

**Public Policy Forum**  
**Salute to Local Government Awards**

**Category- Inter-governmental Cooperation-** Awarded to cooperative effort among two or more governments that best demonstrates the benefits of working together for a common purpose.

- Individual(s) or government nominated: Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
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Answer the following- Use as much space as you like:

*1. What program techniques/approaches were used?*

In 2005, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Southeast Region<sup>1</sup> initiated an ambitious undertaking of a regional partnership with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) to develop a regional baseline snapshot of resource rich lands and waters and to build upon the synergy of working together for a common purpose. The **environmental corridor snapshot** provides a tool for being collectively responsible for carrying out a shared vision for sound planning, cooperative efforts for environmental stewardship, and resource preservation.

SEWRPC is nationally recognized for its work in identifying and delineating primary and secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural areas which consist of the best remaining elements of the natural resource base in the region. Since 1966, SEWRPC has used and refined this concept pioneered by Professor Philip H. Lewis, Jr., and carved out the framework for making informed policy and planning decisions in the seven county regional planning area.<sup>2</sup> The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District established its Greenseams Program in 2001, an innovative flood management program that acquires lands with absorbent soils, establishes flood storage areas, and protects stream corridors in a four county area.<sup>3</sup> The Department of Natural Resources acquires land and easements through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program from willing sellers to achieve conservation and recreational goals to develop recreational facilities and restore wildlife habitat. Stewardship Grants are available to local units of government, nonprofit conservation organizations, and friends groups to preserve natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation.

The primary technique for developing the regional corridor snapshot that measures future expansion of environmentally sensitive lands allows each agency to operate within its current responsibilities, SEWRPC in its seven county area, MMSD in its four county area, and DNR Southeast Region in its eight county area. Through a series of discussions, meetings, and information sharing, the agencies worked collaboratively to **develop a multi-county initiative to Sustain, Reconnect, and Grow Environmental (SRGE) corridors**. The area's resource rich lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, prairies and woodlands

**enhance biodiversity** and are a shared foundation among the three agencies for conservation. The goal of sustainable ecosystems is achieved by incorporating the conservation of biodiversity into a management framework.

The regional agency directors, Philip Evenson (SEWRPC), Gloria McCutcheon (DNR), Kevin Shafer (MMSD), and agency staff collaborated to gather data to provide a 2005 baseline summary of the acreage of environmental corridors and natural areas. The baseline data becomes a basis to measure changes and present opportunities that complement long-range planning and preservation efforts. The SRGE initiative is a tool for multi-government jurisdictions and nonprofit organizations to work together to sustain existing corridors, facilitate opportunities to connect public recreation, reconnect environmentally significant lands, and retain rural character. Programs like MMSD's Greenseams and DNR's Stewardship are beneficial land conservation programs that support the recognition that environmental corridors are the 'lifelines of the natural resource base.' SEWRPC's Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Land Use Plan: 2035 recognized that carefully planned efforts similar to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Turtle Valley State Wildlife Area project in Walworth County resulted in the re-establishment of wetlands, woodlands, prairies, grasslands, and forest interiors. As a result, such delineation of environmental corridors and isolated natural resources areas will be modified in subsequent generations of the regional plan to reflect the re-establishment of natural resource features resulting from sizable increases and restorative efforts in other areas. The three agencies agreed that by working together they could highlight natural resource lands, document progress, and celebrate success.

## *2. How is the initiative structured?*

Sustain, Reconnect, and Grow Environmental corridors is a science based initiative of data collection, verification, map preparation and report production. The **park and natural open space inventory** results culminate annually in the form of a status report, presentation and recognition event. In 2006, the group collectively set out to gather and share information for the purpose of developing annual reports and maps to track progress and make them available to planners, units of government, conservation groups and other interested stakeholders. While acreage changes may be small initially from year to year, progress will be seen over time. For instance, public and private non-profit land management agencies and groups acquired 445 acres of conservation easements in 2006, adding to the 2005 baseline. It is noteworthy that conservation easement increases of this size were not significantly measurable in past regional land use inventory plan updates.

