

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# DIVISION OF FORESTRY

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION



2017–2022



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN .....</b>	<b>1</b>
The Future of Wisconsin Forests	
The Purpose of the Strategic Direction	
Next Steps	
<b>2: FOREST HEALTH (FH).....</b>	<b>3</b>
Invasive Species	
Detection and Monitoring	
Partnerships	
Outreach and Education	
<b>3: FOREST PRODUCTS SERVICES (FPS) .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Forest Inventory and Analysis	
Assistance to Industry	
<b>4: FOREST PROTECTION (FP) .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Safety	
Fire Risk Landscapes	
Prevention and Wildland-Urban Interface	
Fire Detection	
Fire Department Grants	
Fire Training	
Law Enforcement	
<b>5: PRIVATELY OWNED FOREST LANDS (PF).....</b>	<b>12</b>
Cooperating Foresters	
Tax Law Programs	
Dispute Resolution	
Outreach to Woodland Owners	
Easements	
Financial Incentives	
<b>6: PUBLIC LANDS (PL).....</b>	<b>16</b>
County Forests	
Forest Management on State Lands	
State Forest Recreation	
Prescribed Burning	
Master Planning	
National Forests	

**7: REFORESTATION (R) ..... 20**

- State Nurseries
- Regeneration Monitoring
- Outreach and Education
- Reforestation on State Lands
- Tree Improvement and Genetics

**8: URBAN FORESTS (UF) ..... 23**

- Direct Assistance
- Building Capacity of Partners
- Urban Assessment Program

**9: SERVICE SUPPORT FUNCTIONS (SS) ..... 26**

- Forest Sciences
- Research
- IT & GIS
- Outreach and Education
- Division Organization Effectiveness and Development
- Hiring and Training
- Forest Certification

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**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Forestry  
101 South Webster Street PO Box 7921  
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7921**

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**<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ForestPlanning/strategicDirection.html>**



# **INTRODUCTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

## THE FUTURE OF WISCONSIN FORESTS

Wisconsin's forests are fundamental to the state's ecological, economic and social wellbeing. The capacity of Wisconsin's forests to continue to support existing and emerging industries and produce beneficial environmental services, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and soil conservation, is contingent on forests being protected from damaging agents and sustainably managed. Given the importance of Wisconsin's forests to the state's economy and environment, it is essential that the Division of Forestry maximizes:

- The value delivered to the people of Wisconsin,
- Efficient use of limited resources and collective capacity, and
- Our ability to adapt to new and emerging opportunities and challenges.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Strategic Direction is the Division of Forestry's 5-year strategic plan. The purpose of the document is to describe the Division of Forestry's niche within the broader forestry community in addressing major issues and priority topics and our clear intent for how we plan to achieve those objectives in the next five years.

This is the Division's second Strategic Direction, and much of what is presented here continues initiatives that we began five years ago or have done for many years. This reflects our belief that these functions have been—and remain—an appropriate and valued role for the division. There are also several significant changes outlined here to address the changing needs of the forestry community and citizens of Wisconsin. As a result, the Strategic Direction identifies ongoing challenges and opportunities that continue to need our attention, as well as new ones that are within our niche.

Finally, the major issues and threats affecting the forests of Wisconsin cannot be tackled by one group, organization, or agency. It is evident the resources we and our partners have to work with will continue to be limited. This demands efficient and effective use of the resources provided to us by the people of Wisconsin in order to maximize the value we and our partners collectively deliver. The Division is in a position to facilitate partnerships with the goal of increasing the collective capacity and impact of the forestry community as a whole. Through collaboration we share resources and responsibilities to jointly plan, implement and evaluate programs to achieve our common goals.

## NEXT STEPS

As we move forward we will assess how best to align our resources to address priorities and develop an implementation plan. We expect implementation will be phased, in recognition of work that needs to be completed before implementation can proceed. Implementing the changes presented in the Strategic Direction will be challenging. However, we are confident in the capabilities of Division staff and our partners to succeed in this endeavor. We have a history here in Wisconsin of working together to accomplish important work involving our forests. We anticipate this collaboration will continue as we work to implement the Division of Forestry's Strategic Direction.



# FOREST HEALTH

The health of Wisconsin's forests is critical for providing high-quality wildlife habitat, clean air and water, and a reliable supply of raw material for Wisconsin's forest products industries, while also reducing erosion and improving quality of life in urban and rural areas. When forests are healthy, they are able to respond to changing conditions and be more resilient to insect and disease infestations. There are many systems in Wisconsin to detect and monitor changes in forest health such as satellite imagery, ground surveys, and even private landowners sharing information about what's happening on their property. Agencies and communities in Wisconsin are forming partnerships to work together to respond to forest health issues.

## DIVISION OF FORESTRY ROLE IN FOREST HEALTH

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**The Division's role in forest health is to provide technical expertise in the prevention, detection, assessment, management and monitoring of invasive plants, insects and diseases that damage trees and forests, and the benefits they provide. The Division will maintain its existing capacity to assist public and private landowners in their efforts to minimize the establishment and adverse impacts from invasive plants and destructive forest insects and diseases.**

## INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species management will continue to be a key focus; however, over the next five years we will reduce involvement in gypsy moth suppression in order to more effectively manage higher priority invasive species. A reduced involvement is dependent on an administrative rule change and requires working with partner agencies.

