

# Planning Process Participant Survey

## Southeast Landscape Plan Revision

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**Minnesota Forest Resources Council**



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**December 2014**



## Executive Summary

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Under guidance from the Sustainable Forest Resources Act (SFRA, Minnesota Statute 89A) the Minnesota Forest Resources Council's Southeast Regional Landscape Committee created a comprehensive *Forest Resources Management Plan* for Southeast Minnesota, which was completed in 2003. In 2013, the Southeast Committee initiated revision of the original plan. This revision, titled *Southeast Landscape Plan: A Regional Plan to Guide Sustainable Forest Management*, was completed by the Southeast Committee and MFRC staff and approved by the Council in November 2014.

At the request of the Council, MFRC staff undertook an evaluation of participant views on the plan revision process and final products in November and December 2014. Participants in the planning process were surveyed on the appropriateness of the number and frequency of planning meetings, adequacy of available resources, fairness of the decision-making process, impact on personal knowledge of the region, usefulness of the technical supporting documents created, satisfaction with the plan's components, and overall satisfaction with the planning process and final plan. The results of this participant survey are intended to inform future plan revision processes in both Southeast Minnesota and other MFRC landscape regions.

Thirteen of sixteen (81.3%) surveyed participants completed survey questionnaires. The results of each survey question are detailed in this report, including all comments provided by respondents. Survey respondents represented several interests and a range of years of experience participating in landscape committee functions.

Overall, the rate of satisfaction with the planning process by respondents was high, averaging between "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied." Respondents were satisfied with the number and frequency of planning meetings and generally found the resources provided by the Council to support the planning process to be adequate. Respondents also felt that the decision-making process was fair and nearly all of them expressed some amount of increase in their knowledge of sustainable forestry issues over the course of the planning process.

In terms of the final plan, respondents were on average very to somewhat satisfied with all components. Satisfaction was higher for the first half of the plan with satisfaction being highest for the background and supporting information component, and satisfaction was slightly lower for the second half of the plan with respondents indicating the least amount of satisfaction (comparatively) with the monitoring and evaluation component. Overall, respondents expressed a fairly high level of satisfaction with the final plan product.

In open ended questions and comment boxes, only a few respondents supplied additional comments on the planning process and products. A few comments suggested the plan needed simplification and focus, while others praised the efforts of staff and Planning Team volunteers in assembling large amounts of information. Other comments pertained to future needs in the planning effort, including state and industry representation on the Committee and support from

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the Council in data management, monitoring and evaluation, and providing adequate staffing support to the landscape teams. One respondent commented that the work planning and reporting process developed in this Plan should help make future plan revisions more seamless.

Overall, the Southeast Landscape Plan revision process went smoothly from the standpoint of survey respondents. The limited number of meetings was sufficient to meet the needs of the process and the final products were consider useful and satisfactory. The fact that a rather limited number of participants were fully engaged in the planning process likely impacted the efficiency of the process, though conclusions cannot be drawn from this survey regarding other impacts of this factor on the final plan, or regarding comparability between the Southeast Landscape's situation and that of other landscape regions.

# Section 1

## Introduction and Methods

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Under guidance from the Sustainable Forest Resources Act (SFRA, Minnesota Statute 89A) the Minnesota Forest Resources Council's Southeast Regional Landscape Committee created a comprehensive *Forest Resources Management Plan* for Southeast Minnesota, which was completed in 2003. In 2013, the Southeast Committee initiated revision of the original plan. This revision, titled *Southeast Landscape Plan: A Regional Plan to Guide Sustainable Forest Management*, was completed by the Southeast Committee and MFRC staff and approved by the Council in November 2014.

At the request of the Council, MFRC staff undertook an evaluation of participant views on the plan revision process and final products in November and December 2014. Participants in the planning process were surveyed on the appropriateness of the number and frequency of planning meetings, adequacy of available resources, fairness of the decision-making process, impact on personal knowledge of the region, usefulness of the technical supporting documents created, satisfaction with the plan's components, and overall satisfaction with the planning process and final plan. Surveys were completed online or by paper mail. Surveys were sent to 16 participants, including the six members of the Planning Team and several other Southeast Committee members who had provided feedback on the planning process and/or products (note: this subset may not have been comprehensive of all Committee members who provided feedback on the plan, but staff felt that they had captured the majority of those who comprised the plan Review Team).

This report contains the results of the survey. These results will be discussed by the Council in January 2015 as the final stage of the plan evaluation. The feedback provided by participants is intended to help improve the plan revision processes for other regional landscape committees.

