



2022

CLIMATE FAST FORWARD

ACTION PLAN



CLIMATE FAST FORWARD 2022 ACTION PLAN



A publication of the Climate & Energy Initiative of the
Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters

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ABOUT THIS PLAN

This plan is published by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters through its Climate & Energy Initiative. Through peer learning events, large conferences and summits, and plans such as this one, the Academy's Climate & Energy Initiative seeks to address Wisconsin's role in global climate change and explore diverse energy choices for a sustainable future. For questions about this plan or to contact plan contributors, contact environment@wisconsinacademy.org.

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Thank you to Wisconsin Academy donors, members, and the following funders for their support of this plan:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The concept for Climate Fast Forward has been to bring people together from across the regions, disciplines, and demographics of Wisconsin to develop a plan for moving the state forward on climate change action. This ambitious goal was set for the first conference in 2019 and continued through the second conference in 2022. Despite the constraints of a one-day conference, this goal was achieved, with clear priorities for next steps and work to be advanced.

The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters planned the conference in partnership with climate change leaders across Wisconsin and distilled the outcomes of the conference dialogue into this plan. Conference leaders sought to identify actions that would be both achievable and transformational. Prior to the conference, Academy staff asked conference leaders to prepare their recommendations for climate change actions that would meet these criteria prior to the conference, in the form of background papers. Conference attendees read these to prepare for the conference and the papers formed the foundation for discussion in each track. Track leaders based their background papers on existing climate change plans, including the Tribal Adaptation Menu, the Governor's Taskforce on Climate Change, the Clean Energy Plan, the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts 2021 Assessment Report, and the Academy's 2019 Climate Fast Forward report, as well as track leaders' own knowledge and expertise.

Conference leaders presented many solutions that would not require action from the state legislature, but some of these actions were not popular with conference attendees, who preferred actions change to state laws or statutes. This contradiction revealed that there continues to be a strong desire for the legislature to take action on climate change. In order to reflect the power of bipartisan policy advancement as well as the concentrate on achievable strategies, this plan has incorporated the aspirational and pragmatic approaches into a single plan identifying key actions to move Wisconsin forward on climate change action.

A total of 142 actions are identified in this plan, with 36 being identified as high priority. The strongest theme that emerged from all tracks was the desire to create more forums for collaboration, similar to what took place at the conference itself. This includes the creation of a Climate Justice Coalition, a Natural Climate Solutions Task Force, and a new consortium to advocate for more affordable energy-efficient housing. Priority efforts identified to facilitate collaboration include a database of climate change success stories in Wisconsin, the strengthening of conduits between emerging green jobs employers and higher education institutions, as well as between Tribal Nations' governments and state and federal governments.

This collective desire for more collaboration came with a parallel need for funding climate change actions. The topic of funding is a constant in climate change work, but the opportunities available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) were at the forefront of this conference. This plan can and should be used as a leverage point for funding; the actions identified here came from a diverse group of leaders from Wisconsin's climate change action community.

This plan also provides a window of opportunity. As part of the facilitation process at the conference, participants were asked to identify champions for each action, organizations or individuals that could take ownership and leadership of the action. Several actions in this plan are lacking a champion, providing an opportunity for organizations looking to be more involved in climate change leadership in Wisconsin to step in and have a meaningful impact.

The Climate Fast Forward 2022 conference built upon the results of the 2019 conference, working to further distill the best actions for Wisconsin to take to address the climate change crisis. The Wisconsin Academy will continue to be involved in climate change action in Wisconsin through leadership on some actions outlined in this plan for which the Academy is listed as a champion or stakeholder. The Academy will also continue to foster cross-disciplinary collaboration on climate change through regional and statewide gatherings, both in person and online.

CONFERENCE BACKGROUND AND GOALS

The Wisconsin Academy has a long history of convening leaders from across the state to address big issues. Between 2015 and 2019, the Academy hosted a series of successful annual local government summits that took place in different regions of Wisconsin. Following these summits, the Academy decided to pull together Climate Fast Forward, Wisconsin’s first statewide climate change action summit.

On November 8, 2019, the Wisconsin Academy and partners brought together some of the state’s best strategic thinkers on climate change for a working conference designed to “fast forward” solutions for a more sustainable Wisconsin and world. The 2019 Climate Fast Forward conference was designed to crowdsource ideas for climate change solutions from participants. This effort resulted in a plan with over 400 ideas for climate change solution ideas for Wisconsin. Some of these ideas have been echoed in other statewide climate change reports, including the Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change, the Clean Energy Plan, and the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts reports.

While Climate Fast Forward 2019 was well-received overall, some criticisms centered around a lack of racial diversity among participants and low representation from Wisconsin youth climate change activists. In addition, many of the actions suggested in the plan relied on



Participants at the 2019 Climate Fast Forward conference.

Althea Dotzour

the Wisconsin state legislature to take action, which has continued to be a roadblock. The Academy took these criticisms into consideration as planning for the 2022 conference began to take shape. Many climate change action leaders from around the state helped the Academy plan and carry out this conference.

Climate Fast Forward 2022 Goals

The 2022 conference planners wanted to build and improve upon the results of the 2019 conference, with additional goals focused on networking and representation:

- ▶ Climate Fast Forward 2022 results in a concrete action plan that results in immediate significant progress on actions from the ideas generated in the 2019 conference.
- ▶ Attendees leave with specific actions to take with new relationships and will grow their networks.
- ▶ Conference attendees represent the whole state.
- ▶ The conference integrates the sciences, arts, and letters.

The theme of Climate Fast Forward 2022 was *accelerating transformational change*. The Academy wanted to build on the ideas generated from the 2019 conference and hone in on climate change solutions that could be successfully implemented in Wisconsin. The 2022 conference brought together change-makers, including seasoned professionals, new voices, and diverse participants representative of the Wisconsin people who are – and will continue to be – most impacted by the effects of climate change in our state. Conference attendees worked collaboratively in facilitated sessions to confront roadblocks and identify immediate as well as long-term actions that will move Wisconsin forward in taking action against the impacts of climate change.

Nearly 400 Wisconsinites attended Climate Fast Forward, representing a variety of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. Although the Wisconsin Academy did not achieve all of its goals related to diversity, equity, and inclusion at the conference, the 2022 conference was more diverse in terms of regional and racial representation than the 2019 conference (2019: 37% outside of southcentral Wisconsin, 89% white; 2022: 44% outside of Dane County, 72% white). Demographic data gathered through voluntary registration questions indicates that 72% of attendees identified as white, 14% as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) and 14% did not report. Youth and young professionals made up 25% of conference attendees, a marked increase from 2019. Participants representing municipal, state, Tribal, and federal governments, education, private businesses, natural climate solutions, food sovereignty, climate justice, architecture, electric vehicles, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other sectors were present at the conference.

At the conference plenary sessions, conference participants learned about the transformative work of leading climate experts. This included a panel on federal programs and funding

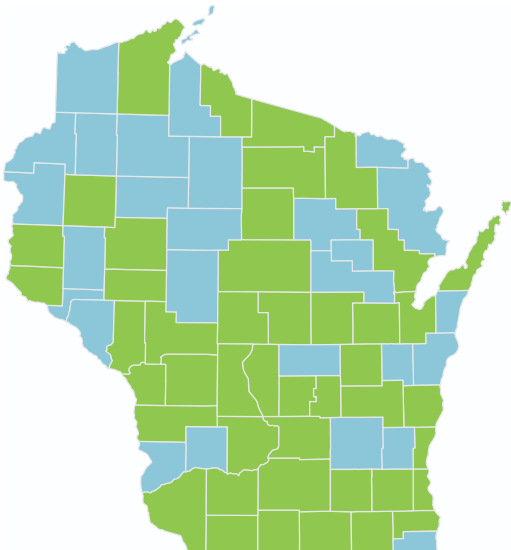


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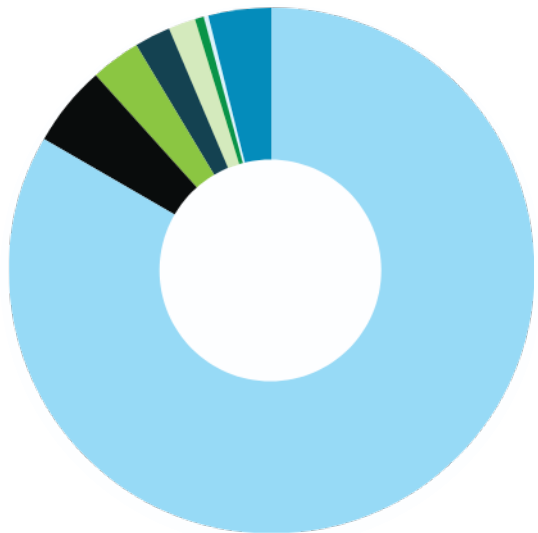


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COUNTY REPRESENTATION



CONFERENCE DEMOGRAPHICS



275	European American/White
17	American Indian/Indigenous or Alaskan Native
10	Latinx/Chicano or Chicana
7	Asian/Asian American
6	African American/African/Black
2	Arab American/Middle Eastern/Northern African
1	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
12	Multiracial

4 Asian/Asian American, European American/White
 3 European American/White, Latinx/Chicano or Chicana
 2 American Indian/Indigenous or Alaskan Native, European American/White, Latinx/Chicano or Chicana
 1 African American/African/Black, Latino/Chicano or Chicana
 1 American Indian/Indigenous or Alaskan Native, European American/White
 1 American Indian/Indigenous or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

opportunities as well as keynote talks by Matt Dannenberg of the Department of Energy and Dr. Jonathan Foley of Project Drawdown.

As is typical with Academy programming, the arts and letters were also represented at this conference. Alexandria Delcourt served as the conference poet, and John Hitchcock served as the conference artist. Both worked with attendees to help create pieces that reflected the thoughts and emotions flowing throughout the conference.

The Academy also made a major effort to engage with leadership from Tribal Nations at Climate Fast Forward 2022. Tribal Nations staff and members lead many aspects of the conference, including poetry, art, an opening ceremony, food sovereignty demonstrations, presentations in the plenary sessions, and a track dedicated to Tribal Nations' concerns about climate change.

