the administrators of the Real Estate Management and the Information and Education Bureaus were interviewed.

1. How do you receive information, suggestions, concerns from citizens?

Mechanisms commonly used to provide input to the bureaus and divisions were advisory groups, committees, and councils, interest-group events and meetings, formal issue-focused meetings, and volunteers. A sampling of examples from various divisions includes:

Parks and Recreation cited about 25 advisory groups among the 68 parks. Wildlife cited 10 years of wildlife meetings and several advisory groups on fishing. Trails and Waterways cited a recently completed effort to involve user groups in long-range trail planning. Forestry described councils, commissions, and committees as mechanisms for input to DNR decisions.

Enforcement and Information and Education receive information indirectly through the work of other divisions and bureaus. Enforcement also described their participation in sports congresses and a statute review-and-comment process as ways they receive information.

Several divisions indicated that they attend meetings of interest or user groups, sometimes as ex-officio members.

Minerals and Forestry described formal meetings on major issues, and Minerals cited early involvement as a goal. Divisions reported formal and informal communication with local government officials. Informational one-on-one visits and attending meetings when issues are being discussed were most often mentioned.

Enforcement, Trails and Waterways, Parks and Recreation, and Fish and Wildlife spoke of receiving information and concerns from networks of volunteers who participate in a variety of safety, education, and development programs within the department.

Participation of the ordinary citizen is seen as triggered by controversy, a "not-in-my-backyard" attitude. Success in getting participation at regular meetings scheduled by the divisions was seen as spotty, depending on whether there was an issue of high personal impact.

2. Who provides input to you?

In response to this question, participants illustrated the diversity of the citizenry and their interests in the decisions and policy of the department. Regional administrators and senior managers pointed out that in many cases any one region deals with broad diversity.

Examples of this diversity were:

Enforcement: Commercial groups, taxidermists, game farms, sports groups, legislators.

Waters: Riparian land owners, local and county governments, farmers, anyone who wants to, and other divisions.

Parks and Recreation: Minnesota Council of Parks and Trails, 25 park associations, and park users.

Forestry: Federal agencies, LCMR, legislature, governor and individuals with concerns.

Fish and Wildlife: Legislative alliances, Minnesota Conservation Federation, National Wildlife Federation, Waterfowl Association, Pheasants Forever, Isaac Walton League, archers, trappers, grouse hunters, and the R.I.M coalition.

Minerals: Public interest groups, Mineral Simulation Research Project (22 groups), Pollution Control Agency (on joint projects), environmental groups, groups that protest everything, Iron Ore Cooperative Research Committee, University of Minnesota, Minnesota counties, federal interests, Minnesota Power, federal and national organizations, and the Mineral Diversification Program.

Trails and Waterways: Organized cross-country skiers, equestrians, hikers, bikers, off-road vehicle owners, mountain bikers, snowmobilers, environmental groups, individual citizens, landowners.

Information and Education: This group gets indirect information by gathering data for divisions and the information center.

Regional administrators, managers and staff see themselves as actively pursuing citizen opinion and input more than the directors and those in the commissioner's office, who tend to be reacting to a specific individual or request. All indicated that they tend to be more reactive than proactive.

3. What channels are used by citizens?

The channels identified in interviews were surveys, comments on drafted decisions, meetings, telephone calls, letters, legislators, and one-on-one interactions.

Focus groups, regional administrators, directors and commissioner's office staff described ordinary citizens as less represented than they should be. They tend to go first to their local field stations or regions or the information center for direction to the appropriate source.

Organized groups are more knowledgeable and tend to go to whoever has influence in the matter at hand, often in St. Paul, but not always. Interviewees made distinctions among organized groups, some being in an attack or adversarial mode, some working with the DNR to find solutions, and some with wide or narrow interests. A small, vocal minority who are angry tend to take a great deal of time to work with, with little resolution of concerns.

4. What makes successful projects successful?

Four basic ingredients were seen as characteristic of effective citizen access efforts:

Having a plan

Having a focus

Committed interest from citizens and staff

Front-end involvement

5. How would you describe the current system? How is it structured? Maintained? Whose responsibility is it?

Members of the commissioner's office and the directors viewed the system as having both a formal and an informal nature. They indicated that, although it is fragmented and a sort of loose amalgam of approaches, it is much better than it was 10 years ago, more tolerant and fairly open, and more responsive to those wanting access to the department. Regional administrators described the system as inattentive, reactive, overly technical, too busy to be concerned about structured input, and inconsistent. The current reality tends to differ from discipline to discipline, but people do share successes across divisions and borrow effective approaches. All agreed that the regions are the front lines of citizen access.

6. Strengths:

Respondents felt the department has a strong capacity to respond in group and one-on-one situations and accessibility has improved. There is a growing sense throughout management that the department is handling difficult, complex issues well. Opinions agreed with the stakeholder view that dissatisfaction is due to not getting desired outcomes, and not to accessibility problems. They felt that citizen satisfaction is high and that this is a big change from 10 years ago.

7. Weaknesses:

The current system is not well coordinated with other divisions on issues or events and calendars. Major groups are involved with many divisions on many issues. If they don't get an answer they want, they talk to someone else. Agreeing with staff focus groups, directors and regional administrators questioned how much more can be done without additional planning, resources, and staff.

Citizen participation responds mostly to individual group needs and not on providing a broader view regarding management and policy.

In the absence of clear direction for improvements, there is a fear that the diversity of missions and stakeholders will be overlooked in any department-wide efforts. Directors were leery of the idea of a special position to oversee participation. They fear

uncoordinated efforts that generate more work of a non-priority nature. They fear the position would be used to keep people happy rather than to address strategic issues.

Citizen participation is currently not explicit in plans, budgets, position descriptions or work plans in the department. This makes measuring success much more subjective. However, it was pointed out that if citizen access were more explicit in the budget, it would not likely be funded by the legislature, that it would more likely be trimmed as "fat." Another aspect of its invisibility is that any citizen participation casualties during budget cuts are not obvious.

8. How do you think citizens would rate the current citizen participation system?

Directors indicated that ordinary citizens were primarily satisfied unless provoked by an issue that touched their interest or concern. One characterized them as 96 percent satisfied. Regional administrators felt citizens would rate the department considerably lower.

On service delivery issues, there was some sense that those who get permits were mostly satisfied, but one might get mixed reviews from those involved in development and economic issues.

It was generally reported that citizen groups would rate the department high in accessibility. Some felt ordinary citizens might struggle initially with finding the right place to provide input, but that they would be heard.

9. How do you use information that you receive from citizens?

Respondents said they use citizen input to inform education and information strategies, to inform decisions, and to inform policy. It is also used to develop support from the public on issues that affect their system, and to enforce or modify laws and regulations.

