

Talking Points for Merging WLWCA and WALCE

Why Would We Merge?

- *Sustainable Future.* Merging the two associations would lead to one stronger, more efficient, and financially sustainable association, provide more staff support (WLWCA), and cause less volunteer (i.e. LCD) burnout while carrying out state association activities.
- *Focused Resources.* The on-going trend for downsizing County Boards and combining and downsizing departments is resulting in fewer people having less time for land and water conservation issues or to participate in state association activities. A merged association with a well-defined and empowered committee structure would better focus limited resources, provide more valuable services, and encourage more participation by LCCs and LCD staff.
- *Expanded Expertise.* Merging WLWCA and WALCE would combine the diverse technical, administrative and policy expertise, and talents of both organizations.
- *Better Cross-Training.* Combining workshops, tours, conferences, and other training opportunities would improve the quality, attendance, revenue, and ultimately the program understanding and support between LCCs and LCD staff – something we need to sustain local programs in the long-term.
- *Improved Policy Influence.* A joint Legislative Committee would help build a stronger and more unified voice for conservation issues and improve our effectiveness in influencing policy makers – thus having a greater impact than either organization could on their own in supporting county land and water conservation programs.
- *Faster Response Time.* A merged and empowered committee system would also help streamline the decision-making process, allowing members and staff to develop or review draft policies, craft a position and give the WLWCA staff and lobbyist direction in a much shorter time frame, which is critical in today's fast-pace policy decision making, especially during budget processes.

What are Some of the Challenges of a Merger?

- *Multifaceted Functions.* A merged organization needs to maintain the multifaceted functions of the two organizations, including legislative advocacy, technical and administrative program review and information sharing, environmental education and membership training. To be effective, the organization needs broad participation by its members on a variety of committees.
- *Leaving Titles at the Door.* As a non-profit organization with a unified mission to support local land and water conservation programs, LCC members and LCD staff need to work effectively together as equals. We need all the skills that LCD staff and LCC members both bring to the table to carry out the multi-faceted activities noted above.
- *Commitment/Diversity/Turnover.* WALCE is made up of professional staff with a strong commitment to conservation issues, while LCC members come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have a higher turnover rate through biennial elections. Training is critical.

What are the Risks of Not Merging?

- *Decline.* If current merger and downsizing trends continue locally without merging WLWCA and WALCE, it may result in steadily declining opportunities for professional improvement, a loss of a unified conservation voice on land and water conservation policy issues, and reduced local program funding. As proposed in 2004, County Conservationists could be merged with WLWCA without the rest of WALCE since they work closely together anyway. In fact, while this is not the preferred merger path, it remains a valid option. However, WALCE would certainly lose support if this would happen, again leading to fewer opportunities for other conservation staff.