The majority of the conference day was spent in facilitated sessions, where attendees worked together to prioritize climate change solutions for Wisconsin.

The appendices are available for online viewing at <https://www.wisconsinacademy.org/climate-fast-forward-2022-resources>.

FACILITATION PROCESS

The Wisconsin Academy hired a professional facilitation designer, Darin Harris of Living Giving Enterprises, to create a specific facilitation plan for Climate Fast Forward 2022. The following summarizes the facilitation plan; the complete agenda is included in [Appendix I](#).

Under the guidance of track leaders Sara Smith and Dylan Jennings, the Traditional Perspectives on the Environment track took a different facilitation path that focused more on relationship building between Native and non-Native partners. The facilitation process for Traditional Perspectives on the Environment is detailed in detail in that track’s section of this plan.



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For the other four tracks, the goal of the facilitation process was to identify climate change solution actions that participants feel are the most important and achievable for Wisconsin to take immediately in order to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions or allow its natural and human communities to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Prior to the conference, each of the track leaders worked together to create background papers proposing actions and strategies that the leaders felt were important and appropriate for Wisconsin to mitigate or adapt to climate change impacts. Those background papers were published on [the resources page](#) for the Climate Fast Forward conference, and were required reading for conference participants. The goals and strategies put forth in these background papers served as the jumping off point for discussions among participants at the conference.

At the conference, track leaders presented their chosen actions and strategies to the larger group in the track. After this presentation, the larger group was invited to discuss these offerings and then propose their own goals or strategies if they were not covered by the leaders' offerings. Participants offered these to the larger track group.

All goals and strategies (both those proposed by the track leaders and by participants) were written down on large flipcharts and displayed around the room. The facilitator asked participants to move together around the flip chart displaying a strategy or goal that they personally felt was an important climate change solution. These newly formed groups worked together to identify actions that would support that goal or strategy, and then identified the top three actions using sticky dots.

Following these facilitation steps, each track had a group of 30-50 proposed climate change actions. The facilitator guided participants through two rounds of voting for actions to move forward based on the following criteria.

ACHIEVABLE: This can mean bold and innovative, but not outrageous. This is about actions that are “doable” given the realities of our state.

IMPACTFUL: This means the action reduces/stores greenhouse gas emissions, or reduces the impact of climate change on Wisconsin communities.

EQUITABLE: It is critical that actions “lift all boats” and not just benefit some or have large negative impacts on BIPOC or rural communities.

Following these two rounds of voting, the leaders and facilitator tallied up the sticky dots and identified the top ten climate change actions selected through the facilitation process. The participants divided into groups around each of these ten actions to create a context-action-result (CAR) chart depicting a storyboard for each action. One person from each group stayed with the resulting CAR chart and presented this storyboard to the larger group, allowing time for feedback and improvement to the chart.

The plan authors (who also served as track leaders) have compiled the top recommended actions in the following section of this plan. In addition to the actions that came out of the facilitated track sessions, the plan authors included actions that came from the background papers distributed to participants ahead of the conference. These are actions that the track leaders, who are leaders and experts in climate change action, deemed essential for moving the state forward on climate change action in the immediate future.

To move forward on proposed actions, participants were encouraged to identify champions. These champions are committed to leading on the actions outlined and are recognized as leaders already working in this space, while also recognizing that none of the actions in this plan can be accomplished by a single organization alone. Each of the committed champions agreed to be identified as such in conversations with staff at the Wisconsin Academy. Any organization or agencies listed as “suggested champions” are ones that conference attendees identified as potential leaders, but have not committed to being designated as a champion on that action.

CONTEXT (Set-up, Beginning)	ACTION (Confirmation, Middle)	RESULT (Resolution, End)
<p><i>Brainstorm, Talk, Draw</i></p> <p>What is happening to create the need for action? Who are the people most affected and who should be engaged?</p>	<p><i>Brainstorm, Talk, Draw</i></p> <p>What is a MAJOR action you wish to take? When should this action begin and end?</p>	<p><i>Brainstorm, Talk, Draw</i></p> <p>What is the end result? Decide using impact criteria.</p> <hr/> <p>ONE “immediate step” to take to get the idea going strong</p> <p>Champion - Person/organization that will commit to supporting and driving this idea.</p>

Source: Paul Smith’s Lead with Story CAR Model / (Aristotle’s 3 Act)

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Leaders: Anna Haines (College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point), Nick Hylla (Midwest Renewable Energy Association), Gregg May (1000 Friends of Wisconsin)

This track focused on the built environment, including land use and development, transportation issues, and renewable energy within urban and rural areas.

The built environment “touches all aspects of our lives, encompassing the buildings we live in, the distribution systems that provide us with water and electricity, and the roads, bridges, and transportation systems we use to get from place to place. It can generally be described as the man-made or modified structures that provide people with living, working, and recreational spaces. Creating all these spaces and systems requires enormous quantities of materials.” ([Basic Information about the Built Environment | US EPA, 2022](#)).



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Practitioners, researchers and others have been addressing the built environment and its environmental and climate footprint for many years. One overarching strategy to create more equitable, sustainable, and livable communities is the adoption of smart growth policies. Smart growth policies include higher-density housing, smaller home sizes, more public spaces, and increased use of public transit. In addition, adequate green spaces, walkability and climate-friendly design of urban form have been advocated for by public health practitioners and planners. Finally, green infrastructure, natural lands conservation, and renewable energy are also supported by climate and planning practitioners. These kinds of policies are designed to reduce negative environmental impacts and encourage affordable housing, active lifestyles, and equitable, healthy, livable, resilient, and sustainable communities. Local governments are responsible for land use and local transportation systems and can play a critical role in decarbonization. At the same time, the state plays a critical role in helping local governments decarbonize through state laws, funding, and other mechanisms.

When it comes to energy conservation and clean energy investments, local units of government are often restricted by state and utility policy, leaving local actions inadequate to meeting most carbon reduction goals. These restrictions take the form of limiting access to financing, utility rate design that limits the financial viability of efficiency and distributed generation investments, limiting local energy investment opportunities such as community solar facilities, and inadequate transparency and planning horizons for jurisdictions to confidently develop and implement zero-carbon energy strategies. Legislation in neighboring states has opened opportunities for community solar (MN and IL), third-party financing (IA, IL, and MI), community choice aggregation (IL and OH), and on-bill financing for energy efficiency (KS, MO, IL, and MN). Neighboring states (MN and MI) have also established detailed and transparent long-term planning processes, known as integrated resource plans, that help to control costs and expand ratepayer energy efficiency and distributed energy resources to manage demand.

Conference attendees identified a number of key goals related to energy, transportation, and land use.

Goal 1: **Increase Wisconsin's stock of energy efficient buildings.**

ACTION 1A: Educate landlords about federal funding to improve energy efficiency.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Wisconsin has many inefficient rental buildings that run on coal powered electricity or propane tanks, and produce lots of greenhouse gas emissions.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: A consortium of stakeholders including nonprofits, Sustain Dane, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Habitat for Humanity, UW–Extension, and faith-based organizations comes together to advocate to landlords and the federal government about the

benefits of energy efficient buildings, including higher property values, higher comfort, lower energy costs, and lower housing costs.

RESULT: More rental units with energy-efficient component, including new windows, solar panels, insulation, heat pumps, and induction ranges. Better, cleaner, and cheaper rental housing. Good, green jobs stay in Wisconsin.

* **Champion needed**

ACTION 1B: Continuously update the state's commercial and residential building energy codes. This is a state legislative action that would influence new construction.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Buildings have a large energy footprint, including the types of materials used in construction, such as concrete. The International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) is the most widely adopted model energy code, but it has not been adopted in Wisconsin.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Allow local communities to implement their own ordinances that are more stringent than the state energy codes so long as they clearly provide for compliance with the state and local codes and permit the creation of a local stretch code.

Wisconsin adopts the most current energy code without amendment (unless specific provisions are not feasible or cost-effective in Wisconsin) and establishes a process for more regularly updating the state code to align with the model code through the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services and the Wisconsin legislature.

* **Champion needed**

ACTION 1C: Repurpose existing buildings.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Wisconsin has deteriorating building stock and inefficient buildings that emit greenhouse gases.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Incentivize upgrading and reinvesting vs. demolishing (TIF, zoning, and permit processes). Engage owners, occupants, neighbors, and municipality developer/potential owners. **2)** Connect federal funding to affordable housing subsidies.

RESULT: Reduced waste, preservation of embodied energy, less blight, energy-efficiency, increased housing, neighborhood preservation, and engaged neighbors.

Champion: City of Madison and other cities and villages around the state

GOAL 2:**Organize stakeholders at all levels to direct federal government funding from the Inflation Reduction Act and other programs to Wisconsin.**

ACTION 2A: Create a comprehensive stakeholder plan to leverage state and federal programs to increase energy efficiency.

CURRENT CONTEXT: A large amount of federal funding is becoming available, and there is a diverse range of projects in Wisconsin that could be funded. There are many different stakeholders, and a complex grid of opportunities to navigate.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Stakeholders gather to create a process for distributing funding to industry, local and state agencies, and individual homeowners.

RESULT: Wisconsinites receive funding and retrofit or build more energy-efficient buildings.

* **Champion needed**

ACTION 2B: Focus on Energy alignment with the Inflation Reduction Act to advance ratepayer distributed energy resources and energy-efficiency investments with emphasis on low- and moderate-income ratepayers.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Focus on Energy funding is flat and Wisconsin has a big carbon footprint with high greenhouse gas emissions.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Create an advisory committee to the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin. The advisory committee receives information from working groups, with one working group focused on equity. **2)** Create a web portal that will serve as a one-stop shop for funding. Launch community-based organization outreach (involve UW–Extension and others) to raise awareness about the portal.

RESULT: People have more funding for energy-efficiency projects and greenhouse gas emissions are lower.