10. What should be the role of citizen participation in decision and policy making?

A strong role for citizen participation was seen by those interviewed. Foremost was the role of guardians of the resource. They saw this occurring through help in the interpretation of policy in the grey areas and in areas where conflicting mandates and differing values must be balanced. Improved decision making and better acceptance of results were seen as results of this role being fulfilled.

Internally, citizen participation was seen as helping to cut across the "we are the experts" attitude that isolates the department from the public. Another role participation can play internally is to provide external pressure to resolve internal conflicts.

11. What are some possible benefits of improved citizen participation?

Increased legislative support

Support for sound resource management goals and resolution of complex issues

12. What are your worst fears?

There is concern that a formal role for citizens will slow down operational decisions and have the department responding on non-priority issues. It was felt that the department could lose its ability to make decisions based on sound resource management practices. They felt this would occur if there was an over-reliance on special interests, vocal minorities who do not represent ordinary citizens or sound resource thinking, or romanticism about ordinary citizens who are not informed; in other words, not finding the right balance of participation.

Another fear is that the department will move ahead without sensitizing or training staff in how to engender discussion and interaction that counts.

13. How should a citizen participation system work? What are components of an improved system?

Department-wide, systematic perspective, local implementation systems, resources and training

Attention to mandates that conflict

It should be the norm to include citizenry in decisions

Advisory role for citizens, retaining the capacity to apply principles for the department

Strong bureau role, strong regional administrator role

Co-location of disciplines where possible

A variety of tools and a toolkit for different citizen access mechanisms

A public involvement process that makes it as easy as possible to participate with feedback to citizens and legislators

Documentation of cost and the array of citizen participation that exists

14. What is currently blocking the formation of quality citizen participation in the department and your division or bureau?

The department doesn't respect the skills that it takes to do this work. It respects technical skills. Also, staff and budget for this work are seen as low.

The variety of issues and interest groups this department attacks -- from taconite to orchid lovers -- can result in a lack of understanding that there can be several right ways.

Internally, differing regional boundaries and competitiveness, along with the "we know best" attitude, were identified as blocks to the future.

There is a lack of insight into a way to have strong attendance in the metro area.

15. If a department-wide system is developed and implemented, by what criteria should it be judged?

Those interviewed agreed with criteria identified by focus group participants:

Satisfaction of constituents

Baseline and regular surveys

DNR's product is more usable and better

Improved efficiency

Feedback from citizens that they are getting answers, and have been heard

16. If you were designing a better citizen participation system, what "do's and don'ts" would you keep in mind?

Do:

Unburden people on the front line: It is at the division level that most things take place

Dispel the myth that resource managers know best -- always

Establish values, standards, systems

Improve our ability to work with local government

Be aware of what is working and encourage it

Address issues of the ordinary citizen

Empower regional coordinators

Talk to ordinary citizens about this

Equip staff to speak and interact in public

Don't:

Start another committee

Only respond to the squeaky wheels

Forget how important style is to good communication

Send out ill-equipped staff on important projects

C. STAKEHOLDER SUMMARY

DNR stakeholders have considerable experience trying to influence what the DNR does. While they may not always be satisfied with the final results of their efforts, they are satisfied with the process of gaining access to the DNR. They would like to see the DNR continue and expand its efforts in outreach and solicitation of information from the public.

The purpose of the stakeholder survey was to find out what they think of their access to the DNR. The survey was designed to collect information from representatives of key stakeholder groups that try to influence the DNR; these representatives are not, therefore, typical citizens. In June 1991, DNR staff identified 162 stakeholders as having frequent contact with the DNR. Eleven of the stakeholders were subsequently removed from the list by the DNR and 11 stakeholders reported not having enough contact with the DNR to complete the survey.

C. J. Olson Market Research, Inc., conducted a telephone survey (inserted at the end of this appendix) of the stakeholders for the DNR. Of the 140 stakeholders contacted, 122 completed the survey, for a response rate of 87 percent. What follows is a summary of the findings of the survey.

Who are the stakeholders?

Those responding to the survey are an experienced group (Figure 1). They have been active in their organization for nine years (median value) with experience ranging from one to 35 years. They have been in their current position for a median of five years. More than half (54 percent) of the respondents work as paid staff for their group.

The stakeholder groups ranged in size from small (five) to very large (600,000), with the median size group representing 900 Minnesotans. Half (50 percent) of the groups are statewide in scope while 22 percent are local. The rest are national (11 percent), international (10 percent), or regional (7 percent).

The work locations of the respondents were evenly split between metro and outstate (52 percent vs. 48 percent, respectively). Respondents worked out of five metro counties and 25 outstate counties.

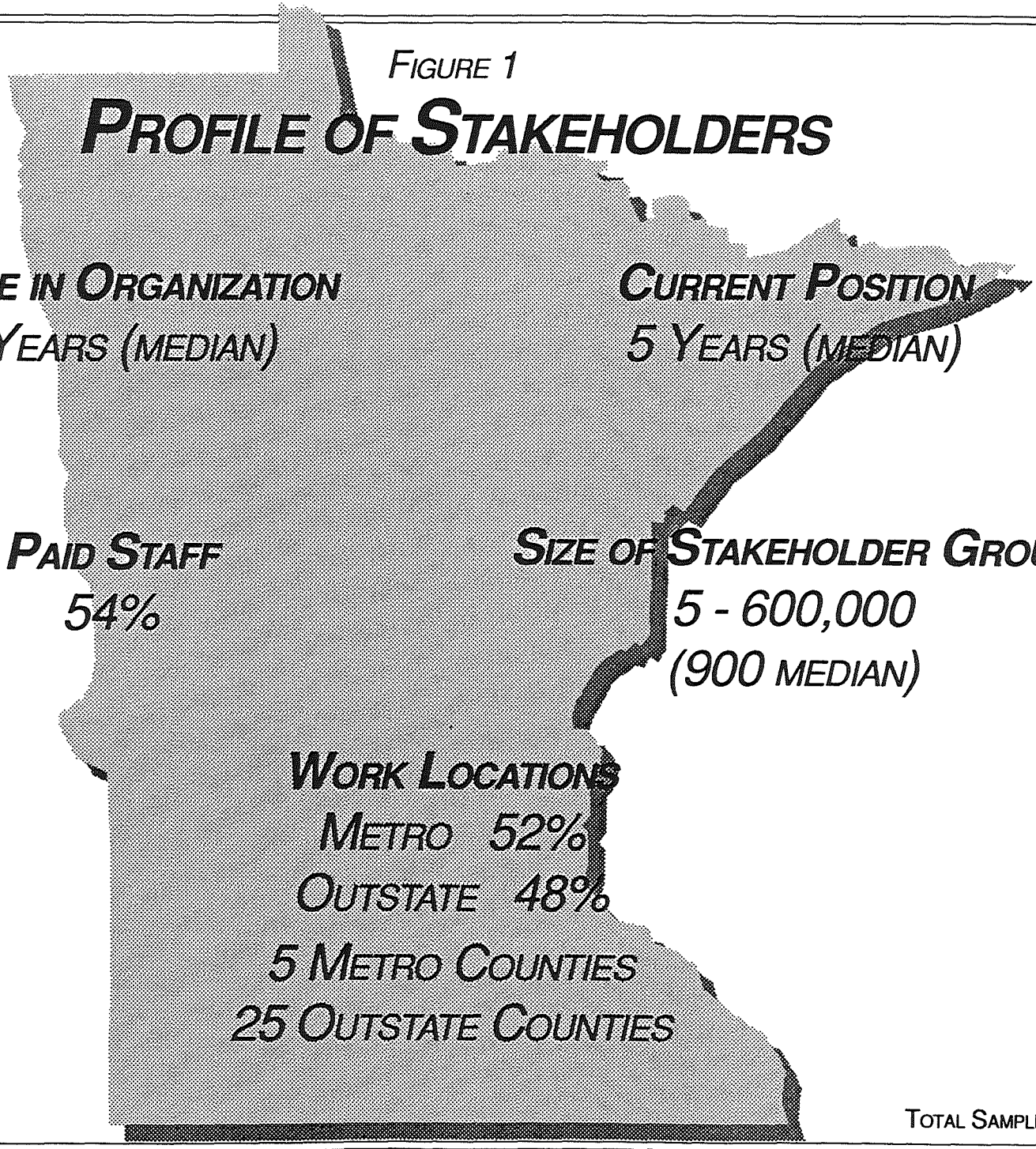
Nineteen (16 percent) of the respondents represented public agencies. The major interests of the groups included: general conservation and land use, outdoor recreation, fish and wildlife, and natural resource industries and tourism (Figure 2).

