

## **Case Study 1: Gogebic County, Michigan**

### **1-1. The Community**

Gogebic County is a rural community of 1,112 square miles or 712,032 acres located in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It is the westernmost county in Michigan, bounded on the west and south by the state of Wisconsin and on the northwest by Lake Superior. Eighty percent of the County is forested. The forests are largely comprised of aspen, birch, maple, and softwoods. The Ottawa National Forest occupies 311,493 acres in the County or 43.7% of the land area. Of the remaining forest, 47.5% is private and the remaining 8.8% is under state and county control. Mining and timber production have traditionally been the main industrial sectors but they have been in decline, since the mid-1960's. Roughly 30 miles of Lake Superior shoreline is a prime recreational attraction. The combination of climate, forests, and terrain produces ideal natural conditions for nature or sport activities such as downhill or cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, ATV trails and mountain biking.

Gogebic County's population is currently 17,370 people. The County is struggling with high unemployment, low wages, aging population and a growth in second home ownership. The County has been very active in trying to address these issues and attract new industries. Some of the recently established businesses include the Watersmeet mill, Wakefield mill, FiberSpec mill, Bessemer Plywood, and Burton industries. The calculated tax benefits of these industries to the municipalities and the school system is estimated at about \$245,000 annually.

### **1-2. How the project started**

In the course of developing a multi-year strategic plan in 1998, the Gogebic County Economic Development Commission brought together a group of 29 county residents representing a broad cross section of the community to define a vision for the county. The group was challenged to identify strategic goals and related specific projects to move the community closer to realizing these goals. One goal identified was *to coordinate uses and users of the county's natural resources*. A project adopted to move toward that goal was *to define sustainable forestry for Gogebic County*. The initiative was driven by a desire on the side of community planners to own the process and to enfranchise local voices regarding local forestland issues.

As a first step a steering committee on Natural Resources was established in February 1999 to serve primarily as the data gathering and coordinating group. The Committee agreed that economic, ecological and social aspects of sustainable forestry were to be considered within the scope of sustainability. The need for assembling economic data was paramount. It was acknowledged that some data on forest resources are readily available, but others such as social and cultural data, are not. The Group agreed that the economic aspect of forestry was the priority area but at the same time it was important to harmonize it with the ecological and social aspects to promote sustainable resource use over the long term.

The steering committee agreed that there was a need for a “large, diverse community based organization.” As a result, a community group was formed to provide continuous input and feedback from the larger community. The group was called the Forest Advisory Coordinating Team (FACT) and was charged with helping to identify and address forest-related issues in Gogebic County.

FACT was made up of approximately twenty-five people from diverse segments of the County, including:

- foresters
- land owners
- forest products firms
- public officials
- educators
- retailers
- tribal authorities
- service companies
- health care providers
- public safety providers
- conservation groups
- representatives of the faith community
- the soil conservation district board
- community development organizations
- regional media, and
- resource educators from Michigan State University Extension.

FACT’s mission was to agree upon a vision for sustainable forestry in Gogebic County in the long run, based on data for past and present trends. The group was also charged with mediating and advocating for the County in forest issues using recognized factual basis for its positions. A key responsibility of FACT was to educate the public about the role of forestry and inform the community about the need to sustain the value of forests for the future of the County.

The Forest Advisory Coordinating Team first met in June 1999. As a first step, the group developed a draft definition for sustainable forestry in the County. This was not a simple task given the diversity of views represented by FACT members. The definition that they reached consensus on was:

Sustainable forestry in Gogebic County is [*forest management*] that contributes to the [*economic health*] of Gogebic County while maintaining the [*ecological and social/cultural values*] for the benefit of present and future generations in Gogebic County.

To reach this consensus, they made the strategic decision to put several phrases in brackets. These were phrases that would need further refining but that they could all agree on initially without spending too much time debating their actual definition.