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) continues to pose a threat to Wisconsin's forests, and we are transitioning from survey and detection of EAB to forest management with EAB. We work collaboratively with our partners to address EAB management in forests, as well as other invasive insects, diseases, and plants.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue the shift in investment toward increased emphasis on invasive species work. There will be a continuing focus on emerging priority needs with a corresponding reduction in gypsy moth suppression efforts. (FH-1)

## DETECTION AND MONITORING

Monitoring the incidence, severity, impact and location of forest insect and disease populations provides the information needed to focus mitigation strategies, evaluate disease prevention protocols, and broadens our knowledge on the influence these organisms have on forest ecosystems. We will use survey and monitoring results to evaluate trends in the state and apply risk analysis at both a landscape-scale and local property (e.g. state forest) level.

We will continue to make strategic on-site field investigations of forest decline and to provide insect identification and disease diagnostic services.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue to provide detection, delimitation, monitoring, and impact assessments of invasive plants, highly damaging insects, and disease-causing organisms. The technical assistance and map development the forest health program provides to partners and land managers is critical for them to make appropriate management decisions. (FH-2)

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Currently, administrative rule NR40 provides the framework for controlling non-native damaging pests in Wisconsin. We will continue to take a lead role at the state and national levels in developing rule guidelines (e.g. firewood regulations) and promoting partnerships so that prompt action can be taken upon the arrival of a regulated NR40 invasive species. Additionally, through outreach and education, we will improve the protection of Wisconsin's forests from invasive insects, diseases, and plants. Our continued leadership in this area allows the forest health program to actively control prohibited invasive species in forests by working directly with DNR law enforcement staff and other partners such as DATCP and APHIS.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue to work in partnership with other DNR divisions, state and federal agencies, and local municipalities to minimize the damage to Wisconsin's forests from harmful invasives. (FH-3)

## **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION**

Forest managers and Wisconsin's citizens work, recreate, and live in Wisconsin's forests, but if they are not aware of threatening invasive problems, they will not be able to report or recognize them. Key program objectives include creating awareness of invasives and improving understanding of Best Management Practices (BMP's), encouraging higher efficiency of invasive species' detection, and informing forest managers and citizens on invasive species identification and management. We will continue to explore and expand partnership opportunities, like Weed Management Area, to leverage state and federal funding.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will investigate education and outreach strategies, and develop and implement outreach plans to engage audiences more in the prevention and management of invasive species that harm forests. A focus, though not exclusive, will be to private landowners, industry and resource professionals (FH-4)





# FOREST PRODUCTS SERVICES

Commercial markets for forest products provide nearly 65,000 jobs throughout the state and allow Wisconsin's landowners to realize economic benefits as part of managing forests. The Forest Products Services Program (FPS) has two focus areas: 1) a forest inventory component, including rural and urban Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA), Timber Products Output (TPO), Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI), and 2) a utilization and marketing component. Each component complements the other; thus creating a team able to respond to the needs of the industry.

The forest products industry continues to recover from the decline experienced in the recession of 2008, but not necessarily with the same mix of commercial products as before. The industry continues to look for new ways of doing business. Markets for certified wood, biomass and new engineered wood products are likely to influence growth opportunities. Diverse markets are emerging such as urban wood, urban wood waste and expanded international opportunities. Many small businesses will be challenged because they have limited expertise to transition into new markets and limited technological capacity. The challenge of recruiting and retaining a qualified and engaged workforce is present for several facets of the forest industry. The stable supply of certified wood in the state will continue to reinforce the state's competitive advantage. The state's forest products industries benefit from research and education regarding new markets, navigating regulatory procedures, and ideas for forest-based economic development.

## DIVISION OF FORESTRY ROLE IN FOREST PRODUCTS SERVICES

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**The Division's role in the marketing and utilization of forest products is to facilitate the ability of the private sector to use the state's wood resource in an efficient, effective and sustainable manner, maximizing wood's contribution to Wisconsin's economy. The Division will maintain its capacity to provide assistance to wood-producing and wood-using companies around the state and its capacity to assess the condition of the state's forest resources.**



# FOREST PRODUCTS SERVICES

## **FOREST INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) is a program that provides geographically based information regarding forest composition, change, production and ownership and tracks that data over extended periods of time. This information helps many agencies, organizations, and companies identify market opportunities and prioritize their efforts. Continuing to invest in the FIA program will encourage sound planning and decision-making by public and private landowners in Wisconsin.

The Division will maintain its forest inventory programs by continuing to invest in FIA at the double intensity level, ensuring its continued ability to use the information at a sub-state scale, continued investments in our CFI program, urban FIA measurements, and forest regeneration monitoring. (FPS-1)

## **ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY**

The Forest Products Services Team will work collaboratively with key partners to facilitate improving the forest industry environment to maintain a thriving and vibrant forestry community. One of the key ways to ensure vibrancy is a focus on industry work force development, specifically the promotion of career paths into the primary and secondary forest sectors. Through its strong technical expertise, the FPS team is well suited to assist with these partner connections to enhance the overall long term viability of the forest industry and management of the forest resources in Wisconsin.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will focus efforts to identify opportunities for maintenance and growth of and assistance to the forest industry in effective solutions to improve: a) wood utilization of hard-to-market species, b) work force development; and c) understanding within DNR regarding industry needs. This focus will enhance the overall capacity and stability of the forest industry through collaboration with private and other government partners. (FPS-2)

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue to provide professional technical assistance to new and existing wood using companies and individuals. (FPS-3)



# FOREST PROTECTION

Wisconsin's forests are, to varying degrees, at risk for destructive wildland fires. The number of wildland fires in Wisconsin varies annually depending on weather, fuel conditions and human activity. Periodic drought cycles drastically affect the number of fires and acres burned.

Fire can be extremely dangerous or beneficial to the health of forests, depending on the circumstances. The choice to aggressively fight wildland fire has direct effects on fire-dependent ecosystems. A counter-balance to the aggressive suppression of fires is use of prescribed burning, a management tool used to manage and restore fire-dependent ecosystems that otherwise would be difficult to sustain.