How do they deal with the DNR?

Stakeholders were asked about their groups' two major efforts to influence the DNR over the last two years. Fifty-two (43 percent) of the groups had only one major issue dealing with the DNR during that time. Results for this section are based on responses to all issues.

FIGURE 1

PROFILE OF STAKEHOLDERS



ACTIVE IN ORGANIZATION
9 YEARS (MEDIAN)

CURRENT POSITION
5 YEARS (MEDIAN)

PAID STAFF
54%

SIZE OF STAKEHOLDER GROUP
5 - 600,000
(900 MEDIAN)

WORK LOCATIONS
METRO 52%
OUTSTATE 48%
5 METRO COUNTIES
25 OUTSTATE COUNTIES

TOTAL SAMPLE: 122 PEOPLE

FIGURE 2

MAJOR INTERESTS OF STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

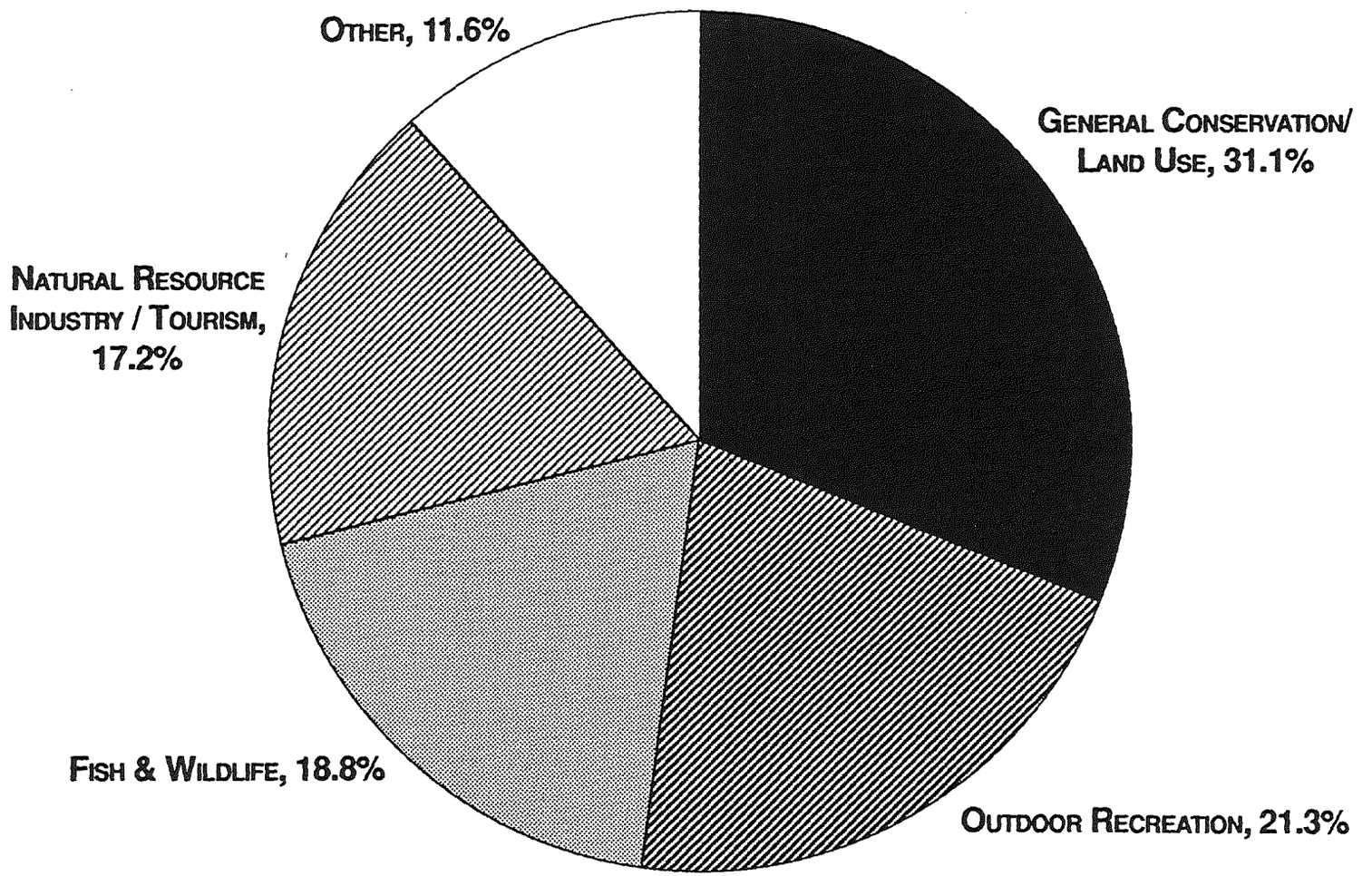


Table 1. Methods of contacting the DNR

Method	Percent of respondents per issue	Median number of contacts per issue
Telephone	73.8	20
Face-to-face	75.4	11
Mail or fax	67.2	8
Public meetings	50.0	6
Legislative meetings	36.9	6
Other meetings	4.1	4
Other ways	4.9	2

The major means of contacting the DNR are by telephone, face to face, and by mail or fax, with more than two-thirds of the respondents using each of these methods (Table 1). Respondents, on average, used three different means of contacting the DNR for each issue.

