

External Revenue & Partnerships to Sustain a Forest Landowner Education Program

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Abstract Summary

The Woodland Advisor program moved from a cohort to an open model in 2003. This created partnerships, expanded delivery, and increased external revenues. Classes now have flexible content and schedules, participant feedback focuses new electives, and marketing and volunteer support increased. Business tools also focus activities and identify growth areas.

Background of the Woodland Advisor Program

The Woodland Advisor program started in the late 1980s, it was:

- Decentralized, no central organizational leader
- Partnered with local woodland owner associations, Extension, MN DNR, and others
- Issues varied depending on landowner interest, local issues, and instructor expertise

In 2000, Extension took a more active role in managing the program:

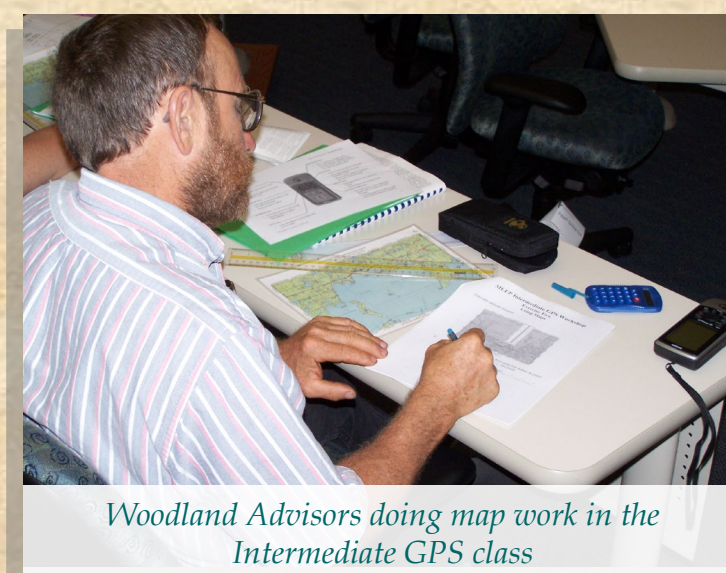
- Unified class content and format
- Trained one cohort per year
- Standardized 40-hour curriculum: half consistent content, half location-specific and flexible

In 2003, the program went to open enrollment:

- Varied topics, locations, and participants
- Taught throughout the year across the state
- Hybridized curriculum 10 core (standard classes) and 5 elective (variable) classes
- Created woodland leaders and volunteers

Revenue Sources

- Participant fees typically \$20 per 3-hour class
 - fee revenue generally covers class costs
- Grants help subsidize class costs and cover expenses
- Partnerships include Extension, Minnesota Forestry Association, and local partners
 - Partners provide in-kind services and logistical work
- Sales of the whole program for a fee