Suggested champion: Wisconsin Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy

ACTION 2C: Public education incorporating social science to support customer investments in energy-efficiency.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Low- to moderate-income individuals are unaware of the energy efficiency resources available for them through IRA and other programs. There is an unintentional barrier between people who distribute funding and those who should be receiving it.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Educating the public on opportunities available for them through programs like IRA by mid-2023 through digital media, newspapers, word of mouth, community-based organizations, and government communications.

RESULT: Low-to moderate-income individuals are aware of and incentivized to use or receive funds through IRA or other programs to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, contributing to net-zero goals.

Suggested champion: Wisconsin Office of Energy Innovation

GOAL 3: **Increase the use of renewable energy in Wisconsin including renewable natural gas.**

ACTION 3A: Increase the use of dairy/wastewater biogas for renewable natural gas.

CURRENT CONTEXT: In Wisconsin, solid waste from cows is used to create electricity via a generator at a rate of 2-3 cents per kilowatt hour, which is no longer financially viable. In California biogas is used for renewable natural gas generation at a lower rate, but has a heavy initial investment.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Increase net metering from 20kw to 2000kw, increasing the value to 10-12kwh. **2)** Increase market sellers' access to interstate pipelines.

RESULT: More digesters that are more economically viable for producers and lower GHG emissions.

* Champion needed

Goal 4: **Reduce driving (VMT, or vehicle miles traveled) by increasing trips via walking, biking, and public transit, and through more compact urban and suburban design.**

ACTION 4A: Advocate for laws that support alternate forms of transportation.

CURRENT CONTEXT: In Wisconsin, high-quality infrastructure connects automobiles to every place people need to go and provides plenty of parking. At the same time, infrastructure for low-emission forms of travel such as buses, passenger rail, trains, biking, and walking is severely lacking. This has created a transportation system that produces too many greenhouse gas emissions and prevents alternative, more sustainable modes of travel.

Beyond emissions, our transportation system also harbors deep inequalities. Communities of color are disproportionately affected by our historic infrastructure investments, including

exposure to more vehicle pollution and increased risk of pedestrian injury and death. Providing more transportation options and reducing VMT will create a more equitable and sustainable transportation system.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Create a partnership of diverse stakeholders to apply pressure to the legislature to change the law and create funding for sustainable transportation options. This could include employers struggling to find workers, impacted transit riders, unions, Wisconsin Policy Forum, non-profits, and more.

RESULT: Laws are changed to create regional transportation authorities and fund collaboration between counties and municipalities in Wisconsin. These authorities build infrastructure for walking, biking, and transit that matches our high-quality roads. Workers will be able to get to jobs and everyone will have better access to basic goods, healthcare, and social connections.

* Champion needed

ACTION 4B: Create two regional transportation and transit networks to address safety concerns.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Wisconsin's infrastructure connects different regions via cars, but not buses, trains, bikes, and other alternative forms of transportation.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Pass legislation that allows and funds regional transportation authorities.

RESULT: Regional transportation authorities work to get Wisconsinites moving throughout the state without cars.

* Champion needed

ACTION 4C: Ensure federal infrastructure money (BIL and IRA) is spent on sustainable modes of transportation.

CURRENT CONTEXT: With the recent federal legislation providing discretionary money for state departments of transportation projects across the country, it is important to ensure that this money is spent in a way that reduces emissions. If current trends hold, it will mean more money going to highways and very little going to bikes, pedestrians, or trains.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Show the benefit of existing alternative transportation networks, and advocate for BIL and IRA money going to sustainable transportation by talking to the legislature and influencing the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). A campaign could include grassroots organizations including the Wisconsin Bike Federation, passenger rail groups, and private businesses that would benefit from access to a larger pool of workers.

RESULT: IRA and BIL money is distributed by the WisDOT to fund alternative forms of transportation.

Suggested champion: Wisconsin Department of Transportation

ACTION 4D: Build compactly and place the range of human land uses (housing, shopping, etc.) close to each other so that people can easily walk, bike, use public transit, or drive shorter distances. Place these land uses in the least vulnerable locations (to floods, for example) as possible.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Recent trends have seen people move both into and out of urban areas. In Wisconsin, some urban areas are becoming more dense and compact, while others continue to sprawl.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Update comprehensive plans. Include sections focused on resilience; for example, how strategies to achieve additional density in particular areas of a community, such as a downtown. **2)** Update zoning ordinances based on the comprehensive plan or other plans created in a community. New zoning districts may be needed. **3)** Map areas more vulnerable to flooding. **4)** Measure housing density in Wisconsin cities every 5-10 years. **5)** Measure vehicle miles traveled each year in Wisconsin.

RESULT: Wisconsinites can more easily get where they need to go without driving (less vehicle miles driven) and are less vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

* **Champion needed**

Goal 5: Require the WisDOT to account for the carbon-emission impacts of the projects they pursue.

ACTION 5A: Direct the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to perform climate and environmental justice impact analyses as transportation-related projects are considered and developed.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Transportation is the largest contributor to climate change in the United States, with personal automobile usage representing 59% of all transportation emissions. At present, WisDOT's decision making process is internal and opaque. Climate impacts are not a major factor. Other states, like Virginia and Colorado, have a transparent process that ranks projects based on criteria and allows climate impacts to influence the decision-making process.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Working with the Wisconsin Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy, meet with WisDOT leaders to discuss this action. Create a timeline and path forward to implement this policy.

RESULT: WisDOT will implement the recommendation from the Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change and analyze and report the carbon emissions and environmental justice impacts associated with future transportation projects. The carbon and climate impact analysis should include an evaluation of a project’s potential impacts on VMTs and transportation-related carbon emissions, and an assessment of climate resilience.

Suggested champion: Wisconsin Department of Transportation

CLIMATE JUSTICE & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Leaders: Antonio Butts (Walnut Way Conservation Corp.), Deneine Powell (City of Milwaukee's Environmental Collaboration Office)

The impacts of climate change and solutions to climate change are happening right now in the communities where people live, work, worship, and play. Yet societal, political, and cultural divides prevent us from working collectively on climate solutions. The goal of this track was to break down barriers to collective action and allow individuals and organizations to visualize the relationship between the community, government, and private sectors in the fight against climate change. We identified the top solutions that can lead to collective action and impact in our communities, recognizing that no one entity or organization is capable of solving climate problems without the input, assistance, and cooperation of others. Our work impacts everyone, and it impacts vulnerable communities most.



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Goal 1: Create a Climate Coalition of Wisconsin.

ACTION 1A: Coordinate the ongoing efforts of the Wisconsin Environmental Justice and Infrastructure Initiative (WEJII), clean energy organizations, and other organizations and partnerships.

CONTEXT: Wisconsin is poised to embark on a new era for its people, its environment, and its economy with the help of new federal funding and state and local leadership. Several climate, energy, and conservation organizations along with businesses and allies are forming a new coalition in Wisconsin. December 2022 will mark the formal launch of the coalition and its programs.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Identify organizations, communities, and leaders in justice-related work, including outreach, who should be involved in this coalition. **2)** Convene a meeting of leaders from WEJII along with stakeholders identified in the previous action step.

RESULT: The formation of a powerful coalition will successfully lead the change effort. A statewide coalition will host working groups on key policy pillars, provide access to shared resources, drive common campaigns, and convenes an annual ambition setting summit. Together, coalition membership and events will serve as a reliable, action-oriented platform for the work at hand, allowing Wisconsin communities to adopt the best possible climate and environmental policies.

* Champion needed

Goal 2: Develop climate action plans in communities across the state.

ACTION 2A: Integrate climate action planning into existing planning processes and ensure equity in all processes.

CONTEXT: Planning processes are siloed. Climate action plans are separate from comprehensive plans, hazard mitigation plans, agriculture plans, and other strategic planning processes. Some communities lack funding, housing, food, water, and other basic needs. Many organizations leading the climate change movement are interested in helping to address these basic needs, even though they intersect with the impacts of climate change. The best path forward starts with understanding partner needs and priorities and aligning climate action to meet those needs, while forging ahead with the initiatives. This may seem like a lot to take on, but it will result in an equitable outcome for community-based partnerships and trust building.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Identify stakeholders (will likely emerge from the Climate Justice Coalition of Wisconsin). **2)** Schedule and conduct a planning kick-off meeting. **3)**

Conduct listening sessions to gather input from communities and learn what matters most to them. **4)** Map out collaboration options and include key players. **5)** Prioritize climate actions.

RESULT: Planning and climate change are part of a feedback cycle. The climate change community is more diverse and inclusive, and relationships between climate justice and mainstream organizations are stronger. Climate change planning and other strategic planning processes are embraced by Wisconsin communities.

* **Champion needed**

Goal 3: Ensure equity and just transition in climate solutions.

ACTION 3A: Provide resources for leaders (money, training, and leadership development) and help frontline organizations advocate for racial justice.

CONTEXT: There is a disconnect between mainstream environmental organizations and those focused on environmental justice, with a desire from both sides to create more connections. Mainstream environmental organizations are saying “We need to get more BIPOC involved in climate advocacy!” to each other in predominantly white spaces. Groups focused on social justice are saying “We need to get mainstream environmental groups to support our environmental justice and social justice efforts” to each other. There are very few BIPOC in leadership positions in mainstream environmental organizations.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Create a bridge between mainstream organizations and social justice organizations. Provide opportunities to develop trust, create authentic relationships, and find common ground. **2)** Ensure that meetings are accessible, e.g. provide childcare and/or translation services. **3)** Provide resources and funding to support BIPOC leadership in environmental organizations. **4)** Advocate for nonprofit engagement in blue/green job force development. **5)** Invite environmental justice leaders to present to mainstream environmental organizations. Those organizations go on to support social justice efforts, and social justice is woven into the fabric of environmental work. This will be an ongoing process of intentional learning.

RESULT: Mainstream and environmental justice come together in the same space and work together. The needs of climate justice communities are centered in climate change action. More BIPOC leaders assume positions of power at environmental organizations.

* **Champion needed**

Goal 4:

Create or establish local climate and environmental justice groups and connect with other groups to work towards collective impact.

ACTION 4A: Bring in community leaders/champions (bridgers) to serve as ambassadors to their communities.