## Section 2

### Results



Of the 16 participants surveyed, 13 responded for a response rate of 81.3%. The survey contained three parts: 1) background information, 2) evaluation of the planning process, and 3) evaluation of products. The questions for each section are presented below as they appeared in the survey, along with a summary of the responses received for each question and a brief explanation of the results. “N” refers to the number of responses for each question.

#### Part 1: Participant Background Information

*Question 1. What interest did you represent during the Plan revision process? Please choose the interest that fits best.*

The majority of participants represented either environmental/conservation organizations, or regionals/local agencies. Other represented interests included state agencies, consulting forestry, private landowners, and research/higher education.

Interest	Respondents
Forest products industry	0
Logging	0
Consulting forestry	1
Private landowners	1*
Environmental/Conservation organizations	4
Recreation/Tourism	0
Federal agency	0
Tribal agency	0
State agency	2
Regional or local agency	4
Research and higher education	1
Interested community member	0
Other (fill in)	0

n=13

\*Respondent added “With an interest in improved ecological performance at a landscape(s)/watershed level”

*Question 2. How long have you been participating in MFRC regional landscape committee functions?*

The majority of respondents (9 of 13) had been participating in Committee functions for 1–5 years. Four of the 13 respondents had been participating for longer than five years; no respondents had participated for less than one year.

<1 year	0
1-3 years	5
3-5 years	4
5-10 years	2
>10 years	2

n=13

*Question 3. Did you participate in the process to create the first generation of the Southeast Landscape Plan?*

Only two of the respondents had participated in the creation of the original plan.

Yes	2
No	11

n=13

## **Part 2: Participant Evaluation of the Planning Process**

*Question 4. Approximately how many of the Plan revision meetings did you attend (including meetings that were held by conference call)?*

Ten of 13 respondents indicated that they had participated in three or more planning meetings. As the number of official planning meetings was small and mostly attended by members of the Planning Team, it is possible that this question was misinterpreted by respondents as referring more broadly to Southeast Landscape Committee meetings, where planning updates were frequently given. Otherwise, respondents may have been referring to planning discussions/meetings that occurred before the Planning Team was formed.

1 to 2	1
3 to 5	6
5 or more	4
I did not attend any meetings	2

n=13

*Question 5. How appropriate was the total number of Plan revision meetings?*

All respondents felt that the number of planning meetings was “about right.”

Too infrequent	0
About right	12
Too frequent	0

n=12

*Question 6. How appropriate was the frequency of Plan revision meetings?*

All respondents felt that the frequency of planning meetings was “about right.”

Too few	0
About right	12
Too many	0

n=12

*Question 7. Were there adequate resources (data, maps, research, presentations, staffing, etc.) provided by the Council to support the planning process?*

Most respondents felt that the resources provided by the Council were adequate to support the planning process; two respondents felt that resources were more than adequate. Three survey participants either did not respond or did not know.

More than adequate	2
Adequate	8
Not Adequate	0
Don't know	1

n=11

Participants were prompted to “Please briefly explain your response,” and a box was provided. Two participants provided responses [Note: The respondents’ answers to Question 7 are noted in brackets at the end of their comments]:

- It is a bit overwhelming and too "big picture" for on-the-ground projects [Adequate]
- Staff did an excellent job of developing and presenting resources to support the process. Data management by state/Fed. Agencies needs to be better coordinated. [Adequate]

*Question 8. How would you rate the decision-making process used to develop the Plan?*

The majority of respondents found the planning process to be very or somewhat fair. Two respondents expressed no opinion; no respondents felt the process was unfair.

Very fair	4
Somewhat fair	6
Somewhat unfair	0
Very unfair	0

Not sure/no opinion	2
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n=12

A comment box was supplied for this question. One participant provided a comment. [Note: The respondent's answer to Question 9 is noted in brackets at the end of the comment]:

- The decision-making was built on information/group discussions/and experienced input [Very fair]

*Question 9. What impact, if any, did your participation in the Plan revision process have on your knowledge of sustainable forestry issues?*

Seven of 12 respondents had a great to moderate increase in knowledge of sustainable forestry issues. Four respondents reported a minor increase in knowledge. Only one respondent reported no increase in knowledge. The average relative rate of knowledge increase fell between “minor” and “moderate”.

