

A collaborative, historical overview of WWOA and a look to its future

By Sue Swanson

W: Watch as the years unfold. *W:* Witness our accomplishments. *O:* Observe through photos, quotes and the telling of our story and *A:* Appreciate where we have been and where we are headed.

And with that simple and eloquent introduction came a slideshow looking at WWOA's past and future during the Annual Meeting 40th anniversary celebration. I call it a collaborative, historical review of Wise Woodland Opportunities and Advice, knowing we have all grown taller from walking with the trees. This story, edited for space, is a summary of that presentation.

A seed is planted

The idea to create an organization of woodland owners interested in pursuing common goals and objectives was a recommendation that came at the conclusion of the 1953 Silver Anniversary Forestry Conference. However, the idea laid dormant just as some tree seeds require layering, stratification and dormancy in order to sprout. For 20-plus years, various organizations all discussed the need, purpose, structure and function of a woodland owners group.

Finally, in 1976, the WDNR Bureau of Forestry pursued the idea with a grant from the U.S. Forest Service and implemented a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UW-Madison. Joint planning and coordination developed the structure and interim direction. Then, in 1979, an acting executive director was appointed, a tentative constitution and bylaws were drawn up and a name was selected under the direction of an Interim Board of Directors. Membership structure followed.

In August 1979, WWOA Articles of Incorporation were filed with the Secretary of State, and by October 1979, WWOA had already appeared before the State Assembly in opposition to a bill regarding the Forest Crop Law.

The need to run the newly formed

association required oversight of the day-to-day operations in order to strengthen and grow the group. Executive director names such as Hovarter, Seybold, Jordan, Hauge, Engelhard and Bozek are familiar depending on when you joined WWOA. We owe our thanks and support to those early directors who helped steer us. And to Nancy Bozek, our longest serving executive director, we applaud her for her work, dedication and guidance. We also owe a thank you to the many people who served as office help or volunteers on committees past and present.

In particular, the Directors are a dedicated lot who work long and hard on behalf of the association. Your board serves at no pay and members have contributed literally hundreds of hours plus a great deal of energy to lay a good foundation for the association.



Brickner

are all dedicated and have a common goal of serving the members.

WWOA's first president, Ernie Brickner, wrote in Issue 2 of the



Executive Director Nancy Bozek, left, and host Kathy Wagner at the 2009 Annual Meeting Field Day.

newsletter, "This is our Association and it will succeed or fail in direct proportion to the effort and enthusiasm that we, the Association members, are willing to put forth." This sentiment has been echoed by subsequent presidents.

Committees & Chapters

An organization is as strong as its parts. Much like a tree, WWOA needs all of us for support, "nutrition," anchors and growth. Committees and chapters are essential for WWOA to function.

Some long-standing committees, such as finance, membership and publication, require member participation to provide the services we expect and enjoy. Over time committees have been formed, structured and disbanded to meet WWOA's changing needs.

The need for smaller geographical areas to facilitate member learning and gatherings led to the development of chapters. At the local level, meetings and field days have become the heart of WWOA. Chapters are the first link to resources and provide the support of the organization much like that of the trunk of a tree.

Annual meeting

WVOA has a strong 40-year history of educational events and opportunities for members. Beginning with the first meeting held in Port Edwards in August 1980 attended by 158 members, the annual gathering has become the highlight of educational opportunities offered around the state.

The gathering has gradually expanded to four days of tours, presentations and hands-on participation. The annual meeting is capped off with a Sunday field day spent exploring member properties and delving into the multi facets of woodland management.

Other educational events

Education has not been confined to the borders of Wisconsin. To celebrate WVOA's 10th anniversary, a group trip headed by then State Forester Milt Reinke ventured to Germany, the roots of American forestry. The tour highlighted centuries old forest and resource management including the Schwarzwald, or Black Forest.

Additional opportunities to see forests, meet resource professionals and see new territory took place in 1991 when 36 WVOA members ventured to the Pacific Northwest to see the majesty of trees and mountains. Sweden was also a destination for 28 WVOA members in 1997, where they learned about new culture, food and forestry with leads Ed and Helen Moberg.

In 2012, a group of 18 members took a three-country European tour to see hundreds of year old oak and beech forests and enjoy food and culture. No matter where WVOA members gather, food and fun seem to follow!

