

MEET ME AT THE CORNER

UNCOVERING/DISCOVERING THE PUBLIC LAND SURVEY SYSTEM IN WISCONSIN

APRIL 25, 2018 :: ROTHSCILD, WI



**FINAL
REPORT**

OVERVIEW

A one-day forum entitled **Meet Me at the Corner** was held at the Grand Lodge Waterpark Resort in Rothschild, Wisconsin, on April 25, 2018.

The forum was free to all attendees.

The event was a sequel to three earlier forums: 2015 in Stevens Point, 2016 in Eau Claire, and 2017 in Wisconsin Dells. The overall goal of the forums is to facilitate dialog about how to align surveying and parcel mapping activities in Wisconsin to improve accuracy and reliability, and to bring the GIS and Surveying communities together to identify and discuss common interests.

The 2018 forum focused specifically on the PLSS corner maintenance process and included a field trip to a buried PLSS corner under the guidance of the Marathon County Surveyor.

The Forum was organized and hosted by the **PLSS Work Group**.

PLSS WORK GROUP

The **PLSS Work Group** was formed by individuals and organizations in Wisconsin to advocate and advance the purpose and importance of the Public Land Survey System. The goal of the Work Group is to educate and encourage state, county and municipal agencies in improving, advancing and maintaining the PLSS statewide.

Current membership of the PLSS Work Group is :

State Cartographer's Office

Howard Veregin - State Cartographer

Brenda Hemstead - Data Services

Wisconsin County Surveyors Association

Bryan Meyer - WCSA President & La Crosse County Surveyor

Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors

Jeff DeMuth - Professional Land Surveyor

Steve Geiger - Polk County Surveyor

Jodi Helgeson - Adams County Register of Deeds

Eric Damkot - GIS Division IS Manager, Washington County

Jason Poser - Buffalo County Land Records Coordinator & Land Information Officer

Mitch Moline - Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation

Chris Colney - Land Information Officer, Grant County



OBJECTIVES

The Public Land Survey System serves as the cornerstone of all property descriptions in the Wisconsin. The system was established in the 18th century to facilitate land conveyance from the federal government. Original land patents were granted with descriptions based on this system. Maintaining PLSS corner monuments is necessary to accurately depict land ownership and interest in real property.

Without a properly maintained network of PLSS corner monuments, there is an increased risk of property disputes, inequitable taxation, disagreements about resource rights, confusion over easement locations, and unnecessary expenditures by private citizens and local governments.

Maintenance and perpetuation of the monuments marking the original surveyed locations of PLSS corners is essential to ensure the integrity of the system. However, across the state, thousands of

monuments need to be re-established and modern geodetic coordinates need to be obtained for them. The high cost of this effort is an impediment to its eventual completion.

The agenda for **Meet Me at the Corner** was designed to emphasize:

- ⇒ The importance of the Public Land Survey System as the foundation of property ownership determination in the state;
- ⇒ The importance of maintaining and investing in the PLSS so that it can continue to be used effectively and accurately;
- ⇒ The complexity and effort associated with PLSS maintenance including historic research, map analysis, field work, and coordinates; and
- ⇒ The role of the County Surveyor in PLSS maintenance.

THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

The **State Cartographer's Office** (SCO), which has a lead role in the organization of the annual Forums, is an office at UW-Madison focusing on geospatial technology and practices. The SCO conducts outreach and education as a core part of its mission.

Outreach and community engagement are ways to guide the development of geospatial policy and practice in Wisconsin. By engaging stakeholders, we can develop a common vision for the state and facilitate the adoption of this vision as a model for the future.

The Forums embody the **Wisconsin Idea** by linking UW expertise and resources to issues that impact Wisconsin's citizens. Improved parcel data is needed as the state moves forward with its efforts to transition to the next generation of online information and services for citizens. Through projects like the Forum, the University of Wisconsin can continue to be a leader in the effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these services.

The topics addressed by the forum are of special importance due to legislation requiring the creation and maintenance of a **statewide parcel database**. The statewide parcel database is being assembled by the State Cartographer's Office under the direction of the Department of Administration, and with the cooperation of all seventy-two of Wisconsin's counties. The database is now in its 4th iteration and in 2018 will begin utilizing PLSS data collected from counties. This effort has provided a way for Wisconsin to make advances in its geospatial infrastructure and at the same time provide a model of cooperation between the University of Wisconsin, state agencies, and local governments in all corners of the state.



