

INTRODUCTION

Wisconsin's forests cover 16 million acres, or 46% of the state's land area. While the public sector and the forest industry own significant forest acreage, most of the state's forestland (57%), is owned by private non-industrial landowners. Thirty percent of the state's forests are owned by the public sector, with federal holdings accounting for 10%, state holdings 5%, and county governments, municipalities, and school districts totaling 15%. Accounting for the balance of the forest resource, Wisconsin's tribes own 2% of the state's forests, corporations own 4%, and the forest industry owns 7%.



Wisconsin's forests are important to many people because they have the unique ability to meet many different needs at once. The production and use of forest products provide products we all use daily, as well as generates employment and support the economic well being of rural and urban communities alike. Public and private forestlands provide opportunities for recreation such as hiking and hunting, as well as the opportunity to simply sit and enjoy the quiet beauty of a forest. Furthermore, our forests clean our air and water, provide habitat for a wide range of plant and animal species, and provide a setting in which we live, work and play.

Virtually all outdoor pursuits—from birdwatching to snowmobiling—have increased in popularity in the last decade. Forest recreation inputs millions of dollars into Wisconsin's economy every day. While the increasing interest in outdoor activities and recreating in forests is a positive turn of events, it brings with it a complex set of new forest management challenges. Continuing growth in the popularity of trail-based activities, for example, has heightened tension between user groups, particularly between motorized and non-motorized recreationists. Many visitors also find harvested timber units unsightly, and negative attitudes toward the immediate effects of timber harvesting in some cases can make active forest management difficult to undertake. An increased commitment to outreach, community dialogue, and planning will be needed to inform the public about the importance of sustainable forest management, involve the public in decision-making, and manage conflicts between user groups.

The enduring productivity of Wisconsin's forests has long been essential to the stability and growth of our state's economy. The forest products sector composes approximately 6% of Wisconsin's economy, fueling over 1,800 companies and employing nearly 100,000 people. Wisconsin is first in the nation in paper production and in the value of our forest industry shipments. Over the years, we have

learned the important lesson that the sustainable management of forests is integral to the health of our state's economy.

In addition, many wildlife species find a seasonal or year-round home in forests. Wisconsin's forests are home to over 650 vertebrate species and 1,800 native vascular plant species. Some of these wildlife species are popular game species, such as whitetail deer, ruffed grouse and wild turkey, which depend on active forest management for the maintenance of suitable habitat. Non-game wildlife species such as herptiles, which include salamanders and frogs, depend on breeding habitat in ephemeral pools that form on the forest floor. Likewise, songbirds nest in forested habitats, from fallen snags to high up in the canopy. While some wildlife and plant species thrive on disturbed habitats, other species require large blocks of forest. Through careful inventory, planning and management, sustainable forestry can help create and protect habitats for a wide range of these species.

Invasive exotic species are a growing problem in Wisconsin's forests. Introduced from outside the ecosystem, invasive exotic species can overwhelm a forest stand when there is no naturally occurring predator or competition. Diseases and insects that damage or kill trees (such as dutch elm disease and gypsy moth), as well as plants that competitively take over the forest understory (such as garlic mustard and multiflora rose), present significant threats to forest resources and the ecological, economic and social benefits they provide.

As Wisconsin's human population continues to increase and more people choose to live in wooded areas, the large blocks of continuous forest that historically characterized the state are being increasingly fragmented. In addition, the area referred to as the "wildland urban interface" — where human dwellings and wildland meet — has grown significantly in recent years. One of the most challenging issues in the wildland urban interface is how to protect human life and property from wildfires. Approximately 1,500 fires burn nearly 5,000 acres in the state annually, and humans cause over 98% of these fires. If the current trend of more people building structures in the wildland urban interface continues, forest fire protection and sustainable management techniques that reduce the risk of forest fires will continue to become increasingly important.



Fragmentation presents other problems, as well. Wildlife species that need large blocks of forest may not be able to maintain viable populations in an increasingly fragmented landscape. Water quality

can also suffer when forests are replaced by lawns or impervious surfaces. When roads and vehicles replace trees, air quality is also affected. Activities such as these permanently fragment forests, taking land out of forest and replacing it with other land uses.

Forests are also fundamental to the quality of the places in which we live. Our urban forest does more than just beautify parks and front yards. A tree canopy softens the blow of a downpour, allowing rain to soak more slowly into the ground, reducing flooding and sedimentation into our rivers and lakes. Trees provide shade in the summer and insulation in the winter, reducing our energy consumption. Urban forest, like all forests, make a tremendous economic, ecological, and aesthetic contribution to our communities.



Wisconsin's Forests in the Future: Sustainable Forestry

The needs and values preserved through sustainability can be divided into three categories: ecological, economic, and social. Together, these categories have come to be referred to as the three pillars of sustainability. People rely on forests for their livelihoods, recreation, spiritual renewal, a vast array of forest products, and other essential functions. To ensure that our children and grandchildren are able to experience forests that are as healthy, useful, and abundant as they are today, it is imperative that we work together to ensure our forests are managed sustainably across the landscape.

From its inception, the statewide forest planning process has been driven by a strong commitment to sustainable forestry. While individual definitions of sustainability differ slightly in their details, there is generally broad-based support that sustainable forestry focuses on meeting the needs of current generations, while protecting the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition, combined with the following principles or goals for sustainable forestry, has guided us in the planning process.