Respondents were asked whom they contacted in the DNR and their contact's job title, work unit and work location. Respondents were limited to three contacts per issue. For purposes of analysis, we placed DNR contacts into three organizational levels: commissioner, director/administrator, or staff, which is everything below the director/administrator level. Results showed that, on average, each respondent contacted 1.7 DNR employees on each issue.

Almost half (44 percent) of the respondents did not know the job title of the employee contacted. However, we were able to go back and, based on contact name, identify the level in the organization of the contacts. The split is about even on whether issue contacts are at a single level (46 percent) or at multiple levels (54 percent) in the DNR. Most single-level contacts are with managers. For multiple-level contacts, the most common pattern is contact with director/administrator and staff (Table 2).

Overall, the commissioner level (as part of either a single-level or multiple-level contact) is contacted on 26 percent of the issues, the director/administrator level on 56 percent, and staff level on 78 percent.

When results were looked at by work unit, most (72 percent) of the contacts were with a single work unit. For single work unit contacts, most were with the divisions. For multiple work unit contacts, the most common pattern was contacts with the commissioner's office and divisions (Table 3).

Overall, divisions (either as part of a single work unit or multiple work unit contact) are contacted on 86 percent of the issues, the commissioner's office on 28 percent, and all other units on 14 percent.

Table 2. Level of organization contacted within the DNR

Issues that involve:	Percent
Commissioner level only	5.1
Director/administrator only	7.9
Staff level only	33.0
Single-level contacts subtotal	**46.0**
Commissioner and director/administrator	9.1
Commissioner and staff	5.7
Director/administrator and staff	33.0
Commissioner and director/administrator and staff	6.2
Multiple-level contacts subtotal	**54.0**
TOTAL	**100.0**

Table 3. Work unit contacted within the DNR

Issues that Involve:	Percent
Commissioner's office only	5.5
Divisions only	61.0
All other units only	5.5
Single work unit contacts subtotal	**72.0**
Commissioner's office and divisions	19.2
Commissioner's office and all other units	2.8
Divisions and all other units	6.0
Commissioner's office and divisions and all other units	0.0
Multiple work unit contacts subtotal	**28.0**
TOTAL	**100.0**

Table 4. Work location contacted within the DNR

Issues that involve:	Percent
St. Paul only	67.6
Outstate only	17.6
Single work location contacts subtotal	**85.2**
St. Paul and outstate	14.8
TOTAL	**100.0**

Results were also looked at by work location. Most of the contacts involved only one location (85 percent). Most of the single work location contacts were with St. Paul (Table 4).

Overall, St. Paul (either as part of a single work location or multiple work location contact) was contacted on 82 percent of the issues, outstate on 32 percent.

How satisfied are the stakeholders?

Stakeholders were asked about their groups' two major efforts to influence the DNR over the last two years. Fifty-two (43 percent) of the groups had only one major issue dealing with the DNR during that time. Results for this section are based on responses to all issues.

Most respondents (71 percent) were satisfied, in an overall sense, with their contacts with the DNR, while 11 percent were not satisfied. Looking at specific areas of interaction (Table 5), respondents were most satisfied with the ease of access to DNR staff (access to people you want to reach, channels open for expressing concerns, ease of communication) and with the information received (credibility of information, completeness of information). They were less satisfied with the final outcome of their efforts and the DNR's explanation of its position.

Stakeholders were asked several open-ended questions concerning their interactions with the DNR. Most of the responses were positive, which is consistent with the satisfaction results.

The first open-ended question asked about DNR's receptivity to their efforts. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents said the DNR worked with them willingly and 34 percent said the DNR was responsive and easy to work with. Sixteen percent said they had to fight with the DNR.

The second open-ended question asked how the DNR made it easy for them to interact with

Table 5. Satisfaction by area of interaction

Area of interaction	Percent of respondents: Satisfied	Neutral	Not satisfied	Don't know
Overall	70.9	16.1	10.9	2.1
Access to people you want to reach	83.8	10.4	5.2	0.5
Credibility of information	78.7	9.9	9.9	1.6
Channels open for expressing concerns	77.6	16.7	5.8	0.0
Ease of communication	76.5	16.1	6.7	0.5
Completeness of information	75.5	12.5	8.8	3.1
How seriously concern treated	71.8	14.6	11.9	1.6
Receptivity of DNR to efforts	69.2	18.2	10.9	1.6
DNR follow-up to initial contact	68.7	18.2	11.0	2.1
Speed of sending information	67.2	21.4	10.9	0.5
DNR's explanation of its position	63.6	18.2	16.1	2.1
Outcome of final results	52.1	24.0	14.1	9.9

the DNR (Figure 3). Most (58 percent) said the DNR was accessible and easy to talk to. Many said the DNR set up and attended meetings (33 percent), and provided information and materials (22 percent). Only 7 percent said the DNR hadn't made it easy for them to interact.

The final open-ended question asked what the major barriers were to interaction with the DNR. The most frequent response was that there were no barriers (31 percent). It was followed by a difference in priorities (22 percent), which is similar to the two areas of interaction discussed above (DNR's explanation of its position and outcome of final results) that had the lowest stakeholder satisfaction. Seven percent said the DNR was inaccessible and hard to reach.

