

Department Updates



Barron County, Wisconsin

Veterans Service Office

Scott Bachowski Veterans Service Officer

On January 22, 2015; the County Veterans Service Officer Association of Wisconsin was made aware of potential legislation (LRB4524) that was authored by Representative Ken Skowronski – Franklin, WI and Senator Van Waagaard – Racine, WI. The authors were seeking co-sponsorships from other State Representatives and Senators. Ultimately, Representative Dale Kooyenga – Brookfield, WI, and Representative Alvin Ott – Forest Junction, WI signed onto the legislation as co-sponsors. LRB 4524 was then introduced into committee, without Veteran Service Organizations and the County Veteran Service Officer Associations knowledge, under Assembly Bill 821 (AB821) and in the Senate as Senate Bill 668 (SB668).

These bills would have a severe negative impact on Wisconsin's current veteran benefit delivery structure. The bills remove virtually all remaining duties and responsibilities of the Wisconsin Board of Veterans Affairs and transfer them to the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. As well as:

- Allow counties to optionally appoint a County Veterans Service Officer (currently a mandatory requirement of Wisconsin statutes)
- Allow counties to join with other counties in a consortium to share one County Veterans Service Officer under operating standards which the Wisconsin Department Affairs would direct
- Allow counties to appoint a non-veteran in another department as a Veterans Benefits Specialist
- Eliminate the authority of the County Veterans Service Officer to certify

veterans' eligibility for the Wisconsin Department of Motor Vehicles driver's license veteran identifier

- Eliminate the authority of the County Veterans Service Officer to certify veterans' eligibility for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources disabled veterans park pass and veterans recreation card

On February 1, 2016; both bills AB821 and SB668 had amendments added which stripped language regarding the County Veterans Service Officers being optional for counties. A public hearing was held on February 4, 2016; after several hours of testimony from Veteran Service Organizations, County Veteran Service Officers, and concerned veterans, the bills were pulled from committee and potential voting.

The impacts: Without the assistance of local, veteran service officer experts, our most vulnerable veterans and their widows would be tragically underserved. It is the homebound and infirm, the veterans in local assisted living facilities and nursing homes who cannot transport themselves to a central benefit office to be served. Although we face a decreasing veteran population, this population in Wisconsin is an aging population. This, in combination with the injuries and exposures suffered by our veterans over the last decade of war, serves to increase the complexity and urgency of our veterans' needs.

There is no reasonable justification for restricting access to veterans' benefits. Our lawmakers should be making veteran benefits more accessible not legislating additional obstacles.

Any alternative veteran benefit delivery structures should be fully researched and

vetted by the state's Veteran Service Organizations, the County Veterans Service Officer Association of Wisconsin, and especially, the veteran's community, before potentially eliminating the current structure veterans depend upon, a structure which has proven to be, nationwide, the best model for assistance to our veterans, their dependents and their survivors.

Given the magnitude of the proposed study, its long reaching effect on all veterans in Wisconsin, the enormity of the potential change in economic impact (in 2014, Wisconsin veterans received more than \$2.6 billion in federal benefits alone), and the multiple levels of government involved, the County Veterans Service Officer Association has asked the Legislature to consider referring this study to a Special Legislative Council Study Committee.

Did you know: In total, veterans are the source of \$2.6 billion being injected into Wisconsin. If we consider the economic multiplier, or ripple effect, this injection supports almost 21,670 jobs, \$1.8 billion in total income, and \$147.5 million in tax revenues, which flow into state and local governments. In Barron County, veterans and their surviving spouse receive \$10.6 million dollars each year.



Health & Human Services

Stacey Frolik, Director

Economic Support Services

The Great Rivers Income Maintenance Consortium (GRC), which Barron County is a part of, recently underwent a study by the Deloitte Group that looked at the operations of all 11 consortias in the State of Wisconsin. Eau Claire County is the lead agency for the GRC. The review highlighted some of the good work GRC is engaging in which included the establishment of a Priority Service Food Share Team and the concept of completing all renewals in the Great Rivers Call Center. The study also noted some areas of improvement were the need for increased timeliness of processing initial applications and six-month report form processing. As a result of the study the supervisor group have been discussing many alternative to increase efficiency and accuracy of service delivery. In addition to the study new State and Federal Guidelines have been released specifically related to FoodShare and the timeliness of processing such requests. Attempts will be made to distribute workload in a manner that creates better equity among counties as well as capitalizes on the strengths of the current system.