Local fire departments are critical partners in detecting, managing and suppressing wildland fires within the state, which is accomplished through an interagency approach in a coordinated, efficient and effective manner. Wisconsin is party to several agreements such as the Great Lakes Forest Fire Compact, National Wildfire Coordinating Group and commitments with several other agencies to share resources such as single engine air tankers, helicopters, fire fighters and equipment.

## DIVISION OF FORESTRY ROLE IN FOREST PROTECTION

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**The Division's role in forest fire protection is to prevent, detect and rapidly suppress wildland fires in areas of the state that have the greatest potential for significant loss of property, natural resources and even lives due to wildland fire. The Division complements the capacity of local fire departments by filling roles (e.g., Incident Management Teams, heavy equipment) not efficiently covered on a community by community basis. The Division will allocate fire detection and suppression resources based on an updated assessment of risk as defined by fire landscapes in Wisconsin, and continue enhanced efforts in fire prevention and risk mitigation.**

## **SAFETY**

With our broad reach throughout the state and help from our partners, we are well positioned to protect the public and respond to potentially catastrophic wildland fires. Safety of firefighters and the public is the top priority in our fire protection program. Investments in safety will be maintained.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain current investment in fire safety. Working together with partners to improve firefighter and citizen safety is and will continue to be the Division's highest priority. (FP-1)

## **FIRE RISK LANDSCAPES**

The most effective way to identify and express the concept of fire suppression risk in Wisconsin is through the identification of distinct fire risk landscapes. The fire risk landscape map was initially developed as part of the Fire Program Assessment (2010) and analyzes data instrumental in predicting fire hazard such as vegetation, ecological landscapes, soil, forest patch size, and parcel improvements. The fire risk landscape map was updated in 2016 to reflect changing conditions on the landscape across Wisconsin. Efficiencies were gained by focusing investments in the highest risk areas during the original Strategic Direction efforts, so we will continue to allocate detection and suppression resources in a manner that reflects level of risk and hazard. Continually being prepared for fire response includes developing and maintaining fire suppression infrastructure, fire suppression equipment readiness, identifying values at risk, predicting fire activity, pre-positioning of personnel and equipment based on fire weather, and prompt dispatching of firefighters and equipment.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue to allocate fire resources based on level of hazard. Resources will be placed within the state based on the 2016 fire risk landscapes to most efficiently prepare for, detect, and suppress wildland fires with emphasis on high risk areas. This reflects the way the program focuses investments with updated data. (FP-2)

## PREVENTION AND WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

Enhancing the public's understanding of the causes of wildland fires, the conditions that increase likelihood of wildland fires igniting, and the extent of the damage that can result, will contribute to a reduction in activities by the public that historically results in damaging wildland fires. Specific investments will continue to target the statewide Wildland-Urban Interface Program (WUI) in high priority fire landscapes. An internet-based burning permits system is a cost-effective and responsive tool to manage burning activity on a day-to-day basis. As a result, the investment in the emergency fire warden program has been significantly reduced.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain existing fire prevention and the Wildland-Urban Interface mitigation programs. The Fire Management program will streamline messaging through the consolidation and branding of WUI and fire prevention education and outreach materials. This effort will provide the tools the program needs to focus education, outreach, and technical assistance we provide to landowners, rural fire departments, forest recreationists, and community leaders (FP-3)

## FIRE DETECTION

We will continue to be the leader in providing wildland fire protection services through early detection and rapid initial attack with ground-based resources (e.g. engines and tractor plows). Aircraft will remain an essential tool for detection, ensuring firefighter and public safety, and enabling ground resources to more aggressively attack on-going fires. Aging infrastructure associated with the forest fire lookout towers required the department to decommission these lookout towers in 2016.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division eliminated forest fire lookout towers and relies on citizen reporting and aerial technology to detect forest fires. (FP-4)

## FIRE DEPARTMENT GRANTS

A key partnership in wildland fire management is with the fire departments in the state. A cost-effective approach to support general suppression capabilities in areas of lower wildland fire risk and exposure, as well as to provide critical structural protection in areas of high fire risk, is to enhance the capabilities of local fire departments. Division of Forestry Forest Fire Protection (FFP) grants help local fire departments purchase equipment and supplies that improve their capability and safety on wildland fires. Additionally, the Division will continue the Forestry Duty Officer as a single point of contact for fire departments, and staff members will provide wildland fire training to fire department members annually.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain its current investment in providing FFP grants, Forestry Duty Officer, and wildland fire training to local fire departments to assist in suppressing and preventing wildland fires. (FP-5)

## **FIRE TRAINING**

It is essential to provide a trained and qualified workforce to be effective in emergency response and maintain safe operations. Our commitment to meet established national and state training standards for wildland and prescribed fire will be maintained. Since the 2012 Strategic Direction, the Division of Forestry has determined to proceed with the development of four district-wide incident management teams (IMT), as opposed to the local short teams and district long teams proposed initially in the Forestry Strategic Direction. The Division will continue to support the four district IMT concept. Interagency drills and scenarios are an efficient way to train and maintain skills and will be continued.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue to fund training as a basic function of the fire protection program at current levels. (FP-6)

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Law enforcement is also an important component of an effective fire control and recreation program. Deputy Forest Rangers will continue to enforce laws regarding burning and conduct fire cause investigations. Significant forestry related law enforcement cases (i.e. timber theft, arson, etc.) will still be investigated by the department, but the cases will be led by the Conservation Wardens in the future through a service agreement with the Division of Forestry.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** Division of Forestry will maintain Deputy Forest Rangers as enforcing officers for providing fire investigations and handling burning law violations. Consolidation of Department law enforcement officers in the Bureau of Law Enforcement (BLE) will require development of a service agreement between Forestry and BLE for recreation law enforcement on the northern state forests and all significant forestry law enforcement cases to be led by conservation wardens for investigation (e.g. timber theft, arson, etc.). (FP-7)



# PRIVATELY OWNED FOREST LANDS

The majority of Wisconsin's 17 million acres of forest land is held by private non-industrial landowners--11.9 million acres of this land is cared for by about 391,000 individuals and families. In addition, family-owned private land supplies a majority of the wood needed for Wisconsin's forest products industry. Private lands provide abundant recreational opportunities and a range of ecosystem services, much of which benefit the public at large.