CONTEXT: Climate change, equity, BIPOC, and healthcare-focused movements are separated from each other. The communities that are most impacted by these problems do not always have a seat at the table.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Identify organizations, communities, and leaders in justice-related work, including outreach. **2)** Bring leaders to the table to discuss policy decisions.

RESULT: A diverse coalition with representation from many communities.

Champion: The Wisconsin Environmental Justice and Infrastructure Initiative and local leaders

Goal 5:

Increase community awareness of climate solutions.

ACTION 5A: Build relationships and trust by highlighting examples of successful climate change solutions in Wisconsin communities.

CONTEXT: Communities across the state are isolated from each other. Some organizations and individuals are successfully implementing climate change solutions, but others in Wisconsin are unaware of these successes. This contributes to climate nihilism and anxiety.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** A non-governmental organization (NGO) creates and maintains a publicly accessible database with actions/projects, locations, categories, dates, impacts, communities, and goals for each successful case study, and manages and maintains the database. **2)** The NGO creates outreach events highlighting success stories in the database, giving people across Wisconsin the chance to connect and learn from each other.

RESULT: Open discourse and ideas spreading to more communities.

Champion: Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters

GREEN JOBS & THE NEW ECONOMY

Leaders: Tom Eggert (Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council), John Imes (Wisconsin Environmental Initiative)

In addition to the moral reasons to address climate change, there are numerous economic justifications for acting now. By investing in clean energy, clean transportation, clean manufacturing, and natural carbon solutions while we green our infrastructure and electrify our building and transportation stock, we can stimulate the economy and add thousands of green jobs to Wisconsin. These green jobs can create new economic opportunities in overlooked communities by both improving infrastructure and employing those marginalized by the current economy. This section begins with the goal of accelerating the transition to a green economy, where growth in employment and income is driven by public and private investment into economic activities, infrastructure and assets that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource efficiency, improved economic justice, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.



Wisconsin Academy

Goal 1: Build out a clean energy economy.

ACTION 1A: Expand the use of community solar, electricity storage, and microgrids and expand low-cost, small-scale solar projects at businesses, educational institutions, hospitals, churches, and nonprofit organizations.

CURRENT CONTEXT: The use of community solar, microgrids and small-scale solar projects is still at the experimental stage.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Authorize and fully utilize third-party solar financing arrangements to include both solar leases and power purchase agreements (PPAs). **2)** Accelerate smart grid technology and interconnection upgrades to the transmission network.

RESULT: Greater adoption of clean energy technologies.

Suggested champion: The Public Service Commission (working with utilities around the state)

Goal 2: Improve energy efficiency and the existing housing stock.

ACTION 2A: In order to access the greatest amount of IRA funding, prevailing wage requirements must be understood and met and apprenticeship programs must be accessed. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) will coordinate the development of apprenticeship programs and work with the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) to ensure industry partners understand prevailing wage requirements.

CURRENT CONTEXT: A minority of building/retrofitting projects currently use prevailing wage requirements and apprenticeship programs in the building trades are woefully under-developed.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Broaden the understanding about requirements of the IRA for the building sector. The DOA should work with technical and community colleges, labor unions, DWD, and under-represented workers to develop a greater variety of apprenticeship programs and raise the level of understanding related to the prevailing wage requirements of the IRA. **2)** Capitalize on Wisconsin's nationally recognized Focus on Energy program to fully access and distribute funding available through the IRA's Energy Efficiency and Electrification provisions that include \$10 billion in rebates, grants, and other incentives to make housing (including multifamily housing) healthier and more energy efficient. **3)** Update state and local building codes to require that all buildings be designed to have all energy needs met with electricity, incentivize the use of air/ground-source heat pumps, and require a cost-benefit analysis of high-efficiency upgrades. **4)** Universities and other educational

institutions, hospitals, churches, and nonprofit organizations should access energy efficiency funding through the direct pay provisions of the federal IRA law.

RESULT: A diverse workforce trained in green building and energy efficiency. Wisconsin makes the most of the IRA and the state's building stock is more efficient and have lower GHG emissions.

Suggested champions: Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development and Department of Administration

Goal 3: Grow green jobs, work force participation, and education.

ACTION 3A: The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Wisconsin Technical College System should develop career pathways for young people in the green building and clean energy sector. The Green and Healthy Schools Program should develop new curricula that integrates the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals into curricular standards for K-12 education. Apprenticeship programs should be grown and strengthened.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Most educators lack knowledge of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and how they can be integrated into education at all levels. In addition, there is inadequate information available to school counselors as they guide high school students in career planning.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Develop career pathways in the green building and clean energy sectors for students not planning on attending college. **2)** Increase support for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education starting in middle school. Include sustainability in a periodic revision of DPI curricular standards.

RESULT: Better prepared students who can immediately join the workforce in a family supporting job or go on to higher education in sustainability and participate in the green economy.

Champion: Wisconsin Technical College System

Goal 4: Jump start clean energy manufacturing.

ACTION 4A: Design clear, timely and readily accessible information to leverage IRA and BIL funding (including tax credits) with targeted grants from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), loans, and business development to expand clean energy technology manufacturing.

CURRENT CONTEXT: The current (old) economy is based on mass consumption of fossil fuels and creates large amounts of carbon emissions. Information about federal dollars available to businesses is limited and not easily accessed.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** The Wisconsin Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy (OSCE) should coordinate with the DOA and the WEDC to create an accessible and understandable database of funding opportunities, and develop a system to regularly promote and share the information. This central hub of information will engage with the Wisconsin Local Government Climate Coalition, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Wisconsin Counties Association, sovereign nations, private manufacturers and contractors, state agencies (Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, Office of Energy Innovation, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Revenue, WEDC, DOA), community organizations (NGOs etc), educational institutions, healthcare institutions and labor unions. **2)** The Midwest Renewable Energy Association and the Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council would function as disseminators of information, distributing communications to their respective networks. **3)** Train IRA “translators” to help Wisconsinites access and use IRA funds. There is a gap between what a homeowner wants/ can access and what funding is available just as there is a gap between contractors’ knowledge and those disseminating IRA funds. An IRA translator can bridge this gap.

RESULT: A new, clean, economy, based on renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and biofuel digesters, with people being employed in these industries.

Suggested champion: Wisconsin Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy

Goal 5: Ramp up clean transportation and supporting infrastructure.

ACTION 5A: Lead by example: state, local governments and businesses should each commit 50% of replacement vehicle budgets to electric vehicles and install a minimum of two charging stations for parking facilities. WisDOT should increase investment in solar roadways, wind turbines along medians, and the NextGen Highways collaboration with transmission and broadband infrastructure.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Every year, fleet vehicles need to be replaced. For most institutions, sustainability is not a factor in fleet replacement decisions. In addition, WisDOT invests only a small amount in research and development on innovations like solar roadways.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Fast-track the federally approved Wisconsin Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Plan, which includes \$79 million to establish an electric vehicle corridor of fast-charging stations to give Wisconsin a competitive, first-mover advantage. In addition, require local governments and school districts to prioritize the expansion of electrically powered fleets, school, and transit buses. **2)** WisDOT should create a multi-sector committee

with University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin counties (some pilot areas), the League of Wisconsin Municipalities (some pilot areas), the Wisconsin Towns Association (some pilot areas), utility leadership, broadband leadership and the Federal Highway Administration to align new transmission and broadband infrastructure with highway corridors.

RESULT: There are more electric vehicles (including buses) in Wisconsin and charging them is faster and easier. As citing transmission and broadband infrastructure becomes more difficult, develop the NextGen Highway which envisions infrastructure running alongside the roadway.

Suggested champions: Local governments, school districts, Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the Wisconsin Department of Administration

ACTION 5B: Increase public understanding and use of electric vehicles and electric vehicle infrastructure in Wisconsin.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Limited understanding about and thus, limited buy-in to, electric vehicles. Lots of questions and misinformation.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Identify partners trusted by the public to share information about electric vehicles and the experience of driving them. These might include auto dealers (train their sales staff), UW–Extension agents, car and truck rental organizations, and internet influencers.

RESULT: Local people are aware of and invested in electric vehicle charging.

Champion: Wisconsin Clean Cities

Goal 6: Embrace and adopt climate-smart agriculture.

ACTION 6A: The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) should align programs and initiatives to ensure rural communities and cooperatives, farmers, and small businesses have access to expertise and the capability to tap into the \$30 billion in IRA direct investments in agricultural conservation programs, renewable energy, improved efficiency and carbon capture to benefit farmers' bottom line.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Farmers and other rural Wisconsinites have often been excluded from green job development. Waste products generated by farmers are not being utilized to the furthest extent possible, which is a missed opportunity.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** DATCP will provide information and support to Wisconsin farmers, cooperatives, and food processors so that they can harness IRA funds. **2)** The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture should prioritize planning grants and use IRA funds to develop a grant/loan program that establishes a network of on-farm and regional biodigesters to produce renewable natural gas and demonstrate the co-benefits and financial value associated with agriculture clean energy projects.

RESULT: 40% of waste products biodigested, carbon emissions are reduced, air quality improved, and farmers benefit.

Champions: Cooperatives like Organic Valley and United Cooperative and (suggested) Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

NATURAL & WORKING LANDSCAPES

Leaders: Ann Calhoun (The Nature Conservancy), Barbara Decré (Savanna Institute), Erin O'Brien (Wisconsin Wetlands Association)

We are fortunate to have a diversity of native ecosystems in Wisconsin, and their distribution is a result of interactions between climate, geology, soils, hydrology, and land stewardship. Relative to other types of land uses, Wisconsin's natural and working lands store large amounts of carbon and can be protected and restored to maximize storage and sequestration. Society also depends on a diversity of *ecosystem services*, or benefits derived from these lands. The increased frequency of extreme weather events threatens the capacity of these lands to store and sequester carbon and to support natural and human communities. The consequences of inaction negatively affect both ecosystem and public health, as well as local economies. Examples include but are not limited to: changing pest and disease dynamics, loss of biodiversity and productive soils, excessive nutrients in our waters, increased flood damages, and more.