AUDIENCE

The 2018 Forum, **Meet Me at the Corner**, attracted 80 registrants with a variety of professional occupations and affiliations. (See Tables 1 and 2).

The two maps following this page show attendance by county employees for the 2018 Forum, and for all four Forums since 2015.

Counties are one of the primary focus areas for outreach because responsibility and funding of PLSS maintenance, parcel mapping, and legal record keeping occurs at the county level.

Note that all maps and tables in this report are based on information provided by people who registered for the event online. Information may not be 100% accurate or completely reflect the composition of the people who actually attended the event.



Sector/Position	
Surveyor	15
Land Info Officer/GIS Director/GIS Coordinator	10
Real Property Lister & Staff	9
GIS Tech/Analyst	6
Register of Deeds & Staff	6
Forester	5
Property/Real Estate Specialist	5
Higher Education	4
Not specified	3
Attorney	2
County Board	2
Facilities Management	2
Planning	2
Emergency Management	1
Engineering	1
Foundation President	1
Grant Administrator	1
Historian	1
Sales	1
Student	1
Title Industry	1
Utilities	1

Table 1. Forum registrants by sector/position.

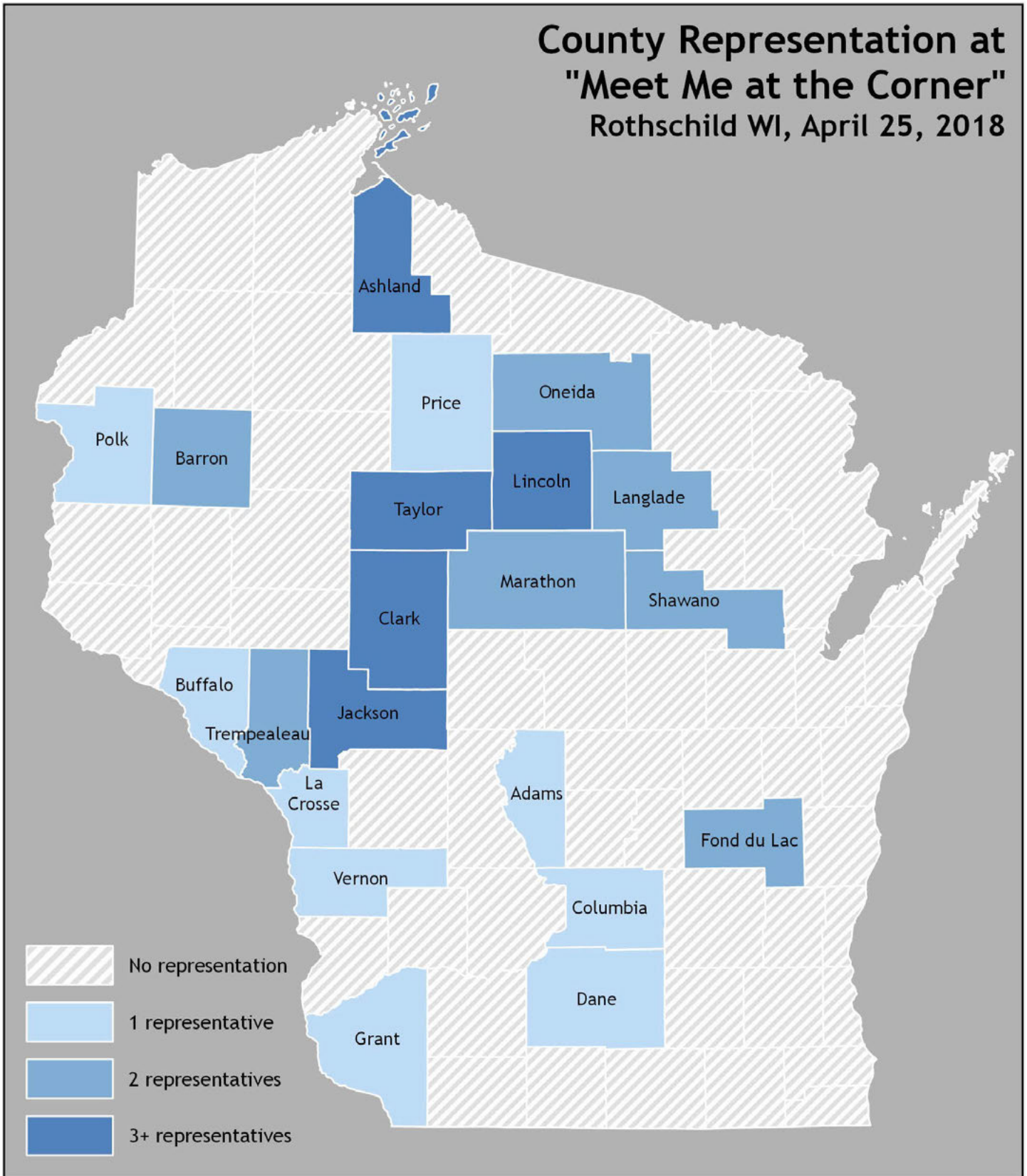
Affiliation	
County	43
Private Sector	12
State Agency	10
University	6
Association/Foundation	3
City	3
Retired	2
Regional Planning Commission	1

