

ROCK COUNTY, WISCONSIN

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection
PACE Council
P.O. Box 8911
Madison, Wisconsin 53708-8911

**Subject: Rock County Comments - Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) Program
Criteria to Rank Proposed Easements for PACE Grants (DRAFT - Updated November 10, 2009)**

Dear PACE Council:

Delineated in the following are comments formulated by our departments in response to the PACE Program *Criteria to Rank Proposed Easements for PACE Grants (DRAFT - Updated November 10, 2009)*, as discussed at the PACE Council meeting in Madison, November 18, 2009. Additionally, the Rock County Land Conservation Committee has reviewed the comments and requested that our departments forward the comments to the PACE council. As Rock County is currently in the process of developing a County PACE Program, we applaud DATCP and the Council's efforts, and appreciate the opportunity to comment on development of the Statewide PACE Program.

The following section headings concur with those as contained in the PACE Program *Criteria to Rank Proposed Easements for PACE Grants (DRAFT - Updated November 10, 2009)* (enclosed).

Section 1. – A.

Comment: Utilizing the land evaluation (LE) scoring system may offer a more comprehensive analysis of soil type than one relying solely on prime, unique, or important soil classification.

The LE system was developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1980, and provides a systematic, objective method in which to evaluate and numerically rank soils for their relative value for a specific land use.

LE scores reflect a soil's potential for total yield/gross economic return of suitable crops and an approximation of the economic and environmental cost of producing a crop on that soil. LE values range from 0 to 100, with a higher value indicating a soil with a greater value for common cultivated row crops.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has formulated a LE score for all soil types in the State of Wisconsin. An LE score consists of the following components:

- *Prime Farmland*: A soil type's major physical and chemical properties affecting agriculture utilization
- *Land Capability*: A soil type's risk of environmental damage (e.g. erosion, etc.), the degree of management concerns, and its limitations for agriculture utilization
- *Productivity*: A soil type's potential yield of agricultural crops

A soil type receives a score (0-100) for each of the aforementioned components. A weighting factor is then applied to each component, reflecting their relative importance. The LE score is then calculated utilizing the following formula:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{Prime farmland score (0-100) x 0.15} \\
 + \\
 \text{Land capability score (0-100) x 0.30} \\
 + \\
 \text{Productivity score (0-100) x 0.55} \\
 \hline
 \text{LE score}
 \end{array}$$

Sample LE score calculation for Soil Type X

Component	Score	Weight	LE score
Prime farmland (if drained)	70	x 0.15	= 10.5
Land capability = 2	90	x 0.30	= 27.0
Productivity = 86	86	x 0.55	= 47.3
			LE score = 85 (84.8)

Again, utilizing the LE scoring system may offer a more comprehensive analysis of soil type than one relying solely on prime, unique, or important soil classification. Similarly, the NRCS has developed LE scores for all soil types in the State and this data could be easily integrated into any local government's soil data set.

Section 3. - B. and D. and Section 5.

Comment: Section 3. - B. and the Section 5. "Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ)" criteria may potentially contradict Section 3. - D. Diminishing the geographical parameters (i.e. distances) in Section 3. - D. may alleviate this potential contradiction.

Section 3. - B. awards the highest points to lands in Towns that are "moderately" developed, conversely awarding the lowest points to lands in Towns that have either extremely low or extremely high amounts of developed land.

Section 3. - D. awards the highest points to those lands that are a "moderate" distance from an urban service area (USA), while also considering the size of the population that the USA serves. This criteria awards the lowest points to those lands that are extremely close or extremely far from an USA, again, considering the size of the population that the USA serves.

Section 5. "ETJ" criteria offers a high point award if a relevant City/Village shows support for an easement application, if the easement lands are within said City/Village's ETJ area (1.5 or 3 miles from current City/Village boundary).

As it pertains to Rock County, and potentially many other Counties in the State experiencing moderate development pressures, Section 3. - B. and the "ETJ" criteria of Section 5. contradict Section 3. - D.

Example: City of Janesville (USA) – 2007 population estimate over 40,000 (Section 3. - D4.)

A parcel of land would need to be 6-12 miles away from the City's USA (and subsequently outside of ETJ) to be awarded the most points in Section 3. - D.4. 6-12 miles away from the City's USA, and not in closer proximity to any other City/Village USA, would be in the Rock County Towns of Johnstown, Bradford, Center, and Porter. These Towns have extremely low amounts of developed land and concurrently, are experiencing extremely low development pressure.

As a result of the geographical parameters (i.e. long distances) set in Section 3. - D.4., it is likely that lands would either score high exclusively in Section 3.B. and the "ETJ" criteria of Section 5., or exclusively in Section 3. - D.4., but it would be highly unlikely that lands would be able to score high in all three criteria. Perhaps this was done intentionally, to provide for an "offset" given the various dynamics that the DATCP program will be dealing with throughout the State.

Again, diminishing the geographical parameters (i.e. distances) in Section 3. - D. may alleviate this potential contradiction.

Section 3. - D.

Comment: Has a formal/legal definition of the term "urban service area" (USA) been formulated/determined?

The term "urban service area" is often synonymous with a sewer service district associated with an incorporated area. In Rock County, and potentially many other Counties in the State experiencing moderate development pressure, there exist sewer service districts that service relatively high-density, unincorporated urban fringe areas. Would these sewer service districts be considered "urban service areas"?

Section 8.

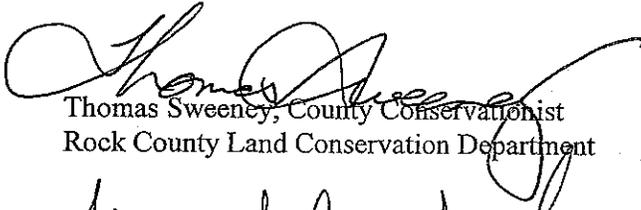
Comment: Utilizing a quantitative system (i.e. scoring) to measure qualitative factors may weaken the validity of the overall scoring system. Utilizing a format in which these factors are presented to the applicant as various yes/no questions (with opportunity for elaboration), with the sum output of these questions then considered as a whole, may alleviate potential inconsistency and ambiguity.

The factors that this section attempts to measure are valid and should be considered in any easement application. However, utilizing a quantitative system (i.e. scoring) to measure qualitative factors may foster inconsistency and ambiguity, potentially weakening the validity of the overall scoring system.

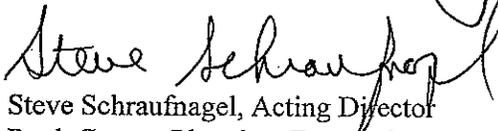
Utilizing a format in which these factors are presented to the applicant as various yes/no questions (with opportunity for elaboration), with the sum output of these questions then considered as a whole, may alleviate potential inconsistency and ambiguity. Given the nature of the qualitative factors that this section is attempting to measure, it is likely that ambiguity and inconsistency will remain utilizing this "yes/no" format, however both would potentially be reduced, offering the opportunity for a more defensible scoring system.

Again, we thank the Council for the opportunity to comment on formation of the Statewide PACE Program, and for your time and effort in consideration of these comments. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either one of us.

Sincerely,



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Rock County Land Conservation Department



Steve Schraufnagel, Acting Director
Rock County Planning, Economic & Community Development Agency

Enclosure

cc: Vicki Elkin, DATCP
Lisa Schultz, DATCP
Carrie Houston, Rock County Planning, Economic & Community Development Agency
Wade Thompson, Rock County Planning, Economic & Community Development Agency