



*People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance*

## **National Wildlife Federation**

11100 Wildlife Center Drive • Reston, VA 20190 • <http://www.nwf.org/>

**Northland College  
The Student Association's Environmental Council  
Ashland, WI  
(project status, Spring 1997)**

### **Campus/ Group Profile:**

Northland College is a small campus (14 major buildings on 75 acres) in Ashland, Wisconsin- a city of about 9000 along the shores of Lake Superior. Founded in 1892, the college attracts a student body of more than 850 students from 47 states and nine other countries.

Northland College's roots are in the liberal arts tradition which was complemented in 1971 when an additional emphasis in environmental concerns was added to the curriculum. Both Environmental Studies and Outdoor Education students select from a number of disciplines, ranging from the natural sciences to humanities and sociological studies. Northland's faculty focuses on undergraduate teaching and learning with particular attention paid to experiential learning experiences, student research, and involvement.

The Environmental Council, established in 1989, consists of four faculty members, four students, and four staff members. It acts as a bridge between many different levels of environmental action at Northland. On campus, Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute (founded 25 years ago) conducts regional outreach and serves the campus on a variety of issues and programs. Northland's environmental studies programs are not housed in any single department, and environmental and sustainability concepts are applied through other groups such as the Campus Facilities Master Plan Committee, College Council, and an overarching Environmental Studies Committee.

### **Project Goals and Summary:**

The Environmental Council will be a catalyst for change that provides direction and encouragement to Northland College in carrying out its environmental liberal arts mission and the goals of the Northland College Sustainability Statement. Toward this end, it will seek to provide vision, encourage community participation, strengthen academic programs, uncover root environmental problems, and provide sustainable and manageable solutions for the college.

### **Accomplishments:**

The Environmental Council developed a paper policy that was approved by the college administration. The policy provides environmental guidelines for the purchase of all paper used on campus. It includes a minimum standard for post-consumer content and calls for non-chlorine bleached paper.

A new residence hall will be built on Northland's campus, beginning in summer of 1997, that will include an environmental wing that will use solar and wind power, composting toilets, greenhouses and high energy efficiency throughout the entire building. In addition, an exhaustive environmental survey was done of building materials to affirm that those used were chosen from an environmental standpoint.

The Environmental Council supported a student initiative for community bikes. The group currently has more than 75 bikes which are being repaired for campus community use. The work on the Northland College Strategic Plan resulted in the reestablishment of an environmental coordinator, who has been hired to serve in 1997-98.

Additional recognition from the administration was accomplished by the Environmental Council in gaining a seat on College Council, which is made up of the president, vice presidents, and representatives from division chairs, faculty and student senate.



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Funding was secured to build a straw-bale structure on campus this coming fall. The structure will be used as a hands-on educational activity in construction and operate as an energy/alternative building practices lab. Northland College also hosted a second Zero Discharge Clinic in April 1997.

### **Strategies and Steps Taken:**

The Environmental Council set an agenda for the school year last September. Some items were worked on in the committee of the whole, while four subgroups were established to work on other issues. The subgroups sought help from across the campus and brought proposals back to the council for discussion and action. Items which needed institutional approval were presented to the College Council for adoption.

### **Targets:**

Administration

### **Tactics:**

- Utilizing the current political system by increasing Environmental Council representation through access
- Clearly delegating responsibility to sub-committee
- Using the student as both a voice and vehicle of change

### **Challenges and Responses:**

Some of the obstacles encountered include securing funding for projects and getting institutional support and commitment on things like a Sustainability Charter and the paper policy. Several years of work on a paper policy have finally paid off, in the adoption of a policy by the administration. Conducting extensive research on costs and campus impact provided the information needed by the administration to adopt the policy. Often there is a lack of available information or another model institution or policy to guide efforts. For example, when working on the Sustainability Charter, several statements were found for sustainability, but the Environmental Commission felt the need to define it specifically for Northland College. Many hurdles were cleared by continuing the efforts of the past and by building relationships with the administration, trustees, faculty, staff, and students. Most of the Environmental Council's efforts have been cooperative rather than political.

### **Funding:**

There were a number of ways that projects were funded. Some, like the paper policy, the college's purchase of paper, and the hiring of an environmental coordinator, will be absorbed by the regular operating budget of Northland. The straw-bale structure to be built is funded through a grant with the Midwest Renewable Energy Association through the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board. The new dorm is funded by the college through donations, grants and a mortgage on the building to be paid for through future student housing charges. The Zero Discharge Clinic in April was sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology program.

### **Publicity and Media:**

Most of these projects were publicized on campus through campus media like *Drifts*, the student newspaper, *Inside Outlook*, a campus-wide weekly newsletter, and *Northern Light*, a magazine format publication printed three times a year. Also, the Zero Discharge Campus Clinic was highlighted in the Campus Ecology Newsletter, *The Connection*. Also, the *Lake Superior Vision*, an environmental grassroots newsletter, featured the Zero Discharge Campus Clinic.



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### **Documentation:**

Campus Ecology has press releases and photos of the Zero Discharge Campus Clinic.

### **Key Groups/Allies:**

One of the Environmental Council's unique characteristics is that it has representation from faculty, staff, and students. This gives it a wider array of allies and partners involved in projects and activities. For example, in working on the new residence hall, several of the members were involved with the Facilities Master Planning Committee and worked with concerned students as well. The Strategic Plan involved the College Council of which several were members. The Environmental Council worked closely with members of the college's public relations staff for help with the drafting of the paper policy and the Sustainability Charter. Several proposals and activities have been linked with efforts of students in the Northland College Greens and the Northland College Students Association. Northland College worked with the National Wildlife Federation to help plan and host the Zero Discharge Campus Clinic. The straw bale project was aided by the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute, Midwest Renewable Energy Association, and the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board.

### **Next Year's Plans:**

- Complete Northland College Charter of Sustainability
- Implement the paper policy
- Build the straw bale structure
- Build a residence hall which will be an environmental model for other colleges
- Enlarge capacity for campus food waste composting
- Explore idea of a completely smoke-free campus
- Explore elimination of soda vending machines
- Redefine and seek adoption of zero discharge campus policy

### **Quote or Helpful hint:**

"As an environmental liberal art college we are constantly aware of a need to "walk the talk" of environmental responsibility."

[www.northland.edu/studentlife/NCSA/index.html](http://www.northland.edu/studentlife/NCSA/index.html)