In this track we explored strategies to maintain or increase landscape-scale carbon storage, protect biodiversity, and increase resilience.



Wisconsin Academy

Strategy 1:

Establish collaborations to better understand and quantify carbon stocks and the value of climate-related ecosystem services provided by natural and working landscapes.

ACTION 1A: Establish a Wisconsin Natural Climate Solutions Task Force (WNCSTF) to integrate rural and urban public, civic, and private stakeholders to drive cohesive planning and implementation.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Wisconsin lacks a statewide body to address natural climate solutions for working lands, natural areas, and built environments. There is a need for bold, transformational change that is driven by a cohesive, collaborative strategy.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Identify convener organization to house the task force. **2)** Identify public, civic, and private sector stakeholders to include in the task force. **3)** The task force creates a Wisconsin Natural Climate Solutions strategic plan, and determines the scale of implementation.

RESULT: The Wisconsin Natural Climate Solutions Task Force is established and creates a strategic plan for natural climate solutions in Wisconsin with quantifiable metrics and an achievable timeline. State government acts on information and recommendations from stakeholder groups. The worst impacts of climate change in Wisconsin are avoided when the plan is implemented.

* Champion needed

ACTION 1B: Create a centralized resource of existing framework templates, funding sources, other resources, and model action projects. Share these successful case studies through outreach events throughout Wisconsin.

CURRENT CONTEXT: There are many different interest groups with a lack of cohesion between groups. There is also a need for equity and for identifying highly impacted populations.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTION: Identify an organization to lead on this task. This decision should come from the Wisconsin Natural Climate Solutions Task Force.

RESULT: Communities are connected to resources and programs based on their needs and interests.

* Champion needed

ACTION 1C: Convene a Wisconsin Grassroots Farm Bill Summit.

CURRENT CONTEXT: American farm policy has driven commodity export production for more than 50 years. Some commodity crop producers depend on high inputs of fertilizers and pesticides and large mechanized equipment (including irrigation), all of which require fossil fuels. Conventional practices also contribute to polluted runoff and soil depletion. Few Americans understand the role the Farm Bill plays in shaping agricultural practices and its climate footprint, and Congress is about to consider a new Farm Bill.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Convene a Wisconsin Grassroots Farm Bill Summit to build connections among those working on climate and agriculture, as well as those working in health, small communities and rural development, water quality, wildlife conservation (including hunting and fishing), and other interested stakeholders. Participants will identify shared concerns and opportunities to promote “good neighbor” farming practices through public policy and laws like the Farm Bill. **2)** “Good neighbor” agriculture aims to diversify food production and reduce farming’s carbon and environmental footprint through sound land and water conservation practices, thereby optimizing healthy soils (and thus natural carbon storage). This will result in lower emissions, more locally produced food, and healthier soil and streams.

RESULT: Leaders with shared concerns establish a network to continue collaborating. They identify specific strategies to encourage or incentivize shifts to more resilient farming practices (e.g., Farm Bill modifications or other policy opportunities) and agree on specific actions that they can advance through mutual cooperation. These policy shifts reduce greenhouse gas emissions, rebuild healthy soils and clean water, and strengthen rural communities in Wisconsin.

Suggested champion: Wisconsin Farmers Union

Strategy 2: Conserve Wisconsin landscapes that provide vital ecological services.

ACTION 2A: Conduct research on the extent and vulnerability of existing carbon stocks and ecosystem services. Apply research to protection and restoration strategies.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Nature is undervalued and we are lacking robust data for all kinds of ecosystem services. We do not know enough about what we have or what we can do. Landowners, policy makers, researchers, and other stakeholders do not work together.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Generate data and perform quantitative synthesis to provide high-confidence knowledge about ecosystem services provisioning from current landscapes and future alternatives. **2)** Communication and outreach to decision makers, foresters,

farmers, policy makers, corporate leaders, researchers, and greenhouse gas measurement, reporting, and verification providers.

RESULT: Decision makers can act on what we know, and act to fill in the blanks about what we do not know.

* Champion needed

ACTION 2B: Restore wetlands and floodplains to increase storage, decrease peak flows, recharge groundwater, and maintain base flow.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Loss of upper watershed wetland storage and floodplain disconnection accelerates the volume and velocity of runoff during storm events. This increases erosion, inundation, and downstream damages to roads, bridges, homes, and farms. Local government and all Wisconsinites are impacted.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Generate data needed to restore hydrology (the flow of water) and increase resilience. This could be achieved by aligning existing state-supported data collection efforts or by establishing funding to help flood-prone communities identify where and how the loss of wetland storage contributes to downstream flooding. **2)** Invest in upper watershed wetland restoration and floodplain reconnection work focused on reducing flood risks and damages. This requires work on public and privately owned lands. **3)** Support efforts to quantify the multiple benefits that wetlands/floodplain restoration provides.

RESULT: Wetland/floodplain acreage restored at scales large enough to reduce peak flooding, decrease damage caused by flood events, improve water quality, recharge groundwater, maintain base flow, and increase metric tons of carbon stored.

Champion: Wisconsin Wetlands Association

Strategy 3:

Develop mechanisms to fund the adoption and implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in natural and agricultural landscapes.

ACTION 3A: Establish an outdoor fund to support natural climate solutions work in Wisconsin.

CURRENT CONTEXT: Communities, land trusts, nonprofits, and government agencies lack funds to conduct climate change research, implement natural climate solutions, conserve and restore land for climate adaptation and mitigation, and to provide land access.

RECOMMENDED FIRST ACTIONS: **1)** Create a working group in the Wisconsin Natural Climate Solutions Taskforce focused on establishing this fund. **2)** Recruit supportive legislators. **3)** Identify potential new funding streams, such as legalized cannabis, real estate transfer fees, sales of outdoor equipment and specially branded products, philanthropy, corporate

partnerships, and lottery tax. **4)** Identify an entity to hold, publicize, and administer the fund. **5)** Decide which actions will be eligible for funding. **6)** Decide how much funding is allocated and how it will be distributed.

RESULT: A sustainable funding source to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change by protecting and restoring our natural heritage, preventing species extinctions and increasing access to outdoor recreation.

* **Champion needed**

TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Leaders: Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings (Bad River Tribe), Sara Smith (College of Menominee Nation and the Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center)

Forward: Our Story

Indigenous traditions and knowledge are steeped in stories. These stories are part of a greater whole, an interconnected web of stories that has no beginning and no end. As each new story is told, it completes yet another part of this larger narrative. These stories become tools for adaptation and resilience within ecological change. They connect generations by passing down knowledge. They bridge the human and non-human divide and, most importantly, these stories serve as a reminder of each community member's responsibilities.



Wisconsin Academy

In an attempt to honor and celebrate this way of knowing, this plan from the Traditional Perspectives on the Environment track is told in first-person story form by four people involved with track leadership. While the stories shared in this plan do not represent a consensus reached by all Tribal Nations of Wisconsin, they can still serve as a starting point for building more collaborative efforts within and among Native cultures, all peoples of Wisconsin, and our non-human relatives.

Introduction: Told by Christine Kelly

On an early cool fall day, as the trees surrounding Lake Mendota began to unfold their long-hidden colors and the first chill of the winter nipped at our cheeks, we gathered. We gathered as the COVID19 pandemic seemed, for a time, to ease its grip, while the climate change crisis tightened its hold ever more. We gathered in the heart of Madison to join as a circle of trust with hopes of more deeply understanding traditional perspectives on the environment within the context of this growing climate crisis. Our task was straightforward: to brainstorm new action strategies that can rapidly accelerate our statewide response to climate change. We were invited to this circle by Lizzie Condon, the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters' Environmental Initiatives Director. Our track leaders, Sara Smith, citizen of the Oneida Nation and Midwest Tribal Resilience Liaison for the College of Menominee Nation and the Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center, and Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings of the Bad River Tribe, led our charge by inviting those that gathered to help us build more deep and meaningful relationships with Tribal Nations. Our stated goal was:

“Through a multi-year process, we seek to create a space for networking, idea sharing, and collaboration. We hope to create a welcoming and relevant atmosphere for Tribal staff, leadership, and knowledge holders to come together and build mutually beneficial relationships with others working in the climate change arena.”

I, Christine Kelly, agreed to help facilitate this unique open space.

As the design for the conference track discussion protocols unfolded, Lizzie, Dylan, Sara, and I recognized that a different format might be needed if the track was to truly represent its name. Traditional perspectives on the environment begin first and foremost with relationships. We therefore used circles of trust and open space discussion formats as a method of forging deeper relationships amongst the disparate people who attended this track.

A Blessing to All Our Relatives: Told by Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings

Ojibwe and other Indigenous languages are often extremely descriptive and concise. Many times, we run into difficulty in translating our languages to English; there often aren't adequate equivalents when considering Indigenous expressions and concepts. It was important to use our languages to start off the gathering and use the very medicines we were given to help one-another. We passed a dish with burning sage around the room after giving

an explanation about the process. When we are at home or in our community gatherings, everyone simply knows that when we smell those sweet burning scents, we are about to embark on a journey together. Whether it's ceremonial, a meeting, or simply a conversation, our medicines are very often present. Some of my teachers used to talk about the balance that is restored when many of these medicines like sage are burned. It helps to clear our minds and hearts so that we might come together with openness and acceptance of each other. It's also an everlasting reminder that we have values and moral responsibilities to our communities, clans, and the beings that sustain us. As the dish went around, everyone openly participated and we petitioned the *manidoog* to help us come together in a good way and work towards building relationships, so that we might have positive future impact on all of our communities. In *Ojibwemowin* we do not have a word for natural resources. Instead, we refer to *wenji-bimaadiziyang* (from where we get life).

An Invitation: Told by Lizzie Condon

The impetus for the Traditional Perspectives on the Environment track emerged in December 2021. Early in the planning process for Climate Fast Forward 2022, I found a letter from Rob Croll in the 2019 conference's digital archive. Rob is the Climate Change Program Coordinator at the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. In what I came to understand as Rob's polite honesty, he criticized the 2019 conference for a lack of representation and leadership from the Tribal Nations of Wisconsin. Comments from conference attendees echoed a similar sentiment, noting their disappointment in the overall lack of diversity among conference leaders and attendees.

