

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATION, AND EVALUATION



Why?

Collaboration and partnerships can help wildlife management areas (WMAs) and coastal communities achieve collective goals. Understanding relational needs to the partnership is important for helping partners understand what their needs are, how they work together, and what the outcomes are for WMAs, their needs, as well as the relationship.

Objectives

- Invite stakeholder input and perspectives about coastal wildlife management area conservation and community planning and development.

Background

This study area included two state-owned wildlife management areas (WMAs), one near Lake Huron's Saginaw Bay region (Nayanquing Point) and one on western Lake Erie (Pointe Mouillee). These two sites were selected for in-depth community engagement due to current or potential partnerships, and interests of local community leaders or Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) staff.

Methods

- An 11-question open-ended survey was distributed in May 2022 to waterfowl hunters, locally elected officials or professional staff, and local leaders, and received 15 anonymous responses.
- STUDY00007601 was approved by the MSU IRB.

Results

A sample of survey questions and responses from some of the respondents:

How can the community and Michigan Department of Natural Resources WMA better work together?

- Educate the local community on fragile ecosystems, impacts of coastal waters on shorelines, migratory birds, food sources, diseases, in addition to hunting.
- Having a "Friends" group to support the wildlife management area is very helpful. Community leaders can serve on the Friends Council to help provide necessities for the WMA. Local elected officials are important partners to help local organizations achieve their goals.
- Funding from state or federal sources to stop erosion of the shorelines adjacent habitat areas.
- Save remaining coastal wetlands.
- Improve community roads and infrastructure around the WMAs.

What are possible actions that WMAs and local communities might collaborate on to achieve their goals?

- Educate communities on how fragile ecosystems are, such as breeding times, food sources and their threats (e.g., plant disease).
- Adapt the Wetland Management for Waterfowl Handbook for Michigan ecosystems.
- Train young people and adults in outdoor recreation, interpretation, and other skills.
- Better understanding of local community interests that are not clear to traditional hunting and WMA stakeholders.
- Include wetland areas in master planning and zoning restrictions.
- Collaborate on funding and grant writing.

What are your reflections on how WMA staff and community leaders could engage or collaborate together?

- “A coastal habitat educational program is needed, like Hunters Safety.”
- “Engagement is just a matter of finding out who does what in the community and trying to get them to collaborate.” Local service groups might be willing to cooperate.
- City and township officials probably already understand the value of natural resources within their area. They could be persuaded to include WMA resources within their deliberations.

Discussion

We identified several preliminary implications for MDNR actions from the themes in the data: (1) consider facilitating local “Friends” groups or partnering with other groups to access private, corporate, and community foundation resources for common interests; and (2) work with communities to brainstorm and envision new ways that they might reach out and ask MDNR Wildlife Division for assistance, collaboration, or co-creation for the stewardship and benefit of local WMAs.

Preliminary implications for local communities include:

- Identify local infrastructure needs to access WMAs, and communicate with MDNR about those needs.
- Utilize community plans (master plans, zoning, recreation plans) for wetland protection.
- Facilitate and communicate about which recreation activities are allowable on different types of lands.

Preliminary implications for both MDNR Wildlife Division and local communities include:

- Joint project planning and funding acquisition.
- Develop, implement, and promote local education programs for the unique aspects of coastal wetland habitat and its benefits for erosion mitigation, habitat, refuge, flood protection, etc.

Adapted from original research: Triezenberg, H.A. and B.A. Avers. (2023). Coastal wildlife management areas community leader engagement feedback. Department of Fisheries and Wildlife; MSU Extension, Michigan Sea Grant, Michigan State University.

Key findings

- For Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division:
 - Consider facilitating a “Friends” group or other service group to access private, corporate, and community foundation resources for common interests.
 - Work with communities to brainstorm new ways that they could assist or collaborate with local stewardship or other activities.
- For local communities:
 - Utilize community plans (master plans, zoning, recreation plans) for wetland protection.
 - Develop, implement, and promote local education programs for the unique aspects of coastal wetlands.
- For both MDNR Wildlife Division and local communities:
 - Engage in joint project planning and funding acquisition.
 - Develop, implement, and promote local education programs on the unique aspects of coastal wetlands for a variety of ecosystem services.

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