Table 2. Forum registrants by affiliation.



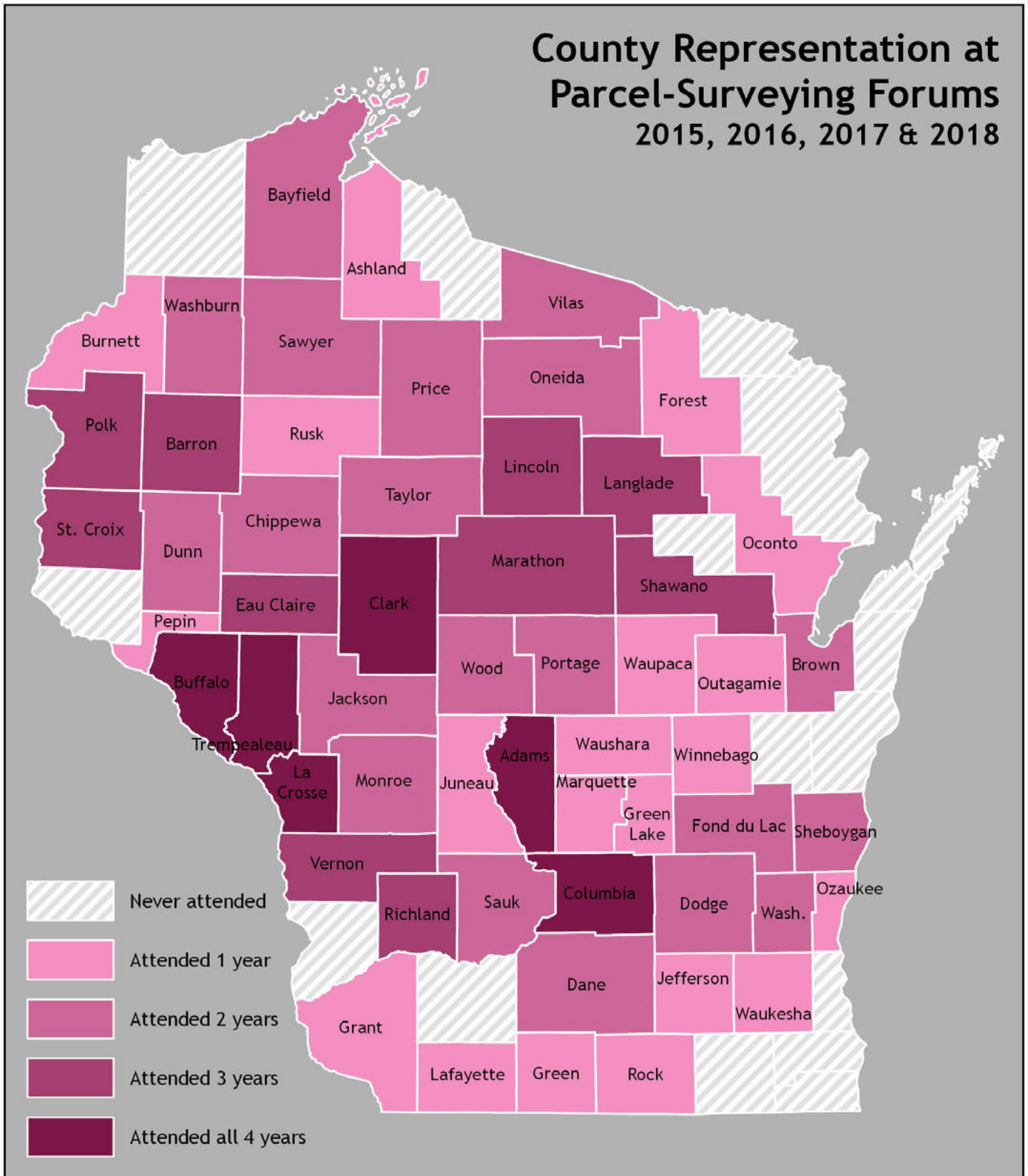
COUNTY REPRESENTATION AT THE 2018 FORUM

County Representation at
"Meet Me at the Corner"
Rothschild WI, April 25, 2018



COUNTY REPRESENTATION AT ALL FORUMS SINCE 2015