The large amount of privately held forest land in Wisconsin provides an opportunity for the Division to engage in outreach, provide technical assistance, and support the private sector. The Division is uniquely able to invest in tools and resources aimed at engaging landowners, which is increasingly important and challenging considering changing demographics, landowner values, and management obstacles.

## DIVISION OF FORESTRY ROLE IN SERVICE TO PRIVATE LANDOWNERS

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**The Division's role in service to Wisconsin's private landowners is to provide assistance that encourages these landowners to sustainably manage their forests. DNR Foresters can provide forest management services, including technical assistance, expertise, advice and information on a wide variety of issues affecting land management decisions to private forest landowners, consulting foresters, and other professionals in the forestry community.**

## COOPERATING FORESTERS

The Division's Cooperating Forester program encourages the practice of sustainable forestry through a cooperative effort between the Department and independent private consulting foresters and industrial foresters. Through this program, private foresters enter into a formal agreement with the Department to promote and facilitate sound forest management.

The Division is committed to supporting the Cooperating Forester program to ensure that a well-qualified, highly skilled workforce is available to provide forestry assistance to private forest landowners. In recognition of the increased role of Cooperating Foresters, the Division will continue to support the program to help it grow. This could include working with a group of Cooperators, to collectively assess and address the needs of private sector.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will support efforts to build capacity and maximize the use of Cooperating Foresters. (PF-1)

## TAX LAW PROGRAMS

Tax law programs (Managed Forest Law [MFL] and Forest Crop Law [FCL]) are major tools that the state uses to keep forests as forests, providing sustainable management that produces an array of public benefits. We will continue to invest in these programs including efforts to make the programs more responsive. Additional efficiencies identified over the past five years will continue to be implemented and the Division will focus on maximizing the effectiveness of the tax law programs. The ability of tax law programs to promote sustainable forestry in Wisconsin can be further realized by implementing changes that reduce administrative workload and increase public awareness.

The current MFL service model includes the administration of tax law programs in over 140 positions. A new model is being adopted that will concentrate tax law work in fewer, specialized positions. This service model will allow the Division to develop tax law expertise in fewer people, providing certainty and consistency in tax law administration.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue to improve administration of the Tax Law programs, focusing on a new service model which will consolidate tax law work into fewer positions and develop expertise in staff. (PF-2)



## DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Division is committed to providing landowners whose lands are enrolled in forest tax law programs with the necessary tools and resources to make well-informed land management decisions. The Tax Law Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) offers landowners an alternative process to challenge forestry-related decisions affecting their land. The DRP is a voluntary process intended to facilitate timely, fair and unbiased resolution when disagreements between DNR Foresters, private-sector foresters (cooperators and others), loggers or landowners cannot be resolved.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will increase investment in developing, implementing and evaluating processes to help woodland owners resolve disagreements that affect their land management decisions. (PF – 3)

## OUTREACH TO WOODLAND OWNERS

Of the 11.9 million acres of privately owned non-industrial forest land in the state, less than a third is enrolled in tax law programs. We recognize that many woodland owners who are not in a tax law program are managing their land; however there are many others who are unaware of the professional forestry services available to them. Professional assistance can help private woodland owners achieve objectives they have for their land in a manner that sustains the forest and the many benefits it provides.

We will be increasing our investment and focus on identifying and assisting woodland owners who are not actively managing their land. We will pilot and evaluate strategies to reach woodland owners and connect them to resources and services that can help them start managing their land. These strategies will incorporate targeted marketing techniques to motivate and support the actions landowners can take. We will also identify opportunities to collaborate with other landowner outreach efforts throughout the state (e.g., Driftless Forest Network projects, in order to leverage our resources and prevent the duplication of efforts.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will increase investment in reaching non-MFL private woodland owners through strategic outreach campaigns and collaboration with other programs and partners. Targeted outreach messaging will focus on the importance of sustainable forestry and connecting private woodland owners to professional assistance, to help guide woodland owners' management decisions. (PF-4)

## EASEMENTS

Easements are a powerful tool to keep forests as forests, ensuring they continue to provide all of their services and benefits. We will continue to use easements to increase the acreage of large block lands open to public recreation and managed sustainably for forest products, preventing development and maintaining unique landscapes and rare species. Easements generally cost less than half of fee acquisitions and have the further benefit of keeping the land under private management, with appropriate state oversight.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain its investment in conservation easements programs to secure public benefits on private forested lands. (PF-5)

## FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

At some point, many woodland owners find themselves faced with financial challenges, which can lead some to sell part of their land, forego management activities, or harvest their woods in a manner that compromises the long-term productivity and health of the forest. Fortunately, financial incentives are available to help landowners manage their woodlands.