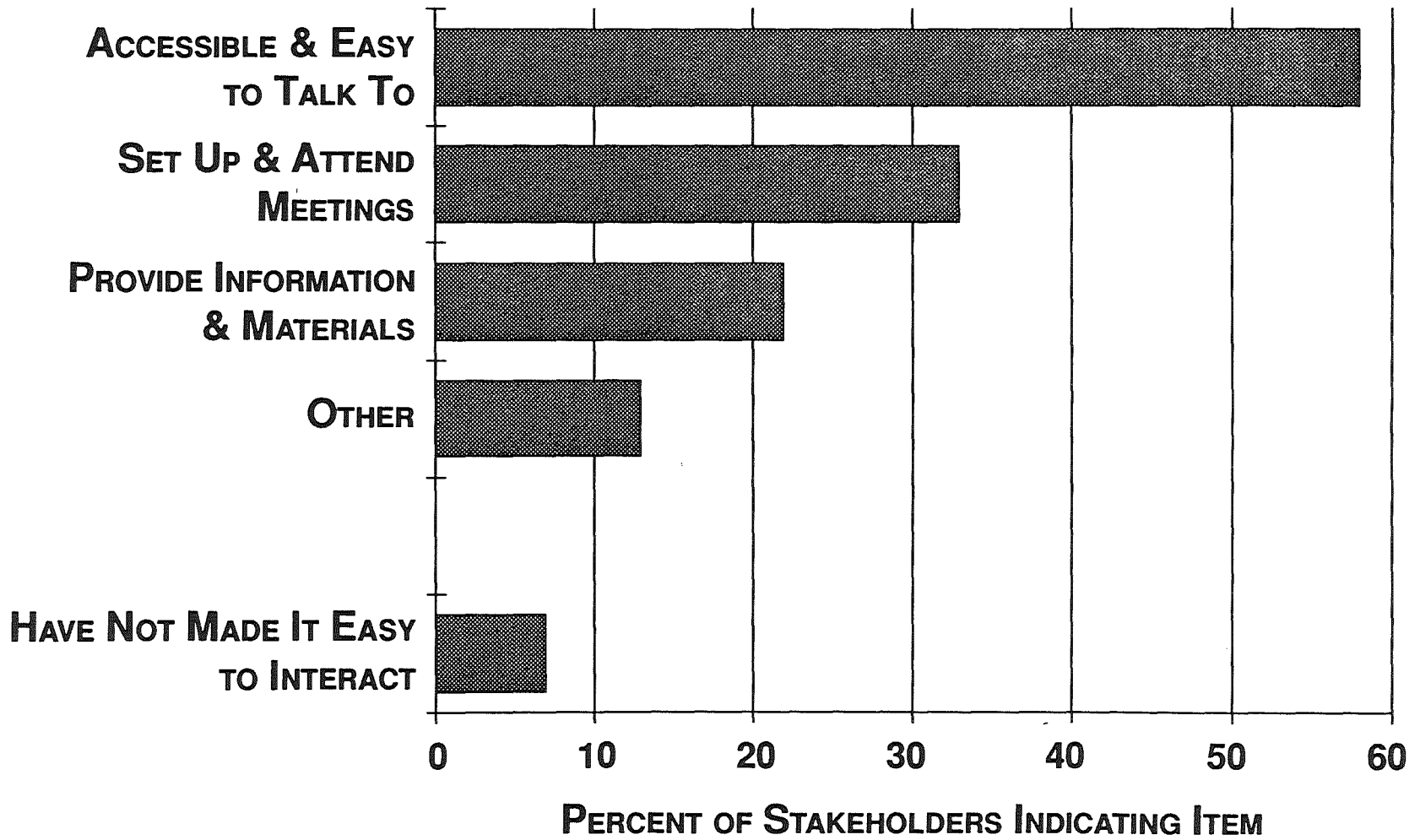
Comments and suggestions

Based on their experience, respondents said the DNR was improving access to its decision-making process by soliciting information from the public (41 percent), sharing more information with the public (20 percent), and becoming more accessible (18 percent) (Figure 4). However, 21 percent of the respondents said the DNR was not doing anything to improve access.

When asked what the DNR should do to improve access, respondents replied that the DNR should continue and expand what it is currently doing: more outreach (26 percent),

Figure 3

How Does the DNR Make It Easy For You to Interact With Them?



more/easier access (16 percent), and sharing information with the public (12 percent). Sixteen percent of the respondents expressed a need for correcting internal/organization problems within the DNR such as a lack of chain of command and accountability.

When asked what the DNR was avoiding doing, some respondents said the DNR was avoiding public contact and input (19 percent) and taking a leadership role (12 percent). More respondents (34 percent) said the DNR was not avoiding anything in trying to open up its decision-making process.

When asked what the DNR should avoid doing, respondents felt the DNR should avoid ignoring public opinion (21 percent), being biased toward certain groups (11 percent), and internal problems, such as turf and hiring (11 percent), when making its decisions.

Respondents suggested the DNR could improve public access to its decision-making process by continuing and expanding its current practices with more public involvement (30 percent) and improved communication with the outside (25 percent). Respondents also expressed a need for improved telephone access/telephone directory (11 percent) (Figure 5).

FIGURE 4

HOW IS THE DNR IMPROVING ITS ACCESS TO CITIZENS?