WVOA members not only educate themselves, but also educate others, including the next generation of woodland owners, teachers, scientists and natural resource managers. To celebrate the milestones of WVOA's anniversary years, including the 40th year, many members have opened their woods to the public through Open Woods events.

Communication key

Early on, communication was deemed to be an important tool for developing the fledgling organization. Originally started as a newsletter, it was edited and



Photo: Sue Swanson

WVOA members have twice traveled to Europe to learn about the culture, food and forestry. This group made the first trip to Germany in honor of WVOA's 10th anniversary. Other WVOA trips have been made to the Pacific Northwest, Sweden and a three-country European tour.



The Kucksdorf family gathers to host a Wolf River Chapter field day on their woodlands in 2013.

published by a Madison consulting firm.

But the need to provide timely information and updates proved to be catalysts for cosmetic and content changes to the magazine. Editors have also changed through the years. Remember Heather Goulding, Jeanne Dorsch, Tim Eisle or Eric Johnson? The current editor is Barbara A. Schmitz.

In 1993, the magazine received rec-

ognition from the National Woodland Owners Association attesting to the content and value provided to members. Guided by a publication committee, the magazine has expanded to provide not only Association and chapter news, but also stories of pertinent, timely resource management.

Advertisements are now a part of the magazine. Not only do they finan-

cially help with the publishing of the magazine, but they are a resource for members searching for management assistance, products or information. Betty Hauge served as one of our advertising managers and Helen Moberg is the current manager.

Forty years later, *Wisconsin Woodlands*, as the magazine is now known, is the quarterly connection. News from *Wisconsin's Woods*, co-published by WWOA and Wisconsin Tree Farm Committee, provides updates twice a year.

While the way we receive information has changed over time, WWOA has stayed current with technology and communication advances, launching its website in 2000 and later revamping it, and also adding Facebook as a way to share information.

Need the perfect gift?

Who doesn't love the chance to shop conveniently for items associated with the woods?

Throughout the decades, the WWOA Gift Shop has been operated by the Mobergs, Wymans, Zdanovacs and others, who have consistently sought resources that expand our knowledge, reach the younger generation or are just for fun. The added benefit of buying clothing from the gift shop is the opportunity to advertise our organization.

The association has also branched out to other organizations, such as the UW-Extension and the Governor's Council on Forestry.

One of our recent accomplishments is establishing the Forestry Leadership Scholarship in partnership with UW-Stevens Point. Established in 2017 through a generous anonymous donation by a WWOA member, our members have joined in this cause with the interest in educating future generations to ensure that private woodland owners will always have access to well-trained foresters.

Just as the forest grows, WWOA has experienced both growth and losses. We've changed our bylaws, developed strategic plans, parted ways with a foundation and evolved to address the many issues facing forest management



WWOA Board of Directors plant a tree in Marshfield, site of the 2019 Annual Meeting. Planting a tree in the host city has been a tradition since 1999.

and woodland owners. Women of WWOA, My Land Handbook and Growing a Legacy are excellent examples of growing to meet the needs of the membership.

However, one of our most recent growth opportunities occurred in 2018 when WWOA signed a MOU with the WDNR. And since 1999, we continue to "grow" by planting a tree in the host city of the annual meeting. What an excellent anniversary idea that continues!

Recalling the major events of the past 40 years of WWOA was a daunting task. How does one capture in 1,500 words an organization devoted to woodland owners? We looked back at past magazines, pored over old photos, recalled speeches by former presidents, and remembered annual meetings, field trips, tours, social events, acquaintances and friendships made.

But in the end, WWOA is what it started out to be for each of us when we became members. Reasons for be-



Photo by Roxanne Erickson

North Central Chapter members enjoy hearing about the history of the Harvey's woodlands in 2012.

longing, participating and committing to sustainable forest management rests on our shoulders.

Yet the measure of WWOA's success is not in the number of members, magazines published, committees formed, annual gatherings, board members or field tours. Ultimately, the true measure of our success is determined by the land, the collective voices and actions of members and the legacy we will leave or have left behind. Success is in the purpose and vision formulated and evolved over the past 40 years. 🌲

Marcia Frost-Vahradian contributed to this report.