We believe the primary focus of financial incentives should be those landowners who are not already receiving significant public incentives through the forest tax programs. Focusing this funding will allow the Division to reach out to more landowners who may not otherwise be able to afford professional assistance. We will also continue to promote federal financial incentives to supplement available state cost-share dollars. This will involve efforts to strengthen the communication and understanding between the DNR and federal programs, such as Natural Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which will allow our DNR staff to effectively assist landowners in obtaining federal incentives.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will focus the investment of financial incentives to landowners who are not currently participating in tax law programs. (PF – 6)



# PUBLIC LANDS

Wisconsin's publicly owned forests consist of county, state and national forest properties covering approximately 5.5 million acres. Collectively, these forests provide a variety of important benefits for the citizens of Wisconsin, specifically large blocks of forests and natural communities that represent unique ecological landscapes, high quality habitat for many rare species, a diversity of recreation amenities, and a stable resource base for Wisconsin's wood products industry.

## DIVISION OF FORESTRY ROLE IN PUBLIC LANDS

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**The Division's role is managing and working in partnership on public lands – county, state, and federal - to ensure that forested lands are balancing the economic, ecological and social benefits derived from forests as set out in property plans.**



### COUNTY FORESTS

Wisconsin's county forest program is a unique state/county partnership designed to promote sustainable management of forests for the purpose of providing an array of public benefits. Currently, there are county forests in 29 of Wisconsin's 72 counties, totaling more than 2.36 million acres. Collectively, the county forests represent the state's largest public forest land-holding.

Each county forest is different in size ranging from 1,000 to 273,000 acres. Some are in counties with sizable cities whereas others are not. Each is managed by a different local government, and each has their own fiscal and political constraints to deal with. The needs of individual county forests vary widely, based on size, location, county capacity and other factors. Currently, we provide staff for planning, reforestation, inventory and timber sale assistance, fiscal support for counties to hire professional expertise, grants for forest and wildlife management practices, coordination and management of third party forest certification, loans for land acquisition and management needs, and annual acreage payments for land within the program.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue to provide a suite of services and support to counties in order to maintain the excellent partnership that has been developed. The Division will continue to monitor County Forest needs and adjust the assistance the state provides to the counties under this program, to ensure the opportunity for individual counties to select among an array of resources that best meet their needs. (PL-1)

### FOREST MANAGEMENT ON STATE LANDS

Currently, 1.6 million acres of land are in state ownership, of which approximately 930,000 acres are forested. Approximately half of the forested acreage is designated as state forests and half is in other state land ownership – wildlife areas, fisheries areas, state parks, and many others. Each state property is required to have a master plan. The plan reiterates tribal rights, is critical for defining public property management, and is facilitated by public input. It involves diverse stakeholders, analyzing alternative actions and incorporating ecosystem management principles to provide public benefits.

We are committed to meeting allowable harvest goals on state lands. Where cost-effective, the Division will continue to utilize lump-sum timber sales and work collaboratively, when and where needed, with private consulting foresters to supplement DNR's ability to accomplish workload priorities across the Division. The majority of this work will continue to be done by DNR staff.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will remain committed to current levels of sustainable forest management on all state lands as identified in property master plans with public input and Natural Resources Board approvals. The Division will continue to meet allowable harvest goals as determined through the master planning process on all state lands. (PL-2)

**STATE FOREST RECREATION**

State forests provide unique recreation opportunities due to their large forest blocks, extensive lakes and rivers, and remote nature. The demand for nature based recreation is increasing and the state forests will continue to provide opportunities to the public.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain its investment overall in the resources it provides to recreational opportunities on state forests; however, the Division will work cooperatively with the Bureau of Parks and Recreation to ensure resources are allocated to develop and maintain recreation opportunities on state forests. The Forestry Division will maintain oversight on all state forests. (PL-3)

**PRESCRIBED BURNING**

Prescribed burns are necessary to maintain Wisconsin's remaining high-quality fire dependent landscapes and are often the most effective and efficient method of maintaining and restoring these ecosystems. The use of prescribed burning, a management tool used to manage and restore fire dependent ecosystems that otherwise would be difficult to sustain will be increased within the Division of Forestry.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will be the Administrative Division for coordination of Department prescribed burning activities, including work planning, burn coordination, accountability and record maintenance. (PL-4)

**MASTER PLANNING**

We provide assistance to all DNR programs in the development of master plans for forested state lands. We have worked aggressively to update property master plans for state forest properties in the last five years and are now able to shift resources to assist other state lands over the next several years.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will shift investment in master planning to a consolidated Department-wide model and will focus time on achieving master planning objectives for other state lands. (PL-5)



## **NATIONAL FORESTS**

The 2014 Farm Bill and the 2014 FY federal Appropriations Act authorizes the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and allows the US Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with states to allow the states to perform watershed restoration and forest management services on National Forest System (NFS) lands. This authorization allows states to use many of their own state policies and procedures to conduct the work (not federal contracting mechanisms and requirements). GNA provides a way for the state to increase the level of accomplishment, most notably timber sales, on the national forests. By working with the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF) to more fully implement their approved land management plan, we can increase the amount of wood being brought to market – a desired outcome our partners have been voicing for many years.

The federal GNA legislation authorizes the states to implement GNA through three mechanisms. Depending on the availability of staff and resources, type of project, and desire of partners, the Division could: 1) conduct the work themselves, and/or 2) contract with cooperating foresters to conduct work, and/or 3) contract with county forests to conduct work.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will utilize multiple mechanisms to assist with administration, planning, operations and field implementation of GNA work according to and in compliance with the approved CNNF Plan. The Division will provide forester time and specialized staff for implementation, as well as contracting with counties and private sector foresters. (PL-6)



# REFORESTATION

The amount of forest land in Wisconsin has steadily increased since the cutover that ended early in the last century. Today over 48% of the state—17 million—acres is covered by forests. The vast majority of Wisconsin's forests regenerate naturally, but reforestation (planting tree seedlings following a harvest) and afforestation (re-establishing forests on lands previously cleared of trees) play essential roles in protecting and enhancing the suite of diverse benefits forests provide.