County Representation at Parcel-Surveying Forums 2015, 2016, 2017 & 2018



AGENDA

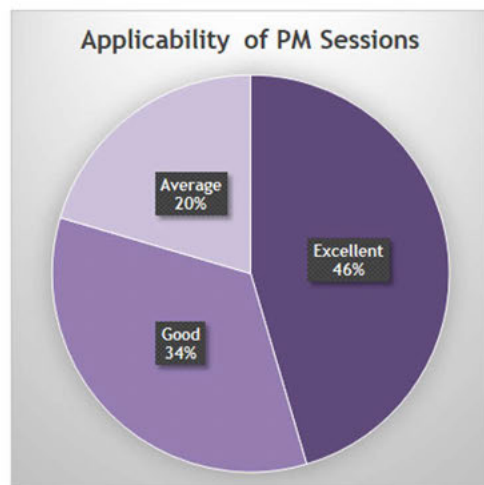
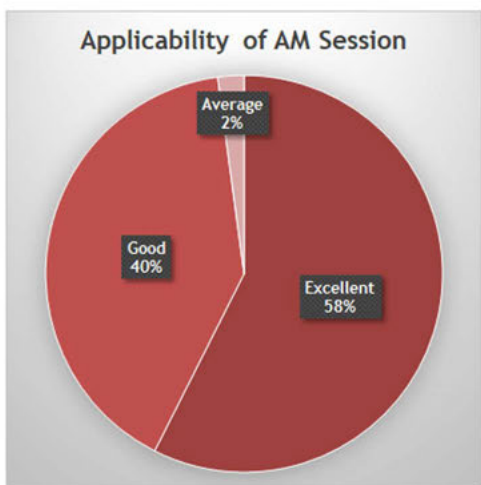
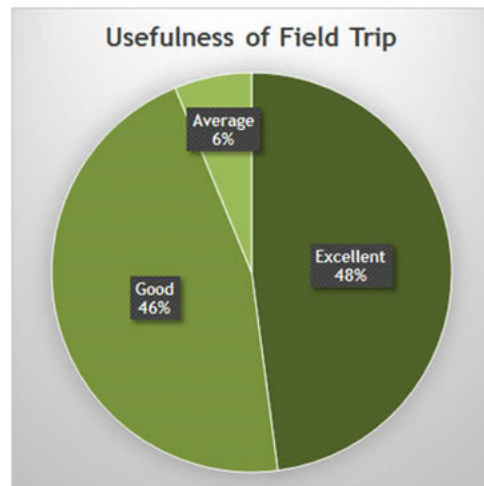
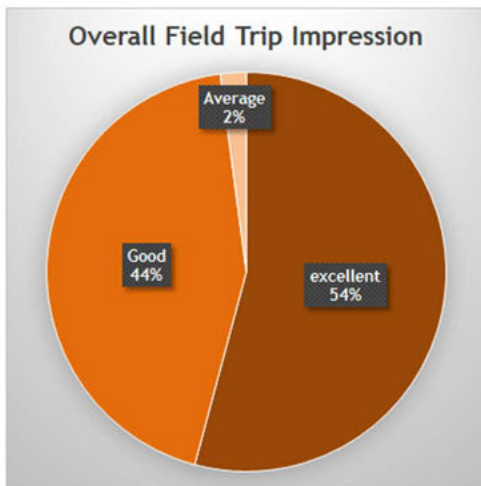
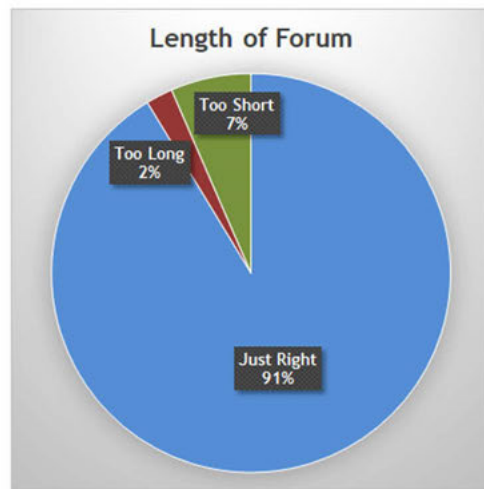
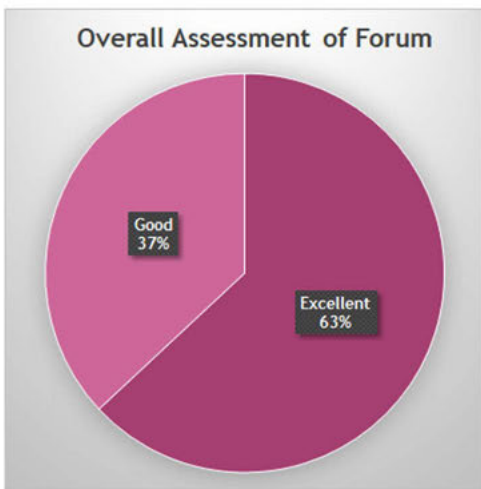