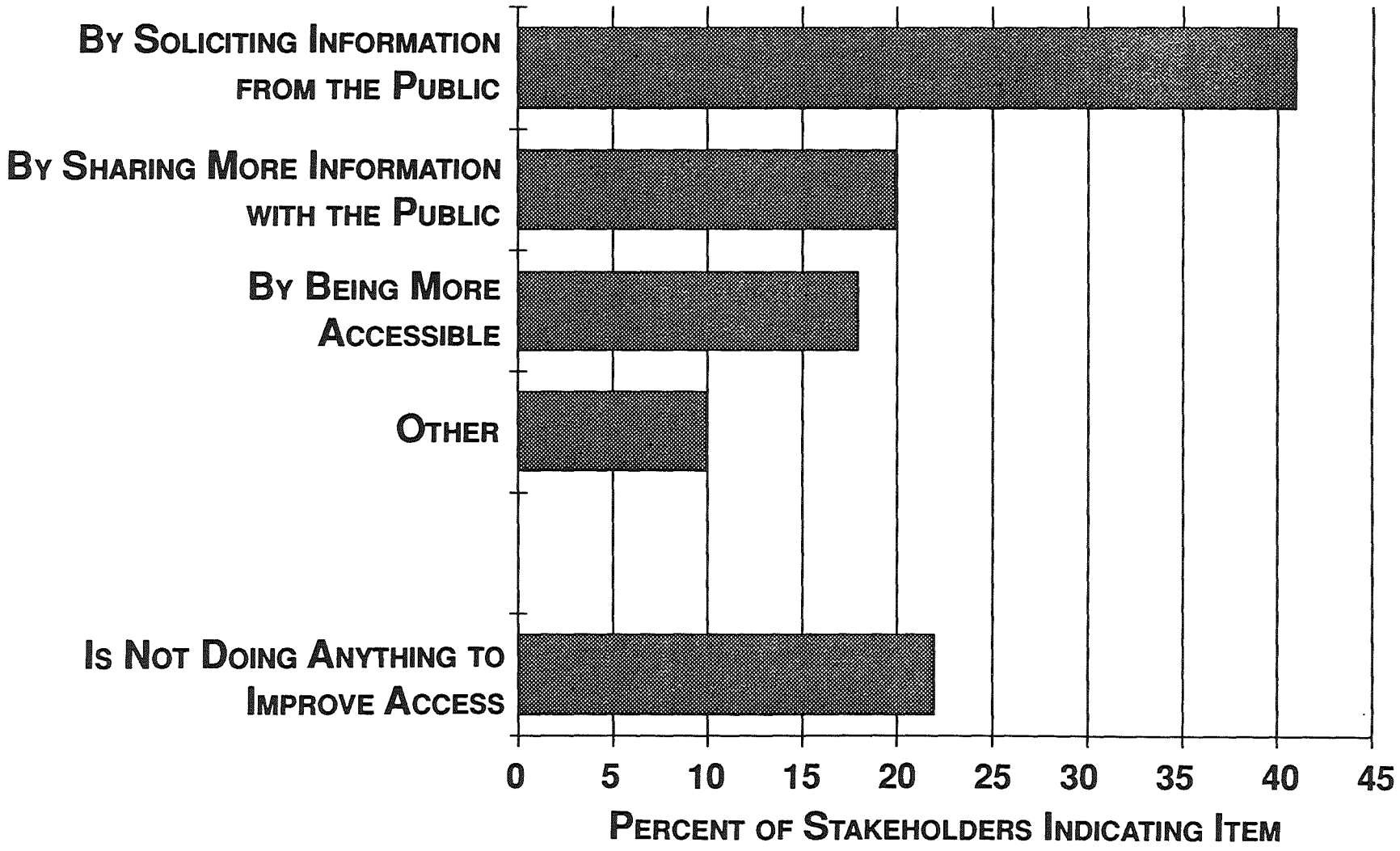
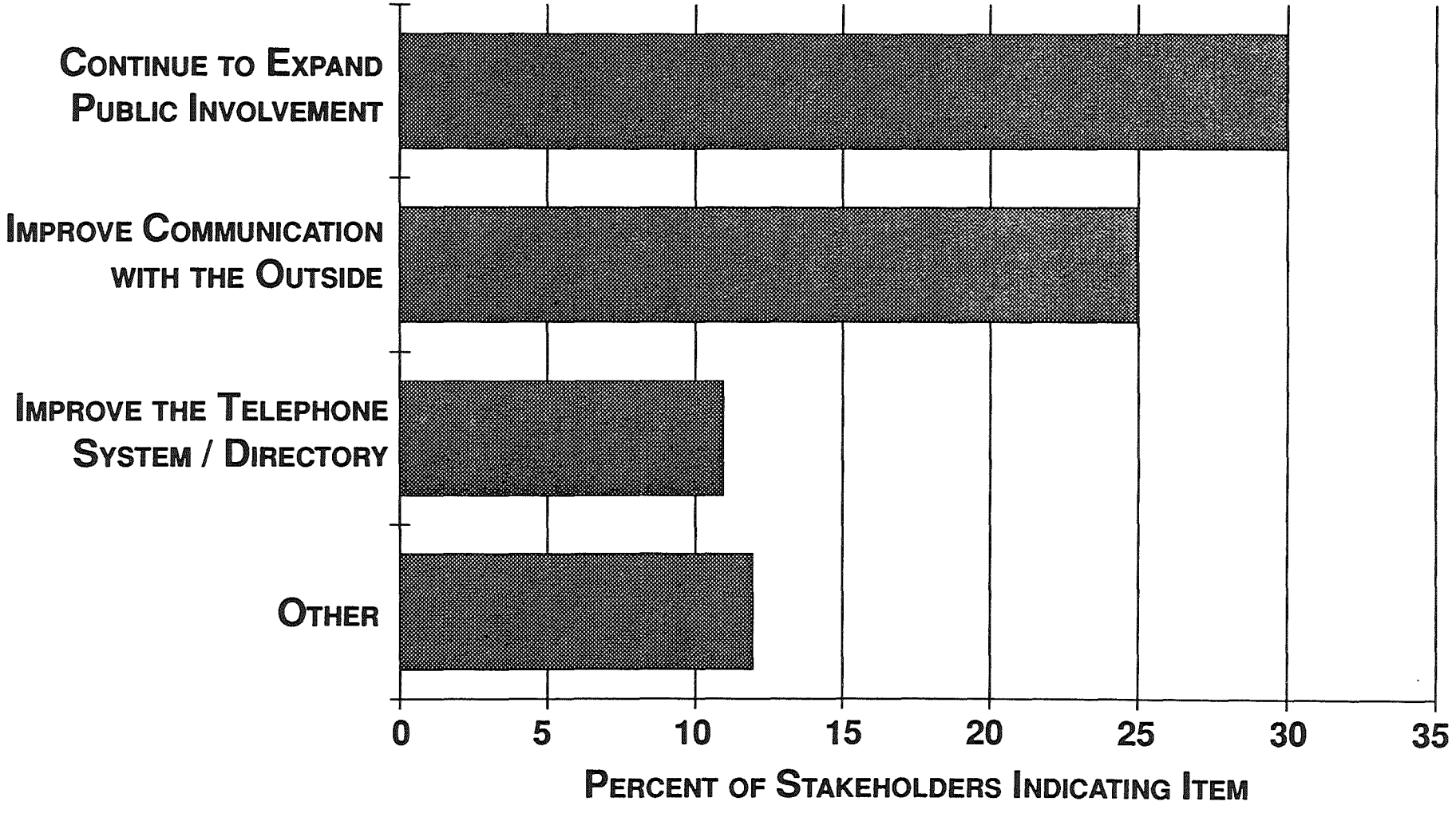


FIGURE 5

WHAT SHOULD THE DNR DO TO IMPROVE CITIZEN ACCESS?



D. OTHER STATES' EFFORTS

How do other states deal with citizen participation? To gain a broad perspective, representatives from 11 states were interviewed about their citizen participation programs. Most participants saw citizen participation as a worthwhile activity, requiring strong internal support through senior management commitment, employee training and administrative systems. There are no models for comprehensive management of citizen input.

Survey respondents

Several states are highly regarded for their excellent citizen involvement. Citizen participation consultants and other resource professionals recommended respondents. Individuals interviewed have a demonstrated commitment to effective citizen involvement in public decision making. Seventeen respondents from 11 states' resource agencies were interviewed. Respondent backgrounds and states contacted are listed below.

States: California, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming

Respondents' areas of expertise:

Wildlife	9
Forestry	3
Recreation	2
Rivers planning	1
Environmental review	1
Citizen participation	1

DNR staff in the Office of Planning created the survey questions. Sharon Pfeiffer, an independent consultant, conducted the interviews by telephone.

Key findings

1. **Citizen participation is a valuable investment in managing resources, educating the public and staff, and easing the decision-making process.**

Interviews showed a strong commitment to the citizen participation process, its impact on government, and its importance in creating successful projects. Perhaps most significant are the many experiences respondents shared of how serious citizen participation efforts allowed project completion to occur earlier with less friction. There were many contrasting stories of how projects undertaken without citizen participation either failed or indefinitely stalled when the public was not consulted or actively involved in creating solutions to problems.

Citizen participation provides a strong mechanism to educate both the public and agency

employees regarding opposing concerns and viewpoints. Also, it helps set meaningful priorities that accurately reflect public concerns. One person indicated that even when an issue was not satisfactory resolved, participation helped all parties better understand the topic and appreciate the validity of opposing views.