Great increase in knowledge	2
Moderate increase in knowledge	5
Minor increase in knowledge	4
No increase in knowledge	1
<b>Relative knowledge increase*</b>	<b>2.67</b>

n=12

\*Note: Relative knowledge increase was calculated by weighting level of knowledge increase according to the following: Great increase=4; Moderate increase=3; Minor increase=2; No increase=1. The sum of the weighted totals was divided by the number of respondents for the question (non-response removed from total “n”).

*Question 10. Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with the Plan revision process:*

Overall, respondents to this question (n=11) were satisfied with the planning process, with 10 of 11 respondents reporting that they were either very or somewhat satisfied, and one respondent reported that they were somewhat dissatisfied. The average relative rate of satisfaction fell between “very satisfied” and “somewhat satisfied”.

Very satisfied	5
Somewhat satisfied	5
Somewhat dissatisfied	1
Very dissatisfied	0
<b>Relative satisfaction*</b>	<b>3.36</b>

n=11

\*Note: Relative satisfaction was calculated by weighting the level of satisfaction according to the following: Very satisfied=4; Somewhat satisfied=3; Somewhat dissatisfied=2; Very dissatisfied=1. The sum of the weighted totals was divided by the number of respondents for this question (non-response removed from total “n”). The relative neutral midpoint is 2.5.

*Question 11. Do you have any comments about the Plan revision process, including any recommendations for improving future Landscape Plan revision processes?*



Three participants responded to this question. Their answers to Question 10 are included in the second column of the table below. One respondent expressed that the plan or process was not concrete enough for busy people. Another respondent felt that future revisions would be more seamless due to the work planning and performance monitoring that would take place during the implementation of the plan. This respondent also expressed the need for the Council to recognize the value of providing the landscape teams with adequate support staff.

<b>Question 11</b>	<b>Question 10</b>
Again, people are too busy for things that are not concrete enough to be meaningful	Somewhat dissatisfied
I supplied some recommendations during the planning process.	Somewhat satisfied
Annual work plans/and reporting and performance monitoring should make future plan revisions more seamless. We will have assembled a documented history of strategies/actions that do/don't work and where we are achieving more efficiency through collaboration. MFRC has to recognize the value of providing adequate staffing to the landscape teams.	Very satisfied

n=3

### Part 3: Participant Evaluation of Products

*Question 12. Several technical background documents were prepared to support the Plan revision process. Please rate the usefulness of each of these documents to that process.*

Of the six technical background documents provided to the Southeast Landscape Committee, respondents found the Conditions and Trends Report to be the most useful, followed by the Key Stakeholder Survey Report (excluding non-responses and those who were unaware of the document from analysis.) However, the Survey Report as well as the Forest Policy inventory had the highest rates of unawareness/non-response. Respondents found the Demographic Data report to be the least useful compared to other reports.

	<b>Very useful</b>	<b>Somewhat useful</b>	<b>Not useful</b>	<b>Unaware of document</b>	<b>No response</b>	<b>Relative usefulness ('unaware' excluded)*</b>
<b>Resource Atlas (Maps)</b>	7	4	1	0	1	2.50
<b>Conditions and Trends Report</b>	9	3	0	0	1	2.75
<b>Demographic Data Report</b>	5	6	0	1	1	2.45
<b>Forest Policy Inventory</b>	6	4	0	1	2	2.60
<b>Key Stakeholder Survey Report</b>	7	3	0	2	1	2.70
<b>Key Stakeholder Focus Group Report</b>	6	5	0	1	1	2.55

n=13, less the non-response noted for each report.

\*Note: Relative usefulness was calculated by weighting the usefulness assigned to each report according to the following: Very useful=3; Somewhat useful=2; Not useful=1. The sum of the weighted totals was divided by the number of respondents who were aware of each report (non-response and “unaware of document” responses removed from total “n”).

*Question 13. Please rate your level of satisfaction with the following components of the final revised Plan.*

Overall, respondents were satisfied with all components of the plan; average relative satisfaction was higher than the neutral midpoint (2.5) for all components (between “very satisfied” and “somewhat satisfied”). Respondents were most satisfied with the background and supporting information component and least satisfied (comparatively) with the monitoring and evaluation component.

	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>No response</b>	<b>Relative satisfaction ('don't know' excluded)*</b>
<b>Background and supporting information</b>	7	5	0	0	0	1	3.58
<b>Desired Future Conditions, Goals, Strategies</b>	6	5	1	0	0	1	3.42
<b>Vegetation Management Framework</b>	5	4	1	0	2	1	3.40
<b>Coordination and implementation</b>	4	7	1	0	0	1	3.25
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	4	5	2	0	1	1	3.18
<b>Recommendations to Partners</b>	4	7	1	0	0	1	3.25

n=13, less the non-response noted for each report.