- 9:00-9:10 am Introduction/Overview**
Howard Veregin, Wisconsin State Cartographer
- 9:10-9:40 am The importance of the Public Land Survey System**
Bryan Meyer, La Crosse County Surveyor
- 9:40-10:00 am Legal descriptions, tie sheets, witness trees**
Chris Fieri, Marathon County Surveyor
- 10:00-10:30 am Breakout Session: Research methods**
- 10:30-12:30 pm Field Trip: PLSS corner and surveying equipment**
Chris Fieri, Marathon County Surveyor
Jeff DeMuth, MSA Professional Services
Jason Poser, Buffalo County Land Information Officer
- 12:30-1:30 pm Lunch**
- 1:30-1:50 pm The post field-work phase**
Wade Pettit, Clark County Surveyor
- 1:50-2:20 pm Coordinate systems used in Wisconsin and their accuracies**
Jerry Mahun, UW-Platteville
- 2:20-3:20 pm Panel Discussion: Standards and best practices for PLSS**
Kristen Anderson, Columbia County Land Information Director
Chris Colney, Grant County Land Information Officer
Chris Fieri, Marathon County Surveyor
Bryan Meyer, La Crosse County Surveyor
April Schoolcraft, Jackson County Real Property Lister
- 3:20-3:30 pm Wrap up**



EVALUATIONS

A total of 48 evaluations were submitted by attendees. Results are summarized in the graphs below and show that the Forum was very well received.



NEXT STEPS

Based on the comments received in the evaluations and informal feedback from participants, there seems to be agreement that the surveying and geospatial communities need to continue to communicate, debate their perspectives, and try to identify common interests. With this in mind the PLSS Work Group plans to continue hosting these forums on an annual basis.

The forums help foster the development of a strong professional relationship between the surveying and geospatial communities in the state. While surveyors and geospatial professionals do not see eye-to-eye on all issues, we are fortunate in Wisconsin to have individuals who are willing to expend time and effort educating and explaining their perspectives for the ultimate benefit of the state's citizens.

There is a strong and growing sense of the importance of PLSS to maintain accuracy in the state's parcel network. The Wisconsin Land Information Program is funding county PLSS remonumentation through its Strategic Initiative Grants Program, and there is broad support within the land information community for PLSS investment. For example, the Wisconsin Land Information Association has stated that investing in PLSS infrastructure will allow us to "more accurately map land holdings throughout our state." On the surveying side, the Wisconsin County Surveyors Association has argued that "we should use PLSS data to solidify our statewide parcel map."

CONTACT US

We are interested in your thoughts and ideas, and your suggestions on how to move forward. Please contact us or any member of the PLSS Work Group,

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Recently, the Wisconsin Department of Administration finalized an agreement with the State Cartographer's Office to augment the statewide parcel database with PLSS data by the end of 2019. Adding PLSS to the statewide parcel database will offer numerous benefits, including: facilitating improvements in the accuracy of parcel polygons; helping reduce the chance of property disputes; reducing survey costs for private landowners; helping ensure equitable property taxation; and aiding in the resolution of apparent gaps and overlaps in county boundaries.

The statewide PLSS database will be derived from accurate county coordinate data where available. The Survey Control Finder web application developed by the SCO is the current access point for much of the state's county PLSS data. Experience with this application and the data underlying it will be used as a starting point to complete the statewide PLSS database. Feedback from the user community about the content and format of the statewide PLSS database will be conducted beginning in 2018.



THE PLSS WORK GROUP



WWW.SCO.WISC.EDU/COMMUNITY/PLSS-WORK-GROUP