In order to get even wider community involvement in the process, FACT members took the draft definition to a large number of organizations to get buy-in to the idea. As a result, the definition was supported via formal resolution by every municipality in the county, the Tribal government of the Lac Vieux Desert Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa, the Gogebic County Board of Commissioners, and a number of development and civic organizations in the county such as the County Economic Development Commission, the County Forestry Commission and several civic organizations.

Even with this success, the members of FACT realized that their job had just begun. The next step was to continue to refine the definition and develop a consensus on the parenthetical elements:

- forest management
- economic health
- ecological and
- social/cultural values

In order to further refine these four terms, FACT decided to use the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators (MP C&I). Initially the group focused on developing socio-economic indicators assisted by the Michigan State University Extension Program. The next step was to expand the focus and include some ecological indicators to evaluate the health and productive capacity of local forests. This led to the idea of being a pilot in the “Linking Communities to the Montreal Process” project.

### **1-3. Using the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators (MP C&I)**

Gogebic County was particularly interested in using the MP C&I for two main reasons:

- a) to refine their definition and the four bracketed terms by selecting criteria and indicators;
- b) to use these indicators to measure their progress toward the vision of sustainable forestry in the County.

The intent was to either adopt existing criteria and indicators or develop local criteria and indicators that would help accomplish the above two tasks.

In a series of two workshops in November 2001, organized by FACT, participants from Gogebic County developed a draft list of principles and sustainability indicators for measuring economic, environmental and social conditions, pressures and activities as they relate to sustainable forestry efforts.

This draft list of indicators was a result of two approaches. First, workshop participants brainstormed sustainability indicators within each of the three key areas (forest management, economic health, and ecological and social/cultural values). The next step

was to select indicators from a long list of sustainable community/sustainable forestry indicators that was organized within the MP C&I framework. A round robin exercise was used to help select draft indicators for the County. The workshop concluded with a brief discussion of possible data sources for the indicators and how to move the project ahead.

#### **1-4. Next steps**

In early 2002 two key FACT members left the community and although this slowed down the process, the project did not stop because the remaining FACT members, including Dick Bolen, Director of Forestry and Parks for Gogebic County, were firmly committed to the project. The steering committee met twice in January and April 2002 and finalized the list of indicators for Gogebic County. It also developed recommendations on how to proceed with the work. The definition of sustainable forestry in Gogebic County was finally agreed upon by selecting a small set of indicators for each of the four bracketed terms (economic health – 4 indicators, ecological health – 4 indicators, ecological values – 5 indicators, and social/cultural values – 6 indicators) (see Table D-1).

The County's main challenge was to obtain funding for the data crunching. The FACT submitted a grant proposal to the USDA Forest Service but due to budget cuts to pay for the forest fires in the West, there was no available funding. The FACT will submit another proposal for the next fiscal year. Meanwhile, the group focused on doing more education and outreach to different sectors to get final support from the community. In addition, FACT was involved in some outreach beyond the local community. This effort began in 2002 with a presentation of the Gogebic model to a multi-state group called ANSWERS (Alliance of Northern States Working to Ensure Regional Stability). This group was interested in exploring how the model used in Gogebic County could be applied in surrounding counties and/or at the region-multi state level such as the border counties of Michigan and Wisconsin.

#### **1-5. Lessons learned**

The Gogebic County initiative for sustainable forestry provided some key lessons that other communities may find valuable:

- It is over-ambitious to try to do both sustainable community and sustainable forestry indicators at the same time under the MP C&I. The latter is specifically designed to address forest issues and leaves very little space for other social and economic issues, such as education, civic engagement, public health, etc. While these are important aspects of any community, trying to develop indicators to cover each of them leads to a long list that is extremely difficult to manage. Moreover, because it is focused primarily on forest resources, the MP C&I is not the most suitable approach to use for general community development. Other approaches such as the community capital or pressure-state-response may be more useful in developing indicators for these areas. The MP C&I is most suited for communities with a strong interest in or concern for forest-related issues.