I reached out to Rob and Jeff Mears with the Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WTCAC) to ask for advice on increasing inclusion and participation from Tribal Nations members and staff. Rob and Jeff were longtime supporters and collaborators of the Academy, and both gave me solid advice on how to include Tribal Nations members and staff as leaders and participants at the conference. Along with feedback from other Tribal Nations members, a working group dedicated to Tribal Nations' issues with climate change was created. This group in turn recommended Sara Smith and Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings as conference track leaders. Thankfully, both Sara and Dylan accepted the Academy's request to join the conference as track leaders at what Forrest Funmaker, Agriculture Research and Education Manager at the Ho-Chunk Nation, named the Traditional Perspectives on the Environment track. I was and continue to be grateful to Forrest, Sara, Dylan, Rob, Jeff, and others who shared their time, energy, and ideas with myself and others planning the conference. They helped us to identify different ways that we could learn from and provide leadership to people from the Tribal Nations of Wisconsin at Climate Fast Forward.

Our next step was to invite the twelve Tribal Nations in Wisconsin to send representatives to the conference, and to let them know about funds available for travel and lodging. The Academy secured funding from the Wisconsin Humanities Council to support these efforts. Additional invitations were sent to staff at the environmental or natural resource

departments of each Tribal Nation. While the Academy had hoped to have representatives from every Tribal Nation at the conference, we were only able to secure participation from five. The approximately 40 participants in the Traditional Perspectives on the Environment track were a mix of Tribal Nations members and staff, as well as participants with no Tribal affiliation who were interested in learning more about the Tribal perspective on climate change.

Bringing Our Minds Together as One: Told by Sara Smith

In my culture, we start and end many of our proceedings, events, and business with *Kanehelatúksla*, the Thanksgiving Address. This is a way we show thanks to all of creation and bring our minds together as one before continuing on in our proceedings. It is a way to ground us in the work we are doing, especially those of us who work with the environment and our non-human relatives. In many other Indigenous cultures, it may look more like a prayer, blessing, or invocation, but the intentions are the same: to bring us together, ground us where we are, and set us off or leave us in a good way.

Traditional perspectives are rooted in the environment and built upon the relationships we have had with our environmental relations over millennia. However, traditional perspectives are dynamic and evolve with those beings (aka species) in Indigenous communities. What does this mean? Traditions can change over time, even more so now with climate change impacting Indigenous communities in disproportionate ways. This may look like building new relationships with beings that are new or introduced to the area, or perhaps sharing knowledge with other Indigenous communities about relatives moving away from them into more northern areas regardless of man-made international boundaries. Now, when we talk about non-human relatives we are talking about what is known as natural resources in non-Indigenous cultures. We also acknowledge them as beings as opposed to species, recognizing their autonomy and their own rights. We view them as our elders and teachers and therefore show them respect and reciprocity with everything we do.

We acknowledge that this may be a difficult paradigm shift, given the way many people were raised and taught about the environment. In order to gain a deep understanding of traditional perspectives, these concepts must be carried throughout the conversation and the language we use in speaking and writing. Non-local beings (aka invasive species) are also a big talking point when it comes to climate change and adaptation. These so-called “invasive” beings are only doing what they were told to do as part of their original instructions. This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t remove them when it is necessary; it means shifting our mindsets from eradication to understanding. This track was meant to bring all of our minds together to share and understand traditional perspectives on the environment and what can be collectively done in the face of climate change in Wisconsin, which can only happen when we build relationships with each other and our non-human relatives.

Opening the Circle: Told by Christine Kelly

On October 17, as we gathered at the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center, Sara and Dylan began by exploring this question: “What are traditional perspectives?” They underscored that Tribal Nations’ adaptive way of living is guided by the belief that everything in this world is considered a relative, NOT a resource. Everything, all living and non-living things and all things created and made, is part of our family. In Indigenous cultures, decisions for the use of our relatives were made with a great deal of observation, acknowledgement, respect, and reciprocity throughout the entire community. Sara pointed out that Indigenous sovereign nations have long drawn on these traditional ways of knowing, aiding their ability to measure and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Dylan went on to explain that today’s management and decision-making practices for land and the natural environment are no longer communal, but made by individuals, agencies, and institutions that are often outside of the Tribes charged with the task of monitoring and regulating natural resources. He underscored that when faced with a crisis, non-Native citizens of the United States can move to many places to meet their needs and still live within their nation. Indigenous peoples cannot. This is particularly problematic when Tribal nations’ cultures, spirituality, ways of life, and even key food sources are deeply tied to the ecosystems (i.e., their natural relatives) that they live among. Yet many of their relatives - the trees, the birds, the pollinators, and the wildlife as a whole - are on the move and very soon will no longer share the same home.

Sara then introduced core values from Anishinaabeg tribes that form the basis of their approach to climate change. These include:

- ▶ *Nibwaakkaawin*, Wisdom
- ▶ *Zaagi’idiwin*, Love
- ▶ *Minaadendamowin*, Respect
- ▶ *Zoongide’ewin*, Bravery
- ▶ *Gwayakwaadiziwin*, Honesty
- ▶ *Dabaadedendiziwin*, Humility
- ▶ *Debwewin*, Truth

She also pointed to the [Dibaginjigaadeg Anishinaabe Ezhitwaad: A Tribal Climate Adaption Menu](#) report to help put these values in context.

After Dylan and Sara provided this background on our Tribal nations, we opened what we called a “circle of trust” to all the voices and ways of knowing in the room to be shared. “Circles of trust” are built on the premise that we all have wisdom to share and can learn from one another. Our track participants then sat in small groups of three or four, using the following guidance to begin their conversations.

- ▶ Tell about a time you lived your climate truth out loud even in the face of adversity, or
- ▶ Share a story about a connection you have with a voiceless relative that influenced your values.
- ▶ Share your confidence in our ability to address climate change on a scale of 1 to 10.
- ▶ Share how that number shapes your life right now, and what it will take to move it closer to 10.

As the groups talked, I watched boundaries drop and vulnerable conversations emerge. Most in the room had faced significant adversity in trying to care for the environment. Many felt isolated and disillusioned and none felt like we had a better than 35% change of addressing our climate crisis.

How Values Shape Our World View: Told by Dylan Jennings

Building from these circle conversations, Sara and I asked the group to consider the difference between the competing values of native and non-Native cultures. For many Tribal Nations in the present state of Wisconsin, the environment holds many lessons, stories, and values. For instance, for Ojibwe communities, the very creation story and accompanying origin stories could not be fully told without the *awesiiyag*, our animal relatives. In fact, a major component of our Ojibwe migration journey also revolved around the presence of other beings including the food that grows on water- manoomin. These are examples of how values are created and instilled over time. Every Tribal Nation has stories that relay the significance of the environment and connectedness to place and identity. The notion of reciprocity and the need to maintain these ancient relationships at all costs also compelled the group to challenge understandings of colonialism, capitalism, and value systems that are often obscured by material possessions and capital gain. It was noted that society can always strive to do a better job of understanding some of these original values and worldviews which seek to build and strengthen long-term relationships. Healthy fish populations might mean healthy economy to one person, but to someone else, a healthy fish population may mean the survival of another generation of lifeway.

Our Open Space: Told by Christine Kelly

After lunch our group gathered to begin the process of brainstorming and building action strategies that could help build mutually beneficial relationships between Tribal Nations and others working in the climate change arena. We used a modified Open Space Technology approach. This is a self-organizing approach that allows participants to first share with the entire room the action strategies they are most passionate about discussing and secondly, allows individuals to self-select which of the proposed conversations they would like to join and advance. (To learn more, visit www.openspaceworld.org) Our group sizes ranged from one group of two to several groups of five or more. Each group was tasked with capturing the key elements of their conversation as well as articulating an action strategy story. As Sara and Dylan each joined a group, I rotated around the room to help the remaining groups settle into

their conversations. The room quickly filled with animated voices while some took hold of large poster-sized sheets of paper and colored markers to capture ideas in words and images. A few people did rotate from one group to another, but within ten minutes the room had settled and people were deep in discussion.

Emerging Themes: Told by Lizzie Condon

On the day of the conference, I spent a bit of time floating in and out of Traditional Perspectives on the Environment and other tracks. As I reviewed the posters created by this track and had discussions with Dylan and Sara after the conference, I felt several key themes were emerging from this track.

Indigenous peoples working in climate change spaces feel frustrated and fatigued.

Many of the participants' reflections demonstrated an overall level of frustration and fatigue with the overwhelming task of advancing Indigenous climate change initiatives within a generally uninformed dominant culture. As one Native participant shared, "Not only do we have to exist in spaces and a system that was not designed for us, but we have to keep educating people and telling the same stories again and again." Others noted that the same Tribal representatives are asked repeatedly for help. Additionally, several were frustrated that federal funds already awarded to the Tribes were funneled through state agencies which required additional red tape before releasing these funds. Tribal members expressed a desire for more autonomy, flexibility, and authority over the use of and access to these funds. There was also strong agreement within the room that state and local agencies significantly lack the cultural competencies needed to effectively work in relationship with Tribes. The overall lack of both diversity in staff and agency-wide cultural training were identified as key problems. One participant noted that agencies must take care to create staff positions and hire Indigenous peoples "who are qualified and can hold their own position/point of view, [and] make sure they have the agency, resources, and authority to make decisions."

Incorporating Indigenous cultural values is paramount to forging meaningful engagement with Tribes.

Time and again participants observed that state agencies' connections with Natives mainly resulted from providing regulated services. As one participant reflected: "Most Tribal connections are all about money. [We] want a connection and NOT because of money." Several agreed that a 30-minute structured phone call is a non-Native standard of engagement: "Approach Tribes with respect, not just phone calls." For Tribal members, meaningful engagement and relationship building requires unstructured extended time to share stories, build trust, and foster connection: "Foster real relationships, not just professional ones. Create trust first, then collaboration." Finally, it was noted that Tribal leaders and champions should be found within elders, youth, and non-Native liaisons.