Due to the warm winter weather as compared to last winter we have experienced a little slower energy assistance season. Reminder, county residents can still apply for energy assistance benefits until May 15, 2016 and that benefit will cover the entire heating season. Assistance can come in the form of payment to a fuel and/or electric vendor or a voucher for wood for wood heat sources.

Public Health

The Public Health Unit continues its journey toward Accreditation. For the last few years, Barron County Public Health has been working toward voluntary accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board. Accredited health departments are tasked with providing documentation to demonstrate the highest standards of operation in the Ten Essential Public Health Services. Public Health plans to submit this documentation to PHAB on May 31, 2016. A site visit will be conducted in Fall 2016, and Barron County Public Health hopes to be accredited by 2017!

Public Health Nurse, Denise Olson, retired

on January 4, 2016 after 29 years of service. We will be replacing this position with a Public Health Specialist. Breanna Olson has been hired as a Public Health nurse to fill a previous vacancy.

Birth-3 programming has been transitioned out of the Youth and Family Services area and into the Public Health Unit. The alignment of assessment and service provision is a better fit to ensure we have the strongest early intervention system as possible. We envision B-3, WIC and Maternal Child Health services, specially Prenatal Care Coordination, will work collaboratively to enhance the outcomes for unborn, infants and young children and their families.

The grant for Be Well Barron County has been extended through June of 2016. We will continue to work on the healthy lifestyle initiatives and wrap up grant activities. As with all grants the question of sustainability is raised and in this case we are happy to say that LakeView Medical Center will be taking over activities supported and coordinated through the grant which include the "EXCEL WITH BE WELL" which focuses on worksite wellness.

Youth and Family Services

Barron County was awarded a competitive Trauma Grant that is funded by the State. This is in addition to the Brighter Futures Initiative (BFI) that we applied for in 2015 and continue to receive. The grant will allow us to have 2-3 more mental health clinicians be trained in the Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy model as well as support the continued implementation of Trauma Tier 3 which focuses on the integration of the community. We plan to focus on our law enforcement and medical communities.

As part of the BFI there will be a presentation By Tonier Cain **on April 25th at 9am at the Barron Area Community Center.** This is a continuation of trauma work following the screening of Paper Tigers which was a huge success. Nearly 200 community members attended the screening.

As part of the current state budget, the Department of Health Services was directed to create the Children's Community Options Program "CCOP" that would replace the Family Support Program effective January 1, 2016. Children who are currently receiv-

ing services through the Family Support Program will be moved to CCOP and families should not experience any changes.

For Barron County this change will mean funds for both the current Community Options Program (COP) and Family Support Program (FSP) will be combined with one set of guidelines for the use of these funds. There should not be any changes to what families currently enrolled in the Family Support Program can use their funds for in 2016. CCOP will continue to allow direct reimbursement for the cost of goods or services that are approved on the child's individual service plan. Similar to the Family Support Program, CCOP will also require an advisory committee that includes parents with children with disabilities. The current Children's Services Advisory Board will serve this requirement and Barron County will seek to increase parent and consumer participation with this committee. In 2014, 36 children were served with Family Support Funding.

Behavioral Health Services

The Community Support Program and Crisis Services Program recently participated in the bi-annual re-certification process which includes a two day onsite visit from the State Licensing Specialist. As a result of the re-certification visit Barron County was recertified for another two year period.

Comprehensive Community Services (CSS) is in full swing after the initial implementation in April of 2015. Not only did the program requirements present challenges to implementation so did the fact that we entered into this venture as an 11 county consortium. CCS is a result of funding that Governor Walker put in the budget to better serve people across the lifespan whom suffer from AODA and/or Mental Health issues. In order to fully access this funding there was a requirement that counties meet one of three criteria. The criteria Barron County met to access the funding was to enter into a regional consortium model. Under the consortium model we are able to re-coup 100% of the actual cost for allowed provided and purchased services the consumer utilizes as long as the consumer has medical assistance. We are serving 25 consumers and have projected doubling that number by the end of 2016.