2. Agency-wide support, especially from top management, is key to gaining citizen participation acceptance and creating meaningful involvement.

Strong support is critical to citizen participation success. Adequate funds, senior management commitment, useful leadership training, and strong administrative assistance must be present.

Respondents strongly concurred that a state must invest necessary resources in staff training. Training fosters citizen participation acceptance in agencies. One respondent said that when the administration had not been exposed to citizen participation through a training program, they were not receptive to the concept. There is a learning curve with citizen participation use. Personal experience results in expanded efforts.

Two consulting firms, the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning (IPMP), Hans and Maria Bleicker: Principals, and Synergy, are well regarded and broadly used for citizen participation training. These two firms provided initial training for many of the efforts discussed in this section. Some of these departments continue to use facilitators, although many use their own in-house facilitators by training administrators and technical staff for citizen participation.

Citizen participation does not succeed without vocal management advocates who truly appreciate the importance of involving the public in decision making on an ongoing basis. Visible commitment and understanding from senior management are essential and frequently come from a thoughtful training program that explains the role of citizen participation in governing public agencies. When all organizational levels, including senior management, understand the purpose of citizen participation and possess the practical tools to involve citizens, the citizen participation process is taken much more seriously and has a long-term impact on the agency's culture.

In addition, administrative support is very important to the establishment of citizen participation programs. Staff must be available to set up meetings, track information, and take care of the many details of dealing with large numbers of people and pieces of data.

3. Citizen participation addresses a variety of issues and circumstances, with certain topics causing the most public interest and concern.

Programs requiring public input included:

a. environmental regulation issues,

b. strategic management planning, and

c. state-specific, often highly political or high-profile, issues such as season setting, river management plans, and exotic and endangered species management.

Issues generating the greatest amount of public concern were:

a. proposed changes in natural resource use patterns,
b. economic and opportunity costs of projects and programs,
c. public vs. private use rights, such as private business impinging on state forests.

Several respondents indicated that the success of citizen participation frequently depended on the choice of the issue. Some topics lend themselves better to useful dialogue than do others. For example, discussions regarding changes in traditional natural resource usage, such as hunting vs. no hunting, seemed to meet with poor success despite citizen participation, due in part to the value-laden nature of the topic.

In terms of selecting issues for citizen review, some mentioned that budget cuts often sparked citizen participation. Other states have a process where stakeholders generate areas they want addressed.

4. Citizen participation is unsuccessful when it lacks top management support, encounters unexpected events, and demonstrates poor agency preparation.

Certain issues and circumstances often do not produce positive results through citizen participation. As mentioned above, senior managers who ignore or sabotage citizen participation can successfully undermine the effort. One state reported that the governor's silence on public involvement rendered participation ineffective during his term. One state said that they would greatly benefit by two tiers of training -- technical and administrative -- to strengthen support throughout the organization.

Several factors are related to agency readiness for effective involvement. Some respondents said that facilitator competence and preparation have a strong impact on the success of citizen involvement efforts. The facilitator must demonstrate confidence in his or her skills and do sufficient homework prior to involvement to anticipate upcoming issues. If this preparation is ignored, involvement efforts create a negative impression.

Other factors that constrain citizen participation effectiveness include unexpected changes such as shifts in political appointees and legal action that reverse citizen participation decisions. Several respondents feared that citizen participation overemphasized extremist input and allowed a vocal minority to dominate the process. Others had had experiences where the issues discussed did not lend themselves well to public dialogue, due to high emotions surrounding the topic.

Clearly, meaningful citizen participation requires thoughtful preparation of staff, careful selection of issues, and a long-term commitment to authentic public decision making.

5. Many methods and channels are used to involve citizens.

No state follows a strict, well-established approach. One respondent indicated that a flexible approach was necessary due to the diversity of issues involved. However, the training and methods provided by IPMP and Synergy are frequently used. The IPMP approach incorporates informal *individual* data collection through open houses involving many governmental levels. Citizens enjoy the more personable, immediate feedback nature of the smaller meetings.

Other commonly used approaches employ surveys and task forces or advisory groups of principal stakeholders and subsequent distribution of draft reports for final public input. An exception is Wisconsin, which has a citizen participation coordinator and uses district information officers to draft information plans on issues.

6. No state has a formal system to collect, store, prioritize, evaluate, or follow through on citizen input.

Most states have a decentralized process. The majority of respondents said that information is gathered informally and is considered in the decision-making process, but is not stored, given priority, or shared outside the department. This process component was judged as very weak by most respondents. Some information is systematically gathered through formal surveys or questionnaires, with some reporting follow-up approaches to check public satisfaction. One person described the follow-up procedures as "without rigor."

On one issue, responses were unanimous. Citizen participation is a useful management tool. Respondents are confident that it would become even more useful in the future even though this conclusion is lacking in documented hard facts or figures.

Successful citizen participation programs

Following are stories of how states have succeeded on specific issues through using citizen participation.

Montana Montana does not have a special program, but uses a case-by-case approach. They hold open houses periodically and have a "listening log" where constituents can express their opinions. They would like to expand their current approach.

Two issues led to the use of citizen participation: (1) highly politicized natural resource issues, such as tribal Indian natural resource use on reservations, and (2) the need for new procedural tools. One example of a new procedural tool is the process followed during a state park crisis. Budget cuts sparked the need for park fee increases. To prevent park closings, legislators, non-government organizations, agency staff and interest groups formed the Parks Future Committee. Addressing the issue of a fee increase, the committee held public meetings throughout the state. Recognizing the perilous position of the agency, citizens recommended that the committee seek additional funding options. Simultaneously, legislative input encouraged increased funding to the

eight separately budgeted agency divisions.

Ultimately, the legislature allocated $3 million to the agency, with citizens volunteering to work in parks to keep them open. During this process, decisions made in the eight districts were forwarded to the central office, which was very receptive to citizen desires. A follow-up survey measured citizen satisfaction with the fee increase.

Florida A citizens advisory committee represents 17 principal interest groups concerned with coastal management issues. The committee enables representative vs. individual public input, making the process more manageable.

The committee operates in two ways. It advertises and holds public meetings on coastal management issues. Individuals or interest groups not represented on the council can express their opinions. Public comments are transcribed and considered by the agency during rule-making. Rule changes require additional public hearings until a final rule is approved by the governor and cabinet.

Florida will be developing the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. By statute, an advisory committee will include all stakeholders. The American Assembly process will be soliciting representative input from all interest groups. Scoping meetings have been held throughout the state and citizens have been canvassed by questionnaire.