Woodland Advisors doing map work in the Intermediate GPS class



Woodland Advisors in a Growing & Tending Your Forest class

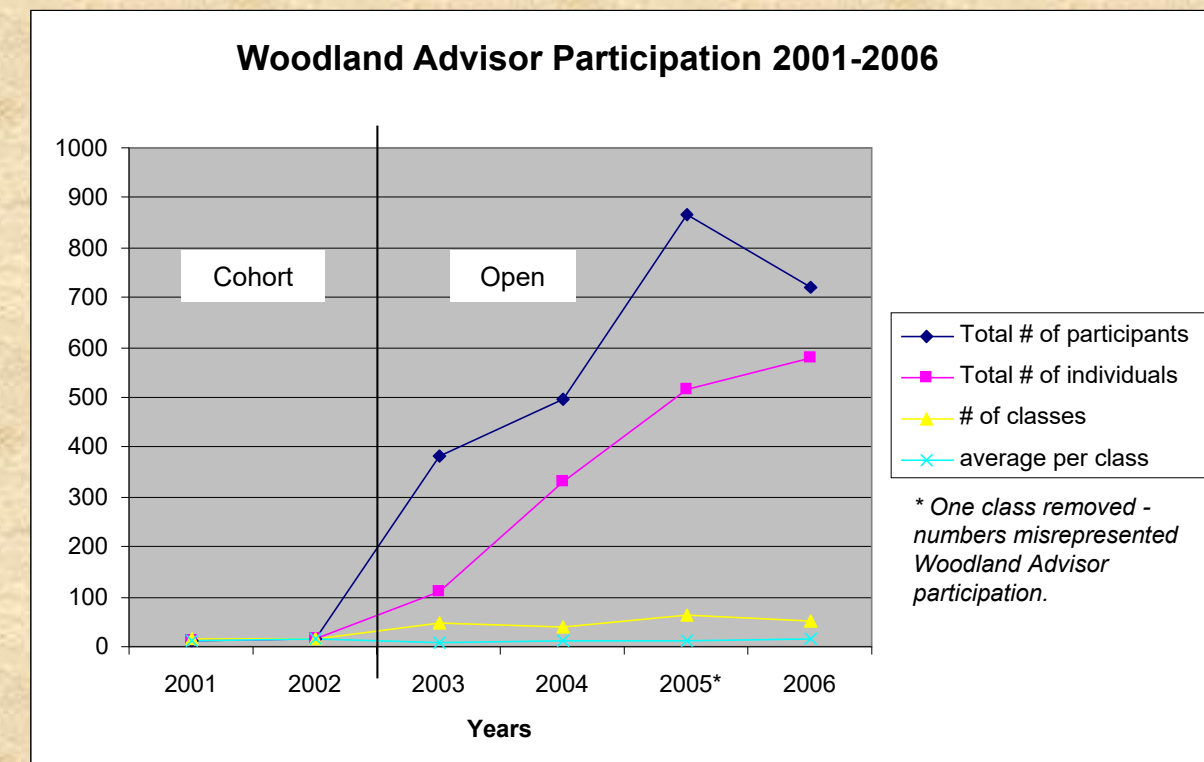


Woodland Advisors attending a Measuring & Reading Your Forest class

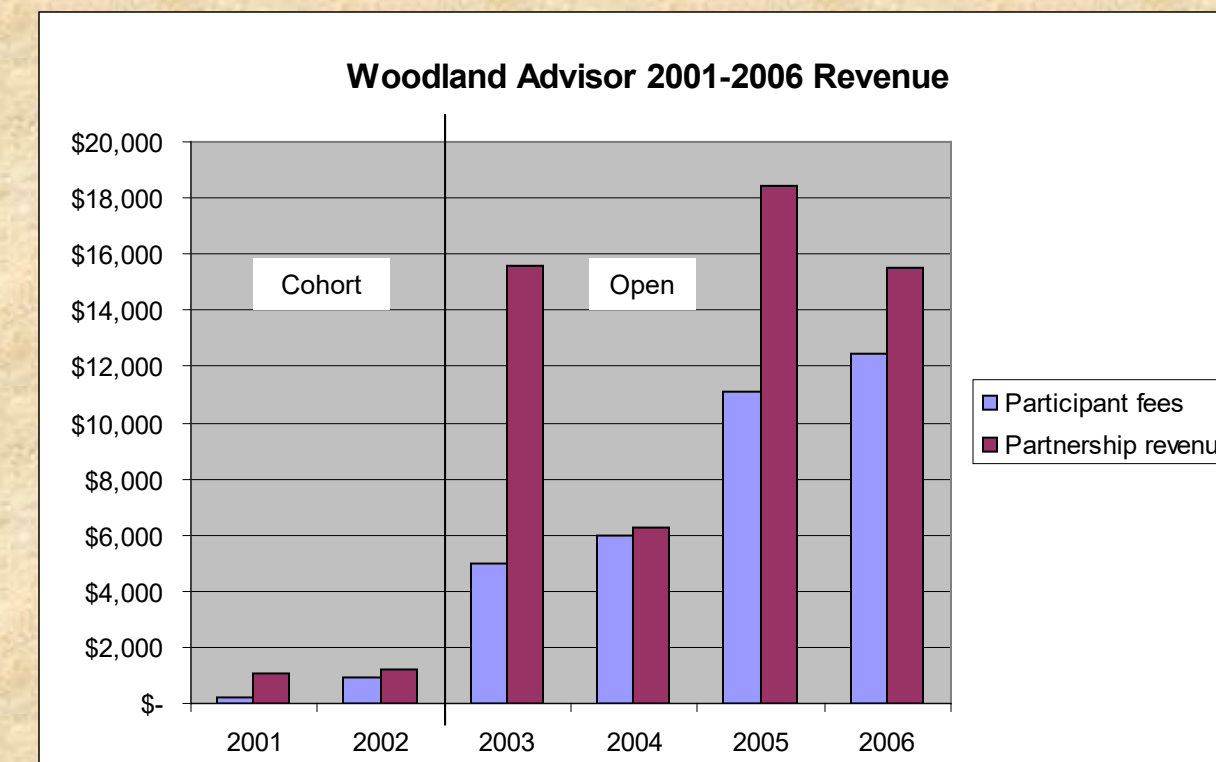
A Successful Outreach Program & Support Structure



Since 2003 when classes moved from cohort to open class format, individual participants have steadily increased and class averages have leveled as represented below.



Since the 2003 change from cohort groups of 11-17 to the open program format the revenue from both participant fees and partnership revenue have both increased substantially.



Woodland Advisors volunteers hosting a forestry field day



Woodland Advisors in Wood Products class



Woodland Advisors in Introduction to GPS class

2003-2006 Changes in Woodland Advisor Class Structure

- Flexible class content and schedules are key to the new Woodland Advisor program structure. Classes are offered throughout the state year round and target local needs. Participants can register for a single class or receive a discount if they purchase a coupon book for the whole series in advance.
- Program evaluations and feedback help to drive new class development. Examples of classes developed because of audience need are *How to Use a GPS Receiver*, *Intermediate and Advanced GPS*, *Buckthorn Removal*, and *How to be a Successful Volunteer*.
- Repeat participation and program growth are encouraged during classes by presenting a program promotional before each session. We also promote repeat attendance by adding participants to our postcard, calendar, and newsletter mailing.
- Program marketing has also been increased. Class announcement postcards are mailed three weeks prior to each class. A quarterly newsletter builds community and encourages engagement and volunteerism. A tri-fold pinup calendar listing upcoming classes is distributed three times per year.
- Volunteer support has increased by assigning volunteer related duties to one program organizer and having large portions of the newsletter devoted to volunteer opportunities and activities.

Implementing Business Tools

Business tools have been utilized to help focus the program. Tools include developing a vision statement, focusing activities, and identifying areas of potential growth as well as aggressive program marketing. We are also developing a strategic plan to continue this business approach.

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Vision Statement: To be Minnesota's leading resource for citizens participating in forestry learning.