While the amount of forest land continues to increase across the state, forest growth has not been consistent. Most counties have either shown increases or stayed the same in amount of forested area, but ten counties have shown a decrease. A decline in industrial forest ownership, more highly fragmented forest lands, economic decline, new landowner objectives, new tax structures, conversion of forested land to other land uses, and shrinking federal cost-share programs have led to fewer tree planting projects across the state.

## DIVISION OF FORESTRY ROLE IN REFORESTATION

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**The Division's role is to encourage afforestation and reforestation in Wisconsin by facilitating the availability of an adequate supply of high quality seedlings of native species at an economical price from public and private sources. The Division will maintain a capacity to produce stock at a level that, when combined with private sector capacity, meets projected demand for tree seedlings.**

## STATE NURSERIES

When public and private landowners have access to economically priced seedlings, their plantings contribute to a variety of important statewide goals such as increasing the amount of forestland in the state, connecting fragmented forest parcels, economically producing forest products and increasing the diversity of species across the state. The DNR's Ecological Landscapes Handbook helps define where afforestation or reforestation is most desirable ecologically, recognizing that individual landowners ultimately decide whether and where to establish and maintain forest cover. Tree planting offers private landowners the opportunity to earn income from not only traditional forest products, but also from potential new markets for carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services.

The Department has adjusted its capacity due to declines in demand for nursery stock. On a regular basis, the Division will assess stock projections and analyze the nursery market to better understand what the best role and optimal capacity is for the reforestation program. In order to make future adjustments in state production, it is also important to know the capacity of private nurseries to serve Wisconsin with production of native stock to meet the overall demand.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** State nursery facilities will scale production in relation to private sector capacity and changing seedling demand, balancing flexibility with cost of production. (R-1)

## REGENERATION MONITORING

Over time trees must be able to adapt to stressors like insects, diseases, animal herbivory, and shifts in climate. Deer browsing on regeneration is having impacts on desirable tree species and their ability to maintain a presence in Wisconsin forests. It is important to monitor the success of regeneration, both natural and artificial, to have the best information and data to adjust management practices; manage the deer herd; and adjust what type of seedlings are produced, their genetic qualities, and geographically where they are best suited to grow. Gathering and assessing information on the success or failure of certain tree species and seeds will benefit private nursery production as well as state nurseries and should be in collaboration with our partners in the private sector.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will focus the investment in natural and artificial forest regeneration in a monitoring program to identify problems, field test potential solutions, and disseminate lessons learned to public and private landowners to ensure successful regeneration, high-quality stock and successful planting survival in the future. (R-2)



## OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Effective public outreach and education is an important tool to implement the reforestation program effectively. Regeneration is critical to sustainably managing Wisconsin forests. Reforestation practices can be significant investments that may not see a return for many decades. Encouraging landowners to regenerate forests will add to Wisconsin's ability to sustainably manage its forests.

**Intent Statement:** The Reforestation Program will continue to provide updated publications, nursery products and expertise to complement the education and outreach efforts performed by other Forestry disciplines to foster public and private landowners' understanding of the importance reforestation plays in the quality of the environment. (R-3)

## REFORESTATION ON STATE LANDS

Stable funding is now available for reforestation on state lands, including site preparation and release of both natural and artificial regeneration. A statute change secured funding through the use of timber sale revenues for reforestation associated with timber sales. Gift accounts, special funding opportunities, and internal and external grant sources will remain available. The combination of funding opportunities allows Division to provide regeneration activities on DNR managed state-owned lands to a point that the post-harvest sale area meets department guidelines.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain the use of funds for reforestation on all state lands, ensuring adequate resources to meet identified reforestation needs. (R-4)

## TREE IMPROVEMENT AND GENETICS

Tree improvement and forest genetics work is important in helping to ensure healthy, sustainable forests. Over the years, the genetics program has made genetic gains and improvements in a variety of forest trees species including jack pine, red pine, white pine, white spruce, black walnut, butternut and red oak. These improvements have included improved form, growth, disease resistance, and adaptability. Orchards have been established for these species and many are providing improved seed. However, with the significant decline in tree planting, as with nursery stock production, there is less demand for improved material. Therefore, resources that were allocated in the 2012 Strategic Direction will now be reallocated to other priorities. The Division will maintain existing contracts, explore new contracting opportunities, and continue to utilize existing staff within the Reforestation Program to accomplish tree improvement needs.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will reduce investment in forest genetics and tree improvement. The division will maintain existing orchards and material. Contracting will be explored for forest genetics knowledge and advances in the tree improvement and genetic material. (R-5)



# URBAN FORESTS

Wisconsin's urban forests provide a wide range of ecological, economic and social benefits for the 70% of Wisconsin's population that lives in an urban area and visitors to these communities. Urban areas contain nearly 42.8 million trees with an estimated total replacement value of almost \$19.3 billion. Many citizens don't realize all the services urban forests provide. They reduce air pollution; retain and mitigate storm water runoff; provide wildlife habitat; conserve energy; improve public health and wellbeing; increase property values; and attract businesses, tourists and residents.

