

AISWCD Discussion notes

Strengths:

- local connection to community
- legislation enacting us
- longevity of AISWCD and SWCDs
- volunteer directors
- 97 independent districts
- in control of how we change
- employee passions

Challenges:

- legislation enacting Districts
- volunteer directors
- 97 indep districts
- no clear brand
- communicating to legislators
- lack of certification
- sustainable funding
- districts resistant to anything limiting their autonomy
- vocal dinosaurs = need to ignore (not right word) them? And expect natural selection?
- action: hr. for employees, media presence (perhaps AISWCD can provide)
- looking at work on landscape scale vs county scale
- director training/certification
- are programs still relevant?
- AISWCD board took who they could get not who was passionate, not much expected of board members on AISWCD board or district boards; AISWCD Board is too large (look into board based on regions instead of land use councils?)
- action: term limits for directors and board members
- too much repetition in board meetings
- Relevance of Focus Area Committees? Are they irrelevant or do they need champions in them?
- action: have focus area committee members outside of the board? Perhaps create employee committees that bring recommendations to board?
- action: facilitate more conference calls, webinars or vtc focus area committee meetings vs driving to Springfield?
- hard to see outside the box and move forward when always given guidance in the past, many fear change and the adjusting priorities of conservation (how do we respond to the ever shifting boundaries of conservation?)
- assoc. consistent message across all 97
- underutilized resolution process=use to define message? Ask for resolutions before June!
- NLRS resolution? getting all districts on board with this (have a policy book we can take to legislators?)

- transect surveys need to be used more
- action: resolution training every year (can keep the strategic plan time slot that was created and use it for resolution training every March)
- Should AISWCD/SWCDs become a state entity? Or should we stay private?
- AISWCD could create a union or umbrella agency for employees, or a hr. department?
- AISWCD structure (too many delegates and alternates at annual meeting?)- Steve likes current structure

Side note: Governor's administration willing to listen to a few proposals (not necessarily as focused on limiting districts if we look different)

Programs:

- AISWCD can create a hr. department
- need a NLRS presence in all districts, how do we do this?-meetings not cutting it
- market that NLRS applies to all counties, not just Ag land (need to market to districts and partners/farmers/legislators)
- action: AISWCD start looking through resolutions to see which ones are completed (create an easy form with just the policy)
- action: do easy form by category topic and have bullet points so we can see where weaknesses are
- AISWCD can create an annual plan of work each year that we share with the districts (example: we can share it in September, and the board can pass it in December)
- action: AISWCD needs a grant writer and media person that can work on programs for SWCD employees
- AISWCD foundation is underutilized (look into funder database?-maybe this is how we get the grant writer and media person or funds for employee training)
- AISWCD can create training program by hiring experts to train districts so they can come to us for their certifications?-AISWCD needs to market that training essential

Employees:

- need employee training and certification (perhaps AISWCD can provide this for employees and directors)
- Need NLRS specialists?-opportunity for us to do this in partnership with districts
- AISWCD can hire a grant writer needed and marketing person?
- summer conference become training conference each year; add training to Quarterly Board meetings? Or do as webinars? (Or do through resolutions?)
- challenge=explaining training process and why needed-explain at LUC meetings? Or do via podcast?
- action: explain resolution process via podcast and discuss during exec. meeting and strategic planning time slot!
- need to market our training to Ag programs so that partners see us as a credible source to pay to do the work
- action: idea: ISWCDEA can hire a full time staff for hr. and we will work together as a partnership vs working as 2 organizations, we will also attend each other's meetings

- get away from idea that AISWCD is out to get the employees (where does this come from? And how to get away from this?)
- need to find where miscommunication comes from with us and them and NRCS and districts (they misunderstand the agreement and think we get 25%)
- Maybe re explain each year? (Make a list of topics to re-explain each year for training)
- action: publish resolutions into logical format and get to districts and go by area and discuss them with districts to show they are important
- action: 1st resolution from this process should say the resolutions will be our guide and common message (Kelly will work on drafting language)

Brand and image:

- need to get message out there, most partners don't understand our structure with districts (may be true for most legislators and the Governor's office as well)
- need consistent message, logo, and brand
- need to draw attention to what districts do instead of hiding and not being recognized for the great work they do
- marketing person would help, so will the media events we have started publicizing
- marketing training at annual meeting
- image is professional/experts to farmers, but not too many others (but that is because of lack of certification program?)
- we are being compared to our partners and we need to have certification to show our qualifications
- need to define who we are and how we want to be perceived so we are not compared to our partners
- need a diff mission statement to define that we are the technical people vs an admin agency
- what would make us unique and make people want to come to us? Perhaps certification because expected to be technical people, need to close gaps in services available to gaps
- perhaps we could fill those gaps as well (for example: NLRs, forestry, Quail and Upland Game Alliance, pheasants forever, pollinator habitat)
- districts run machines to provide planting pollinator services for absentee landowners=gap Districts can fill
- Districts can fill gap for forester if we had one (AISWCD need a forester that districts can use?)
- AISWCD can get a grant to hire x number of foresters-do via a generic resolution?
- can resolutions come from the AISWCD board? Answer=yes, but not ideal, better to use political capital
- people already come to us for recommendations for resources, but how do we charge for this and become the resource we are recommending?
- issue w/ charging because of NRCS contract, need to sit down with them and capture this
- disconnect between landowners going to NRCS and government entities and those who want to avoid it, do landowners know we are an option to avoid government and the jumping through hoops
- absentee landowners is a large group and we need to find a way to serve that group (can we develop conservation leases for them to use with tenants?)-need one that benefits both sides of equation
- AISWCD act as resource to pair the groups together for these leases (partners help us with language?)-create a database?
- brand=better job of networking so partners direct people to us

-logos need to be the same

Governance and partnerships:

- AISWCD needs development staff
- Change out conservation catchall for bi-monthly or quarterly podcasts?-is conservation catchall relevant anymore with weekly wonders?
- concern=AISWCD understands this topic, but not sure staff and partners get it
- ties into education and training of district act and why we are as we are (did we do a good job of breaking down that act?)
- partners have no idea that we have no control over the districts
- why not talk about taxing if we can do it, since we need the money (only able to do for specific things=like Schuyler county example)
- there is an act that limits what we can and can't do as far as boundaries and we do not have an attorney for districts (should we look into this so they don't have to hire own when things come up)
- AISWCD can hire NLRS staff members via grants (like we did for Matt's position)
- Look into: modernag.org or .com? (A Monsanto granting body for conservation)
- Kelly has a list of potential employee positions
- action: AISWCD can look into finding grants for these positions and get direction from districts so they don't think we are only looking out for ourselves
- maybe have funds come from foundation and every year vote on proposals on who to hire
- action: explain district act more clearly
- AISWCD needs to keep better track of who has the training and expertise that we can hire from within instead of from the outside
- need 1 person per area, not necessarily in every district or x number in AISWCD that can travel throughout the state (use extension model)
- communications: monthly data collection from districts so can send it to IDoA at the end of the year and send it to farm week (idea came from IDoA email on keeping track of things done in area)
- this may be somewhat burdensome right now so it may take some time to get this to be seen as valuable
- look into getting local media contacts, and not just the ones we currently send to
- social media (who is our target audience? mainly only directors and employees now)
- need interactive map on our website with links to county? Also include members only login section?
- need it person
- Governor's administration wants to reduce number of local units of government, if combined with drainage districts, would lower numbers overall, but still keep our staff in all areas
- would give districts taxing authority (watch for the opportunity to take over if they come under threat)

Discussion highlights from the other groups

- strengths=trusted local source of info, work with all ages, and work with many agencies, looked at as hardworking boots on ground
- need respect from partners and credibility from them so they don't take all the credit
- need employee training and employee handbook

- partnerships imp but need to have boundaries so they don't keep asking us to do more work with less employees
 - marketing person statewide to help get message out consistently state wide (they do press releases and flyers for districts so looks the same with branding)
 - re-branding is important because we have new issues now and we need to accommodate them, maybe we even need to change our name
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- agree with locally led conservation and know people and resources
 - lack of identity and training and high turnover rates
 - sustainable funding
 - high turnover with staff
 - Littering fines? Fees? =potential source of funding
 - workload from partners (like other group mentioned)
 - conservation campaign for marketing
 - funding for cpp, ssrp, back to basics
 - relevant but does community see it? (Need visibility)
 - urban funding
 - define solution and relevance with campaign videos (then -dust bowl- vs now and our role in it)
 - define swcd image with common logo or slogan "make IL SWCDs great again?"
 - district boundaries best left to districts to define
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- AISWCD needs to provide specialists for local districts to use a resource (urban, soil health, etc.)
 - promote selves as local group that understands farmers in given area
 - explore more partnerships (land grant colleges, environmental groups like prairie rivers), more education for future
 - conservation for the future program needs to continue
 - sustainable funding
 - accountability=not sure if more reporting necessary because very time-consuming