Forestry

John Cisek, Forester

Timber Sale Activity

A very wet fall and early winter delayed logging operations for the second year in a row. We are working with logging contractors on extending contracts. Currently there are two active timber sales on the County Forest.

- Turtle Cr. II (Tract 3-2013 / # 350) located in the Township of Turtle Lake, covers 243 acres and contains 441 MBF (thousand board feet) of hardwood and pine sawtimber and 1020 cords of oak, hardwood and aspen cordwood. Tri-State Lumber and Land is the contract holder.

Expected revenue is an estimated \$ 212,919.98.

- Shiner Lake (Tract # 5-2014 / # 355) located in the Township of Cedar Lake, covers 92 acres and contains 144.51

MBF of hardwood and pine sawtimber and 1090 cords of hardwood an soft-wood cordwood.

Expected revenue is an estimated \$ 103,917.89

There are nine (9) timber sales that are contracted on the County Forest.

Lumbering Hall of Fame

- At the direction of County Administrator Jeff French, the Forest Administrator applied for and received from the Department of Natural Resources, Barron Countys 2015 County Conservation Grant monies which combined with a Federal Shoreland Improvement Grant allowed the county to build and install (spring 2016) an Americans with Disability Act (ADA) approved fishing pier located at the Lumbering Hall of Fame Park in Rice Lake.

Chetek Fire Tower Sale

- Barron Countys 2016 County Conservation Grant has been applied for and will be used to complete scarification for oak regeneration on Tract # 4-2015 / #359.
- Pending approval by the Barron County Board of Supervisors Barron County will request that the Wisconsin Dept of Natural Resources remove the fire tower located near Chetek.

DNR Liason Forester

- In the fall of 2015 D.N.R. Forester Chris Rucinski retired from his position. Chris will be missed for his experience and knowledge of the Barron County Forest. His position was filled by Janette Cain who was previously stationed in Polk County nad was also responsible for the southern tier of townships in Barron County.

Please contact our office for more information or questions.

Highway

Mark Servi

Highway Commissioner

This has been a relatively quite winter season here in Barron County. So far this winter season (as of Jan 11 Storm Report) we have seen 37-inches of snow in 15 separate storm events, as well as 9 incidents of freezing rain. Compare this to last year, when at this time we had 57-inches of recorded snow in 23 storm events and 9 incidents of freezing rain. Often we hear “wow Highway must be saving a ton of money with this easy winter”. That really is not a true statement. While we certainly do save in the cost of material (salt and salt/sand) and in overtime costs for the crew, we still have many areas where we have needs on the Highways that we would not be able to perform if we had deep snow or many storms.

The crew has been cutting brush along the state highway system. This involves using the mower tractors to cut down brush and other woody vegetation in areas where do not mow during our normal seasonal mowing. This brush needs to be removed before it gets so big that it needs to be cut with a chain-saw. It is much safer for the crew and more efficient overall to cut this with the

tractors. It may appear that we are “mowing”, but look closer and you will see we are actually cutting brush. This brush, if left to remain, can cause drifting as well as create other hazards if allowed to grow. It is good right of way management to cut this brush, and an open winter provides that opportunity. We also have been hauling into Barron field rock that we use in drainage and road projects. Winter is a great time for us to get that rock hauled as many of the areas we are getting the rock from are farmed in the summer, and we have better access on frozen ground with our equipment to the rock piles. It is quite surprising how much rock we use in a construction season.

The mechanic staff has been performing annual maintenance on the equipment we use during the summer, as well as keeping the equipment we are using now reliable. Keeping our equipment in good shape is critical, as we generally do not have “spare” equipment, so when there is a breakdown, it has an impact on productivity and project costs. Our mechanics do an awesome job in preparing our equipment and keeping it on the job.

We are very excited to move into the new cold storage building that has recently been completed. Northwest Builders from Rice Lake constructed the building over the past several months. This building is 11,200 square feet. Three departments will be utilizing space in this building. The Maintenance Department will be storing various equipment. ADRC will be parking their fleet of vehicles inside. Prior to this those vehicles were parked outside in an unsecured location. The Highway Department will use the remaining space as storage for vehicles, equipment and material. The building is finished but there will remain some site work such as pavement placement that will be completed by the Highway Department in the 2016 construction season.