Systemic change can be fostered through storytelling, education, and food resilience programs.

Three of the discussion groups focused on specific programmatic strategies to advance climate change solutions and deepen our cultural understanding of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing. One group focused on nature-based programs and another designed a story collection project. A third focused on building resilient food systems, noting that “we are all connected by food.”

Acknowledge the impact larger social systems and culture paradigms have on our existing problems.

Finally, a small group of out-of-the-box thinkers took on the challenge of articulating the root causes of both Tribal inequities and our current climate crisis, based in the dominant cultural paradigms. They believed the paradigms negatively impacting current Tribal Nations (as well as impeding our efforts to address climate change) are the neoclassical market-based economy and our patriarchal society’s view of land and knowledge ownership. These paradigms are in direct opposition to the largely relational Indigenous paradigm that operates within an ecology-based economy, honors communal decision making, and acknowledges the cosmos as an interconnected living being. As one participant noted, the current dominant paradigms result in a “fundamental lack of recognition of the value of what Tribes bring, values that inherently benefit all of us. The new story of climate change is the old/original story of Indigenous values, which we all have (some further back than others).”

Our Action Strategy Stories: Told by Sara Smith, Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings, and Christine Kelly

As the groups identified these key themes, many of which represented underlying systemic challenges and opportunities, the conversations turned to how we can change these current narratives into rich stories of mutually beneficial relationships that offer hope, trust, knowledge, and caring as we face this ever-changing climate crisis. These were the action strategy stories we heard told:

Ethical Tribal Engagement: Not Just a Checkbox But a Way of Life Told by Sara Smith

Working with other organizations and agencies is not a new concept. However, when it comes to working with Tribal Nations, many seem to not understand the right way to do so. Many times Tribal Nations are approached at the last minute to partner on a project and given very little decision time. I have seen this happen days before a proposal is due. I have also seen Tribal representatives, normally just one or only a small group, contacted in order to check the box on Tribal engagement and consultation when it comes to projects. These ways of going about Tribal engagement are not useful or ethical. In the group I led, we talked about what ethical Tribal engagement looks like and how we envision it happening. This required us to really break down the flaws in the system. It essentially came down to starting with educators. Training current and future K-12 educators in ethical Tribal engagement is important so they can teach this to children and reinforce it throughout the child’s education. This helps embed

the information through repetition so that when the child graduates and goes on they have the correct tools for engagement with Tribal Nations. Some of these tools include:

- ▶ Engaging with Tribes early
- ▶ Increasing cultural competency, including the recognition that every Tribe is unique and has its own history and culture,
- ▶ Doing your homework about the Tribes you intend to work with,
- ▶ Building genuine relationships with Tribal partners and understanding that it takes time to do so,
- ▶ Making sure Indigenous voices are held up along with their knowledges, cultures, and values, and,
- ▶ Ensuring that meetings are in-person, building deeper relationships than by just using Zoom or phone calls.

This curriculum would need to be built to train educators, who would in turn train children based on their age/grade. The next step would be ensuring that it is part of the onboarding process for all state agencies and government officials. Another aspect is increasing the number of Tribal liaisons or justice coordinators within the agencies. All these steps, and the ones in between that we did not have time to talk about, would lead to ethical Tribal engagement becoming a way of life and doing business rather than just a checked box.

Spark Change from the Start: Educators Hold the Keys to Our Future: Told by Christine Kelly

How do you begin to unravel deeply ingrained ethnic discrimination that inhibits cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and meaningful relationships? This was the underlying question that drew a small group to create the Spark project. The group was led by a non-Native participant (who himself had recently experienced strong ethnic discrimination and violence), joined by a tenured educator. They began by focusing their attention on where these biases are first learned. After some discussion, they felt education was the key to breaking free of our legacy of discrimination. Targeting people from all backgrounds and cultures, the key elements of the Spark project include embedding learners within nature and utilizing all our relatives as teachers. The goal of the project is to spark individuals' love of nature, empathy for all cultures and ways of knowing, and a stronger stewardship of all life, which will encourage them to become climate activists. The Spark project learning opportunities would include explicit instruction on the connection between environmental health and human health, on Wisconsin's Indigenous peoples' traditional ways of knowing, and on doable steps to promote environmental health. One suggestion was to include the Spark curriculum within existing environmental education programs throughout the state. Additionally, the group felt the Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education could be a helpful vehicle for providing professional development centered on traditional ways of knowing and for advancing the Spark project around the state.

Build Conduits Where Flow is Needed: Remove Barriers to Knowledge, Ideas, Trust, Connection, and Funding: Told by Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings

A group of diverse participants from various federal, state, and Tribal agencies, along with a few community members, discussed the importance of building bridges and what could be possible if many of the bureaucratic barriers were removed. Some participants that work for agencies lamented that frustrating agency “norms” are not conducive for building strong relationships. Some shared funding issues and agency priorities as major barriers to doing cross-cultural work to address climate change. There was also discussion about many entities publicly announcing their intent to do good work with Tribal Nations, with minimal or no funding to carry out this work. It was also noted that often Wisconsin agencies will appoint one Tribal liaison position to work with eleven federally recognized Tribes, while in some states an entire department is committed to this work. Furthermore, many of these positions tasked with working with Tribal Nations often lack fiscal and decision-making power. Nation-building should be considered a huge priority given that Tribal Nations are often at the forefront in addressing climate change and are also notably impacted by climate extremes. The team finally talked about meaningful mandatory trainings that could be offered and implemented across the state for those that should or want to learn about Tribal communities and effective communication strategies.



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The Frayed Fabric of Our Stories Can Be Rewoven: Rediscover Our Collective Well-Being Threaded Through Shared Stories: Told by Christine Kelly

At a table near the door of the conference room, a larger group of people gathered to more deeply explore the question “What are the Indigenous ways of knowing, and how can these ways of knowing be more widely embraced to foster societal change?” Whenever I checked on the group’s progress, their conversations were almost always intense -sometimes happening

within smaller groups, and other times as a whole group. They oscillated between examining global worldviews and brainstorming specific programmatic strategies. The group’s main focus was on Indigenous peoples’ use of stories to convey cultural values and norms from one generation to the next, recognizing that these stories are grounded in trust in inherited wisdom and the belief that knowledge is collective and ever evolving within the community. As the group formulated their action strategy story, they appeared to work from the premise “we are the stories we tell.”

Today the stories we most often hear –our society’s meta-narrative –are of devastation, inequality, and loss, and often promote consumption, fear, and self-preservation. Too few of these stories share a vision for our collective well-being. The group envisioned a space for stories to be collected and told in an ongoing and threaded way such that the meta-narratives of destruction and individualism that brought our society to this point evolve into shared narratives of well-being that can not only impact specific policies, but transform our societal values. One participant was particularly passionate about better training for Wisconsin writers and journalists to become “a Tribal megaphone for climate change.” This collective of stories would be embedded in place, allowing big stories to connect with little stories and creating conditions for the dominant narrative to shift within the collective by the communities themselves. The group felt the initiative could be modeled after Shine Global (shineglobal.org), a nonprofit online media company producing films and content about children and their families, and connected with the Institute of Collective Wellbeing’s “Collective Wellbeing Stories” project (collectivewellbeingstories.org) headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin.

You Can’t Be Sovereign Unless You Can Feed Yourself: Food Sovereignty is Tribal Sovereignty: Told by Sara Smith

Tribal Nations are sovereign entities, which means that they are independent nations able to govern themselves with their own policies, processes, and systems. This helps in protecting, honoring, and preserving their cultures and traditional ways of life. It also means they have a government-to-government relationship with the United States.



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Tribal sovereignty has many parts. One of them is food sovereignty. Indigenous food sovereignty entails being able to feed your community with traditional foods and medicines (like cranberries, maple syrup, trout, and wild rice), while also supporting Indigenous food markets and producers and regenerative agriculture; being able to tailor the food specifically to meet the community's needs; and being able to harvest, gather, and hunt on reservation and treaty lands. It also entails seed saving, elder food boxes, community supported agriculture (CSA) boxes, and community gardens. Community gardens are not only able to produce local food for the community; they also tie in traditional knowledge, culture, and intergenerational learning. Community gardens bring people together throughout the year, whether it's prepping seeds and the garden, planting, weeding, harvesting, preserving, or saving seeds for the next year. They can also build partnerships with funding organizations and the wider community, like that between the College of Menominee Nation and UW–Madison Extension. Some of the concerns and issues that this working group brought up include having equitable access to knowledge, funding, land, resources, and technical assistance for different crops as well as grant-writing support (for example, assistance in applying and working with USDA programs). While this is just a snapshot of the group's discussion, it is important to recognize that being a sovereign nation means having food sovereignty within the reservation, treaty lands, and the state of Wisconsin and that building an understanding of those needs and rights is important. If we cannot feed ourselves, we are not truly sovereign nations.

Ways to Intervene in a System: Change Our Consciousness: Told by Christine Kelly

This unique action strategy story was first sparked by a Tribal participant who almost walked out of our track, frustrated that we were not talking about the real issues at hand. I first noticed his gift for out-of-the-box thinking during Dylan's presentation, when he noted that maple tree migration and loss data included an assumption of significant maple tree

harvesting. He simply noted that if we stopped cutting the trees down, the loss would not be nearly as rapid. As we organized our afternoon conversations, he again felt most were focusing their efforts on addressing symptoms, not the root problem itself. I invited him to open a space to talk about these root problems. He accepted the invitation, and after being joined by another non-Native systems thinker, they took on the charge.

The two largely spent their time discussing the dominant culture paradigms that are in direct opposition to the advancement of Tribal cultures and values and our attempts to meaningfully address climate change. They discussed the negative impact of a market economy that draws its value from consumption. They noted the challenge of Tribal self-determination and the strong influence of funding: “Our priorities are often defined by what we fund, [therefore] Tribes need more funding.” They felt there was a “fundamental lack of recognition of the value of what Tribes bring” and a strong need to see the priorities of the Tribes as inherently benefitting us all. Ultimately, their action strategy could be stated simply: change the dominant paradigm. They acknowledged that it is hard to change the system from within and no one individual can change a system. As they documented what was possible in the short term, they leveraged key positive feedback loops: education, funding, capacity building, deeper allies, and cultural exchange and immersion for children. The more successful these approaches are, the more the system evolves and new knowledge structures become accessible to larger groups of people, thereby changing our consciousness.