Maryland The Maryland Public Lands staff was trained by Synergy. They have successfully used citizen participation in several aspects of the Savage River Plan for tree removal and overall plan development. Faced with removing dead trees in state forests while developing the river plan, Public Lands staff contacted advocacy groups for support of their proposed actions. News releases described the problem to the public, followed by public site meetings with key players. Proposed action plans were presented at the meeting in addition to requesting citizen input. Unlike another instance where dead trees were removed without participation, the agency met little resistance in the decision-making process.

Maryland also used citizen participation in the preparatory stages of the plan by conducting six public workshops across the state. A citizens advisory group, including representatives of county government, interest groups, academia, and Public Lands, had recently become active in plan development. As involvement becomes a greater part of Public Lands operations, the agency is setting up standing advisory committees for each state forest. Informational public meetings are held on all annual work plans to avert problems between the public and timber contractors and to inform elected officials about stakeholder concerns.

Michigan For the first time, the Michigan DNR is dealing with a project demanding substantial public input: the Escanaba River State Forest Plan. Over the last two years, the DNR has held several meetings with stakeholders, in addition to gathering information through surveys. The DNR has distilled the issues following two drafts of public review. At one public meeting, attendees broke into smaller groups to assign priorities to issues so the DNR can better address local concerns.

Washington Washington used citizen participation to deal with trail issues. The state faces many challenges in trail management. There are not enough trails to meet a growing demand, many are poorly maintained, and user conflicts are present in many locations. The Outdoor Recreation Division of the agency began a citizens advisory committee, which used informal open houses and formal evening presentations to explain the issues to the public. They scheduled meetings in public spaces in different cities. Disillusioned with low meeting turnouts when using the media, they chose to use a different method to attract meeting participants. The division contacted regional state trail representatives, who identified key stakeholders and invited them to attend.

Information was gathered informally at the open houses, with notes taken during or after one-on-one conversations. This format had two key benefits: It created a relaxed atmosphere for interchange and it succeeded in getting informed stakeholders to provide input into solutions.

Wyoming Wyoming uses a three-step process for big game management:

1. Annual data on discrete game populations is used to set game management objectives using citizen participation.

2. Official and/or unofficial key players ("gatekeepers") hold informal meetings. District-level staff talk one-on-one with citizens. Information is informally gathered, because previous efforts, such as public meetings, were seen as unproductive.

3. Local staff hold open houses to discuss the upcoming big game seasons, with an informal information flow.

E. DNR SUCCESS STORIES

Each interviewee and focus group of Minnesota DNR staff was asked for successful citizen access examples. One hundred and fifty examples were listed and reasons for the success were solicited. What follows is a sampling of those responses.

Themes describing reasons for success are:

Good leadership ability

Committed interest from citizens and staff

Front-end involvement by citizens

Sharing power

Having a plan and focus

Doing things with, rather than for or to, people

Good leadership ability

Forestry Resource Management Act. Through this effort, a disorganized forestry community drew together to pass landmark legislation, with good cooperation with the governor's office and excellent legislative leadership.

The last meeting of the sand and gravel task force. This group had a hard time coming to any consensus. The last meeting was a major turnaround, largely because it was held at the state capitol.

A Waste Management Board meeting on granite storage. All sides of the issue relied on DNR comments and presentation for different purposes.

Lake Minnetonka public access issue. DNR persuaded a hostile lake association to accept its activities. After the governor vetoed access acquisition, all possible Minnetonka stakeholders were identified and called to meetings to resolve the issue.

Committed interest from citizens and staff

Iron Ore Cooperative Research Committee. Participants wanted the consensus process to work.

Regional input to concerns for regional plan. A lot of good input was received through meetings, advertisements, and mailings.

The mineral potential programs. Feedback allowed correction to occur.

Lake Vermillion Sportsmen's Club. Success was due to regular contact, open-minded members' interest in the resource and the best options, and to trust and sincerity expressed by participants.

Citizen Advisory Committee in SE Minnesota. This group of 15 local people from all walks of life had broad interests in the welfare of the region and food land stewardship; also, DNR people were willing to talk with them.

"Meet Rod" open house by invitation only. The audience was diverse, the commissioner was receptive to public input, it was personal, and people had their concerns heard by someone who cares.

Lower St. Croix River planning and rulemaking process. This popular program is strongly supported by state and federal legislation and the local citizens of the valley.

Friends of Flandreau State Park. A local citizens group in New Ulm raised $110,000 to build a swimming pool in the park, $5,000 for playground, and $8,500 for campsites.

Burnsville meeting on trapping. Local officials listened to public input.

Front-end involvement by citizens

Kandiyohi water access. DNR actively went to the users and prioritized needs with them.

Chapter A process for Rule G. Rules were revised rules for the first time in 10 years, resulting in all criticisms being addressed objectively and the rules being implemented.

Wild rice rules and fees. Early involvement was key.

Dean Lake controversy. At a prehearing conference on this lake-level dispute, all parties agreed to jointly gather data and pool the results to better answer the questions of cause and effect. By involving all in the process, agreement on the outcome was reached.

Governor's snowmobile task force. This task force involved a group of people committed to the process. They had good facilitation, and participation was planned, rather than reacted to.

Sharing power

Grand Portage advisory group planning process. The positive attitude of a diverse group that represented various backgrounds led this process to success.

Local archery association. Two-way communication and honesty were keys.

Lake Hanska. Consensus was built from diverse interests.

Environmental mediation on herbicides. The meeting was informative and educational.

Shorelands project, second phase. This succeeded only after DNR was forced to get citizens involved.

Sherburne County Tree Board. The group had an initial focus that was changed, and interest was maintained. The group matured very quickly to become an effective voice.

Having a plan and focus

The Land Stewardship Project. Congressional requirements brought together a wide variety of agencies and groups, broadening interest and responsibility in carrying out plans.

Dealing with the Shagawa Lake inquiries. All division personnel were prepared and informed. It was easy to refer them to someone with answers.

Root River Trail acquisition. Representing a remarkable department focus on a particularly rancorous issue, it resulted in a thoroughly negotiated settlement that answered a broad range of self interests.

Urban Forestry Councils. Successful past efforts have set the stage for a new program and money to implement it.

Wetlands Forum. A wide range of interests was represented in a non-threatening environment conducive to the exchange of ideas. Discussion on this timely issue was well structured.

Steelhead meeting in St. Paul. Good pre-meeting planning and good crowd control developed respect, modest as it was.

Doing things with, rather than for or to, people

Green Prairie Fish Lake investigation. A series of one-on-one contacts.

Minnesota SARDA. The DNR now has a memorandum of understanding.

R.I.M. Coalition -- It has demonstrated a commitment to a process and outcomes.

Trail planning process. There was a broad effort to hear from user groups, and use the information.

Working with Minnesota Trappers Association on revision of regulations. Meetings occurred with the organization over several years. This also included working through the public input meeting process to improve trapping regulations and largely eliminate controversy.