\*Note: Relative satisfaction was calculated by weighting the level of satisfaction assigned to each plan component according to the following: Very satisfied=4; Somewhat satisfied=3; Somewhat dissatisfied=2; Very dissatisfied=1. The sum of the weighted totals was divided by the number of respondents who chose one of these four answers (non-response and “don't know” responses removed from total “n”). The relative neutral midpoint is 2.5.

*Question 14. Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with the final revised Plan.*

Overall satisfaction with the final plan was high—11 of 12 respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with the final plan; one respondent was somewhat dissatisfied.

Very satisfied	6
Somewhat satisfied	5
Somewhat dissatisfied	1
Very dissatisfied	0
<b>Relative satisfaction*</b>	<b>3.42</b>

n=12

\*Note: Relative satisfaction was calculated by weighting the level of satisfaction assigned to the plan according to the following: Very satisfied=4; Somewhat satisfied=3; Somewhat dissatisfied=2; Very dissatisfied=1. The sum of the weighted totals was divided by the number of respondents who chose one of these four answers (non-response removed from total “n”). The relative neutral midpoint is 2.5.

*Question 15. Do you have any comments about the Plan revision products, including any recommendations for improving future Landscape Plan revision products?*

Three respondents provided comments about the planning products. One respondent praised the efforts to assemble large amounts of data, while another felt that the plan could have been simplified. Another respondent emphasized the need for agency support and agency/industry representation on the Committee.

The planner deserve a lot of credit for pulling so much information together. The plan for the SE is tough due to the mix of land uses and ownership patterns. The existing public programs is almost overwhelming so very difficult to pull together into a coherent coordinated overall program.	Somewhat satisfied
Make the document simpler and more focused.	Somewhat satisfied
*We need support from state/Fed. Agencies - representation on LS committees, coordinated data management and monitoring/evaluation. *Industry representation at the LS team level is needed. *BUT, only want people to attend that want to be there, believe in the effort and are ready to work.	Very satisfied

n=3

## Section 3

# Summary and Recommendations

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Survey respondents represented several interests and a range of years of experience participating in landscape committee functions. They were satisfied with the number and frequency of planning meetings (which were minimal), and generally found the resources provided by the Council to support the planning process to be adequate. Respondents also felt that the decision-making process was fair and nearly all of them expressed some amount of increase in their knowledge of sustainable forestry issues over the course of the planning process. Their overall rate of satisfaction with the planning process was high, averaging between “very satisfied” and “somewhat satisfied.”

Respondents generally found all six technical background documents to be useful to the planning process to some degree. They felt that the Conditions and Trends Report was most useful and Demographic Data Report was comparatively least useful. These and other findings concerning the relative usefulness of each document may help staff prioritize background information collection efforts during future planning processes. A few respondents were unaware of certain documents or did not respond to the question, indicating that staff needs to ensure that all documents are well-distributed during the planning process.

In terms of the final plan, respondents were very to somewhat satisfied on average with all components. Satisfaction was higher for the first half of the plan with satisfaction being highest for the background and supporting information component, and satisfaction was slightly lower for the second half of the plan with respondents indicating the least amount of satisfaction (comparatively) with the monitoring and evaluation component. These findings can help guide staff in understanding which components may require further development in future plan revisions. Overall, respondents expressed a fairly high level of satisfaction (between somewhat satisfied and very satisfied, on average) with the final plan product.

Very few respondents supplied additional comments on the planning process and products, limiting the insight that staff can draw from those questions. A couple of comments suggested the plan was not concrete enough and needed to be simpler and more focused, while another comment praised the efforts of the Planning Team in pulling together so much information. A couple of other comments pertained to future steps – such as the creation of annual work plans and reporting efforts – and needs in the planning effort, including state and industry representation on the Committee and support from the Council in data management, monitoring and evaluation, and providing adequate staffing support to the landscape teams.

Overall, the Southeast Landscape Plan revision process went smoothly from the standpoint of survey respondents. The limited number of meetings was sufficient to meet the needs of the process and the final products were consider useful and satisfactory. The fact that a rather limited number of participants were fully engaged in the planning process almost certainly impacted the efficiency of the process, though conclusions cannot be drawn from this survey regarding other impacts of this factor on the final plan, or regarding comparability between the Southeast Landscape’s situation and that of other landscape regions.