After the information was compiled, an initial kick-off SRGE Event at Havenwoods State Forest and Environmental Awareness Center on Milwaukee's northwest side was hosted by Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. In the spring of 2007, the baseline information was presented and the founder of the environmental corridor concept was honored. An Environmental Corridor Ovation (ECO) Award was presented to Professor Philip H. Lewis, Jr. for his visionary work. The event location was an appropriate site because of Professor Lewis' past work of drafting a Havenwoods Awareness Center Plan in 1977. The plan led to the restoration of a 237-acre open space in the City of Milwaukee previously used as a House of Corrections, Army Disciplinary Barracks, Nike Missile site, and landfill facility.

An annual recognition award is now presented to a person or group which **exemplifies environmental stewardship** and fosters natural resources values leading to tangible results for sustaining, reconnecting, and growing the environmental corridors in the region. The initiative represents a commitment to enhance and expand the environmental corridors and to measure and celebrate progress in preserving resource rich lands and waters. In 2008, the event highlighted Earth Week celebrations by recognizing the importance of **sustaining environmentally sensitive lands**. The ECO Award was presented to G. Andrew Larsen who contributed 30 years of exemplary leadership and guidance of the Riveredge Nature Center,

developing a 370-acre rich landscape and nature sanctuary. Riveredge is one of the largest nature centers in southeast Wisconsin that serves as a learning laboratory and provides a range of workshop training and youth education programs from adult ecology classes, fly fishing lessons, to summer camps for kids.

***3. What were the programs outcomes and how did they promote inter-governmental cooperation?***

The three agencies used a **continuous quality improvement** process to develop the initiative. Throughout the process, a schedule, checklist of staff responsibilities and roles, expected products, and action items were maintained, leading up to the public events. A mailing list was developed consisting of local units of government, county and park planners, lake districts, land trusts, nature centers, and environmental and friends groups. The mailing list of nearly 250 individuals and organizations is utilized to communicate the initiative, seek award nominations, send invitations to support the event, and allow for future participation expansion and updates. The SRGE-ECO Award event at Havenwoods included visuals, maps, speaker presentations, and the unveiling of a permanent Havenwoods Awareness Center Plan Map and Professor Lewis Recognition Plaque. Through this effort, new lines of communication were opened among the three agencies with the resolve to build upon the cooperation and continued work effort. Future plans are to continue the effort to promote the concept through the independent work of the three agencies and to expand the knowledge base among other units of government and non-profit land management agencies and groups.

This voluntary initiative recognizes the collective power of working together to inform and promote shared goals. Like SRGE, we are **sustaining and growing partnerships**. Sustain, Reconnect, and Grow Environmental corridors is a planning tool to highlight existing environmental corridors and identify opportunities to connect public recreation and environmentally significant lands. Through the efforts of local, state, and federal units of government along with nonprofit organizations, the initiative builds partnerships to connect and reconnect corridors to accomplish common goals for ecosystem management. This effort integrates the recognition and reemphasizes the importance of sustaining existing environmental corridors, reconnecting corridors and growing and expanding them as well.

These environmentally significant lands are vital natural resources in the region, provide an important element to the landscape in southeast Wisconsin, and add high value to both residents and visitors. Decisions made today have far reaching implications on choices and quality of life in the future. Currently, there are 634 square miles, or about 24% of the land in the region, that are designated environmentally significant lands. The versatility of these lands calls for a versatile initiative to sustain, reconnect, and grow them.

Looking ahead 10, 20, 50, or even 100 years, the momentum and motivation for SRGE builds upon each additional 10, 20, 50, or 100 acres that are added to the region's resource rich lands and waters. **Just envision what these lands mean toward ensuring a bright natural heritage for future generations.**

Mailed Chronological Attachments:

- a) Sample inter-agency SRGE-ECO correspondence
- b) SRGE Announcements and Program
- c) Environmental Corridor Ovation Award write-ups
- d) Greenseams Example Slide
- e) Professor Lewis and ECO Recipients Plaques
- f) DNR News Releases
- g) Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Regional Brief article on award recipient

Submitted by: Peter McMullen  
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<sup>1</sup>DNR eight county area includes; Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha

<sup>2</sup>SEWRPC seven county area includes; Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha

<sup>3</sup>MMSD four county area includes; portions of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha

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