- Some of the indicators in the Montreal Process C&I set are not meaningful at the local level. There is clearly a need for upscaling and downscaling the indicators, or identifying which indicators at the national level can be used locally and which ones at the local level can be integrated up to the national scale. Creating a tiered system of indicators at different scales (local, regional, multi-state, and national) is particularly important both for improving data collection and decision-making at all these levels in order to promote sustainable forestry.
- Although the MP C&I framework is useful as an organizational tool during a community's indicator development process, a community may find other frameworks more useful for final presentation of an indicator set. In the case of Gogebic County, the categories “Forest Management,” “Economic Health,” “Ecological Values,” and “Social and Cultural Values” were used.
- There is no one set of indicators that will apply to every community (one-size-fits-all). Depending on their resources and key issues, communities need to select the most relevant indicators to measure their sustainable forestry efforts.
- The workshops in Gogebic County demonstrated that community indicator projects are processes and not endpoints. A community cannot expect that in one meeting it will get all the answers and develop the perfect set of sustainable forestry indicators. First, involving a diverse community representation often involves a series of discussions to reach a consensus. Second, public education and raising awareness about the importance of preserving forest resources is more important than simply coming up with a sophisticated set of indicators. Third, as a community changes over time, its key issues may also change. This requires continuous revisiting of the goals and indicators for sustainable forest management.
- Indicator projects should include a wide group of people representing diverse interests in the community. This helps build ownership within the community and helps to overcome the institutional and policy fragmentation that results from multiple land ownership, mandates, legislation, and policies. Moreover, diverse community support for the project helps to ensure that the initiative will continue even in the case of a loss of critical members.
- There is a clear need to identify data and information sources that communities can use in measuring and tracking the indicators. Data collection can be time-consuming and expensive as some of the information is place specific. For example, to measure some of the social and cultural values in the community, Gogebic County initiated a comprehensive residents survey designed and conducted by the Department of Forestry and MSU Extension, Michigan State University. However this was an expensive one-time effort that cannot be replicated without continuing funding.

Gogebic County was clearly an example of a community that did not have outside resources but managed to engage the entire community and come up with a common

vision for a sustainable forestry. It demonstrates that even small communities with limited resources can do a lot by taking charge in defining a common vision and goals, initiating action and measuring progress.

**Table D-1: List of indicators selected by Gogebic County FACT**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Data</b>
<b>Forest Management</b>	1. Number of acres of forest in Gogebic County in each category.	FIA (Forest Inventory Assessment data)
	2. Number of forest acres in Gogebic County with written forest management plan.	
	3. Percent of forested land in Gogebic County that is certified by a third party.	
	4. Percent of volume of forest harvested relative to volume growth in Gogebic County.	FIA
<b>Economic Health</b>	1. Acres of forest that allow timber harvest (a.k.a., working forest) in Gogebic County.	Measurements are not known but FIA data can be used for trends.
	2. State Equalized Value of land in Gogebic County.	SEV is readily available at the County offices.
	3. Changes in labor statistics and employment patterns in Gogebic County.	Readily available from labor market analyst of State of Michigan.
	4. Value and volume of value-added products of forest industries in Gogebic County.	
<b>Ecological Value</b>	1. Change in water quality in Gogebic County.	
	2. Changes in forest structure and composition in Gogebic County.	FIA and MSU Extension
	3. Proportion of forests in Gogebic County that are affected by disturbance and damaging agents.	FIA
	4. Number of forest species in Gogebic County that are classified as threatened, rare, vulnerable, endangered, or extinct.	
	5. Average parcel size in Gogebic County.	FIA and plat book.
<b>Social and Cultural Value</b>	1. Change in ownership of land in Gogebic County.	
	2. Changes in quality of life in Gogebic County.	Primary data collected through interviews of county residents.
	3. Changes in population in Gogebic County.	
	4. Percent of Gogebic County population under the poverty level.	Census data available.
	5. Changes of infrastructure of Gogebic County.	
	6. Changes in acreage of forest land converted to development in Gogebic County.	