Urban forests face two main challenges. First, our current tree canopy cover is only 19.8%, well below the recommended 40%, and second, it lacks species diversity. An estimated 25-43% of all urban trees and 64% of street trees are either maple or ash. This leads to a high level of instability (e.g. high susceptibility to catastrophic loss from a pest such as Emerald Ash Borer). Effective urban forest management includes up-to-date inventories and resulting operational plans and the resources to implement them. Urban Forestry continues to develop tools to assess the resource and develop strategies to provide more comprehensive tree canopy management.

## DIVISION OF FORESTRY ROLE IN URBAN FORESTRY

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**The Division's role in urban forestry is to support urban forestry efforts across the state and to facilitate partnerships to advance urban forestry as practiced by local communities, private sector specialists, and community organizations. By building capacity of partners and by continuing to provide partners direct assistance, such as grants and urban assessment tools, the Division's focus on an integrated canopy delivery model will maximize public benefits from the urban forest.**

## **DIRECT ASSISTANCE**

The Division will focus assistance on key partners and advocates to enhance the program's influence on the urban forest, both publically and privately held. By using geographically based assessment tools we are focusing assistance at the appropriate scale for maximum impact to the urban forest canopy. Urban forestry grant funding is maintained at the current level. We will continue to explore grant rule changes to enable larger grants to achieve broader canopy objectives and benefits from economies of scale.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Urban Forestry Program will continue to invest in sharing resources and information through traditional methods, as well as Arbor Day activities, Tree City events, and partner workshops. (UF-1)

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain the urban forestry grant program at current levels and focus on projects and partnerships that enhance canopy and leverage local resources. (UF-2)

## **BUILDING CAPACITY OF PARTNERS**

We will facilitate public and private partnerships to increase capacity and investment in the urban forest canopy. Additionally, we will improve the ability of partners to deliver urban forestry services and resources by sharing tools, resources and ideas to maintain and increase canopy and the resulting benefits. This is intended to increase awareness and demand for urban forestry services and enable others to do the work at the ground level.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue the shift since 2011 to develop broad scale partnerships and funding methods to enable communities, regional planning commissions, tribes, foundations, non-profits and professional organizations to add value to urban forests. (UF-3)

## **URBAN ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**

A continuous urban forest inventory and canopy analysis better equips urban forest managers to set resource goals, identify new threats, measure initiative results and quantify benefits to the public. We will continue to develop tools and databases to aggregate community level inventories, assess statewide urban tree canopy, implement the national Urban Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (UFIA) and work with partners to pilot the national Urban Forest Owner's Survey. Continued investment in the urban forest assessment program encourages sound planning and decision making to protect and enhance the urban forest.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue the recent shift to develop, implement and support a statewide inventory and assessment of the urban forests of Wisconsin to provide best available data for program planning and prioritization of efforts. (UF-4)

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Urban Forestry Program will increase efforts to make full use of the Urban Forestry Owners survey results to create pilot strategies for homeowner engagement in urban forestry issues. (UF-5)



# SERVICE SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

There are many important activities that critically support our programs, but do not fit into just one of the program areas. These activities help make possible the accomplishment of multiple programs.

## **FOREST SCIENCES**

Science is the foundation for much of our work. Although incorporated throughout, the focus of this function is specialized expertise that serves our program work and our internal and external partners. It should be noted that one of the programs detailed earlier, forest health, was discussed separately due to its size. Like entomology and pathology (which are elements of forest health), silviculture/forest ecology, hydrology, and economics are important components of our work across all land ownerships.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will maintain current investments in silviculture/forest ecology, forest hydrology, and forest economics. The agency will shift the administration and management of the Karner Blue Butterfly Habitat Conservation Plan (Kbb HCP) to the Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC) Bureau, aligning the Kbb HCP with NHC's similar work on other endangered and threatened species. (SSF-1)

## RESEARCH

Research informs our work to address specific issues. Research is a partner-based effort with universities and other organizations. We invest in both internal DNR research capacity, which has been cut in recent years, and other research institutions, most notably the University of Wisconsin. This work is varied and on multiple topics, ranging from adaptation of forests to changing conditions, to regeneration challenges for economically important tree species, to impacts on forests caused by changing land ownership dynamics. One area of emphasis will be to contribute information to the debate over deer management. Our role in this complex issue is to invest in the growing research that analyzes the ecological, economic, and social effects deer have on forests.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will increase investments in research to support informed decision-making. The Division will continue to work with internal and external partners to assess priorities for research on ecological, economic and social aspects of forestry. (SSF-2)

## IT & GIS

Information technology (IT) and geographic information systems (GIS) increasingly play a role in effective program implementation. Opportunities exist to more effectively deliver service to our customers and more efficiently accomplish our work through the implementation of new technology and applications. We are in the midst of a major IT/GIS initiative (WisFIRS) that will improve our systems for managing public and private forest lands. Once complete, this application will create efficiencies in the work the DNR and partner organizations do on the land. Furthermore, increased use of the web will reach our customers and the general public in a more effective manner.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will further increase its investment in IT and GIS to support all Division programs. (SSF-3)

## OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Public outreach and education is an important tool to implement our programs effectively. An assessment of our existing outreach and education programs was completed in 2014 to evaluate how to make a more efficient investment that addresses all aspects of forestry, rural and urban. A Forestry Education Leadership Team (FELT) was formed to coordinate outreach and education among Division programs and to develop integrated strategies and messages.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will invest in providing messaging that integrates multiple forestry topics for use by DNR staff and partners. The Division will ensure that outreach and education programs are coordinated among programs and with field staff and partners, with clearly defined desired outcomes and measures of success. (SSF-4)