The Ripples We Take with Us: Told by Sara Smith, Dylan Jennings, Lizzie Condon, and Christine Kelly

Literary authors, Native cultures, and neuroscientists alike know the power of story. It begins first by engaging the listener: finding a connection within the listener to their own deeply held personal narratives. In fact, as a person listens to a story, their brain waves start to synchronize with those of the storyteller. This synchronization becomes even stronger as the listener more fully engages and empathizes with the story.

On October 17, 2022, we began as storytellers in hopes to move our audience to action; but by the end of the day we had become the story listeners. As we listened, we found our brains harmonizing with the shared chorus of those we heard and felt moved beyond the singular into a collective multitude of voices. In the end, we found the action strategies shared amongst the relatives that joined us on that early fall day had already formed new ripples of change within each of us. Here are our reflections on our experiences in the Traditional Perspectives on the Environment track at Climate Fast Forward.

Feeling Grateful: Told by Lizzie Condon

In planning this conference, I came back to feelings of gratefulness over and over again. As expressed in the track, Indigenous people are constantly having to educate non-Indigenous people working in the climate change space about their ways of knowing, which creates a

huge burden on people like Sara and Dylan. Yet there they were, educating me, sharing their knowledge with me and being extremely patient as I tried to make changes to my approach to climate change and how the Academy engaged with Tribal Nations for its work. I am committed to helping lessen this burden on Sara and Dylan and other Indigenous climate change leaders through outreach to the Academy's extensive network. I am grateful to the many Indigenous leaders at the conference who helped me learn and grow, and who helped make the conference a success.

Reimagining My 2.5 Existence: Told by Christine Kelly

As the track facilitator, I opened our space by gathering the group into circles of trust. Within these circles, I asked each person to share their personal confidence in our ability to address climate change on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being highest) and to reflect on what it will take to move their confidence closer to 10. I confess that last October my own number was a generous 2.5, and I had no idea how to move it even another half point. Today, with the help of a new friend, a disparate group of visionaries, and some close relatives, I have a few ideas.

Last fall, as Sara and I began having lengthy conversations in preparation for the conference, I felt a new-found friendship emerge. She was always understanding as I fumbled around my own lack of knowledge of Tribal cultures. One afternoon she explained how Native cultures see Creation as cherished elders and relatives, not a set of living and non-living resources. In that moment she gifted me with a new and transformative story. As I listened to this story, I envisioned all life and every piece of creation - from the creatures and trees and rocks and oceans to all the things we create from these lives, waters, and lands - as relatives. I began to let go of my limited view of them as resources to be categorized, managed, used, and preserved. I saw them instead as relatives; as members of our family to be nurtured and honored, and as elders filled with beautiful stories that we should joyfully listen to just as one would happily gather to hear a story of days gone by from a grandparent or elderly neighbor. I had honestly never before envisioned the world as one in which I was completely surrounded and embraced by my relatives every moment of my existence. And yet in many ways it immediately felt familiar and comforting.

Why was this new story so impactful? I think for quite some time I had settled into a routine 2.5 way of thinking. I wasn't frustrated and emboldened about my 2.5 existence as I had been in my youth. Yet, when those attending the Traditional Perspectives track were asked to create action strategy stories, they chose to become visionaries. As they created their stories, they leapfrogged over familiar obstacles to create new stories and new ideas that seek to address the root causes of our systemic societal challenges. They drew on the tools of empathy, vulnerability, humor, and hope. But most importantly, they rekindled their own gifts as storytellers.

As we asked the group to generate action strategies that would build mutually beneficial relationships with others working in the climate change arena and move our ability to address

climate change closer to 10, I listened to their stories. Their stories intertwined to form a single story of relationships. I heard them collectively tell this story of hope: "If we were able to envision a future, even in the face of catastrophic climate events, in which we all gathered in a great circle filled with stories of love, caring, and compassion, not hatred and indifference; in which all our relatives joined us, respected and cared for; where none of us would ever have to fear facing tomorrow alone –we would be a solid ten."

Remembering Our Past When Looking to the Future: Told by Dylan Jennings

As an Ojibwe harvester, provider, and cultural practitioner, I try to pay attention to the changes I see firsthand in these places that continue to take care of us. I would be lying if I told you I wasn't worried about our future generations and the opportunities that may or may not be available to connect with the other orders of creation. Will my children get to spend their last summer days laughing in the rice beds like our ancestors have? Will they know the joys and contentment of having no money, but a pantry full of wild rice and a garden full of foods? An old man from our Bad River community that I spent a lot of time with was infamous for telling stories. He'd often talk about life in our region when he was a young man. He often said that he could scoop water from the lake and drink it with no consequences. He would tell us about the abundant muskrat populations and the thick *manoomin* beds that no longer exist in barren spots along the river. He did, however, always end our conversations with intense optimism that the spirit of the seventh generation is alive and well. I always took this to mean that as long as there are people that are thinking about our future generations, our way of life will continue.

I want to say *chi-miigwech* (thank you) to the conference organizers, attendees, and to Sara, Lizzie, and Christine for all of their hard work and patience. We were in community and took part in conversations that I hope will strengthen relationships between all of our communities. Time is one of the most valuable things that you can give to someone. I'm confident that the time we all spent working with one-another will create ripple effects and instill encouragement, hope, and love where it's intended to go. *Miigwech. Mii sa iw* (Thank you, that is all).

A Silver Lining of Hope: Told by Sara Smith

When I was asked to be a track leader for Traditional Perspectives on the Environment, I was very honored and also extremely nervous, thinking about how to fit everything about traditional perspectives on the environment into just a few hours. I was also concerned about how the tracks were set up for the day and the model used to structure them. Thankfully, I was not the only one who felt that way and so our group decided to break the mold and structure it in a more Indigenous way. Now if we had the option, we would have loved to spend time with our track attendees for at least two days, if not more, in order to build a deeper understanding. But with the time we had and the conversations that developed I saw a silver lining of hope that these conversations would continue outside of the conference and actions would be taken. Our goal for this track was essentially building relationships over multiple

years through networking, idea sharing, and collaborations, and I feel like this was a start to that. There definitely needed to be more people in the room from the Tribal communities, including harvesters, gatherers, producers, and knowledge holders, but this was a good start to lead conference organizers on the track for the next steps and future conferences. As our goal stated, it will be a multi-year process and not just something that will happen overnight. Trust must be built, relationships made and honored, among other things – all of which takes time. I am excited to see the fruits of this track grow within Wisconsin and across borders. The seeds have been planted; now we must water and tend to them in order for any fruits to grow.



John Greenler

CONCLUSION

This conference would not have been possible without the leadership and vision of the planning committee, conference leaders, and the many participants who attended and shared their ideas and expertise for the purpose of moving Wisconsin forward on climate change action. The conference itself was an incredibly busy day, with little time for reflection on the important work being done.

This plan ends with a poem composed by Alexandria Delcourt, a fiction and poetry writer from Madison. As the conference poet-in-residence, Alexandria's role was to listen to the conversations around her, observe the work being done in the tracks, and reflect her observations in a poem, which she read at the end of the closing plenary session. Alexandria received a standing ovation for her poem. It captures this moment in climate change action, and reminds all of us why we continue this work to create a brighter future.



John Greenler

The Next Best Day

by Alexandria Delcourt

And here we are still today
trying to get anybody to listen.
We've gone backwards in recent
times, should have been watching
years ago, in the time of the good
work we were always about to do,
its original connection, a tension
at the center, back when we never
asked what if it rains too much?
What if it doesn't rain enough?
And what of those without a boat
either way? How can we get through
this together? The path to net-zero
goes through indigenous land,
seven generations into the future,
a pathway to capacity, not merely
urban or rural, but built on the medians
running across the country, to the places
we each lay our heads each night.
We have reached a state of readiness,
a precipice of collective action,

a kitchen table discussion, an offering
to the group. We have moved together
and apart, each of us in our areas
of interest, filled our white pages
with dots, convened our ambition-
setting summit, listened and spoken,
championed, targeted the universals.
And now, the missing spark, a just
transition, to make of it all our own actions,
to hear the voices of those impacted,
to migrate as one,
to fit the new onto the old,
to say, "Yes We Can!"
to see the epistemic violence,
to braid the husks into a rope,
to complete the street,
to create our stories,
to survive,
to face the loss and reconnect
with the inherent, to realize our smallness,
to be authentically who we are,
a people building every future
we have hoped for.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wisconsin Academy wishes to thank the nearly 400 individuals who participated in the facilitated tracks at Climate Fast Forward. This plan would not be possible without their dedication to creating achievable climate actions in Wisconsin. The Academy also wants to thank the planning committee, track leaders, facilitation team, Tribal Nations engagement subcommittee, and young professional subcommittee. These teams shared their time and wisdom to help make Climate Fast Forward a transformational and inclusive event. Finally, the Academy thanks the 70 conference sponsors, who made the conference possible through generous donations and the grant partners, Mcknight Foundation, Sally Mead Hands Foundation, and the Wisconsin Humanities.

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The Wisconsin Academy creates opportunities for people to connect, learn, and collaborate to improve life in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Academy showcases contemporary Wisconsin art at the James Watrous Gallery, examines science and culture in Wisconsin People & Ideas magazine, and explores pathways to a sustainable future through the Climate and Energy Initiative. The Academy Courses and public talks provide opportunities to learn and explore, while making connections with curious and creative people across Wisconsin. The Academy recognizes excellence through the annual Fiction & Poetry Awards and Fellows Awards for leadership in and across disciplines. We also support the Wisconsin Poet Laureate and many other endeavors that help the Academy create a better world by connecting Wisconsin people and ideas.



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