# SERVICE SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

## **DIVISION ORGANIZATION EFFECTIVENESS & DEVELOPMENT**

Since the inception of the Division's Strategic Direction in 2012, Forestry leadership at all levels has been committed to the creation of a culture of performance accountability, employee inclusion and engagement, leadership development, and the principles and practices of a learning organization. The tangible outcome of this commitment is a set of Division specific "Key Results" and "Cultural Beliefs." These tenets guide and inform our actions in how we deliver service and hold ourselves accountable to others. Building and sustaining a healthy, performance-focused and learning based culture is as integral to our success as all of our other strategies.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue its commitment to building a strong, healthy culture through a variety of organizational development strategies. Specifically, this will be done by supporting the development of our leaders; delivering effective, quality communications; and investing in our staff. Our focus will be on a Division-wide succession learning planning strategy that gets and develops the right talent in the right places at the right time to ensure service continuity and performance excellence. (SSF-5)

## **HIRING & TRAINING**

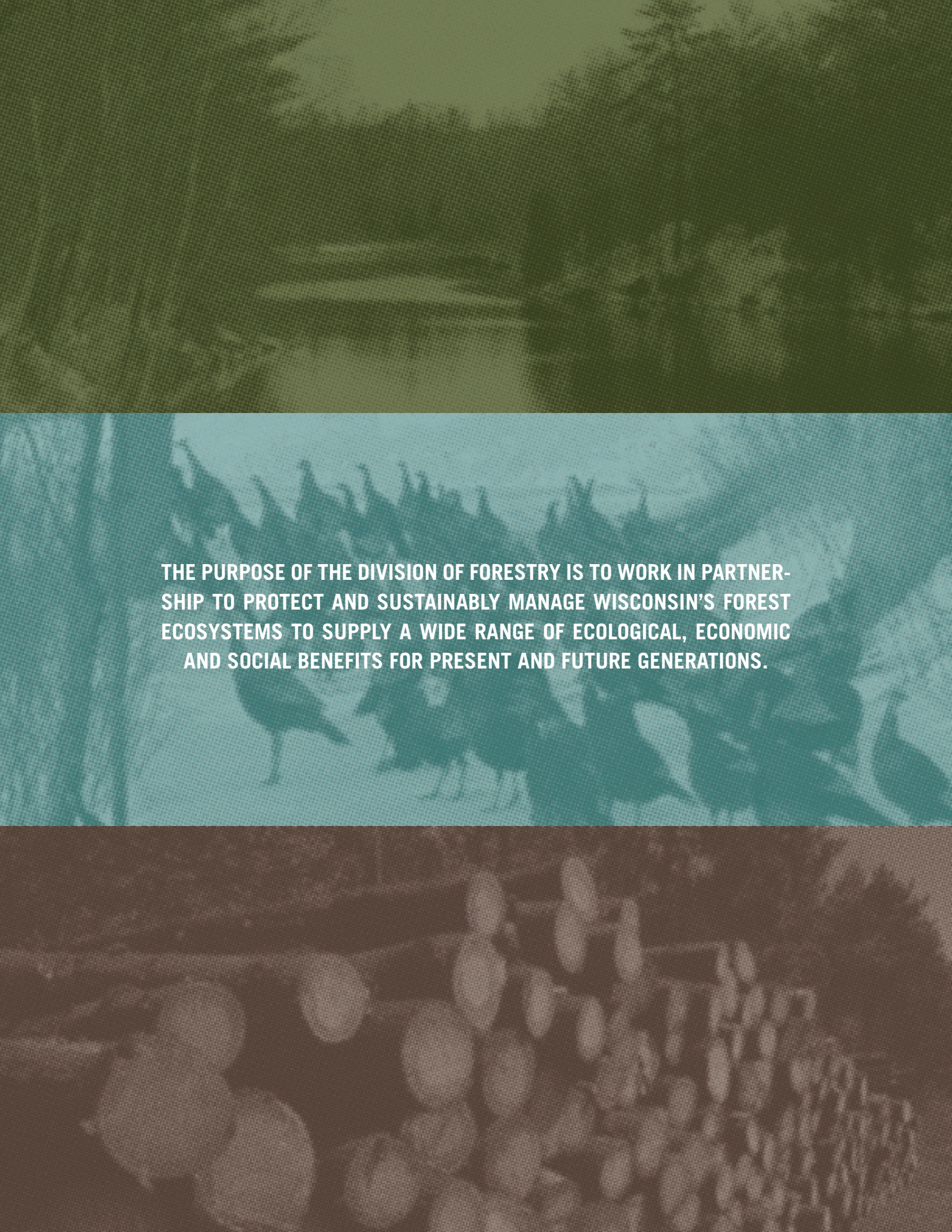
The Division remains committed to investment in attracting and retaining a quality workforce, and providing a quality learning experience for our staff and partners. We will work with the many other organizations that help deliver and receive training with the DNR to develop the most effective and efficient ways to provide training and experiential learning opportunities.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division will continue our commitment to hiring quality employees, ensuring we have a trained and professional workforce. (SSF-6)

## **FOREST CERTIFICATION**

Independent third-party forest certification has created a competitive advantage for Wisconsin forest products companies to gain and/or maintain access to markets. This has been particularly important in the increasingly globally competitive marketplace. Certification has also provided a mechanism to receive feedback from outside experts that we will continue to use to improve our management of both programs and forests.

**INTENT STATEMENT:** The Division remains committed to its investment in third-party certification of state lands, county forests and the Managed Forest Law. (SSF-7)



**THE PURPOSE OF THE DIVISION OF FORESTRY IS TO WORK IN PARTNER-  
SHIP TO PROTECT AND SUSTAINABLY MANAGE WISCONSIN'S FOREST  
ECOSYSTEMS TO SUPPLY A WIDE RANGE OF ECOLOGICAL, ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL BENEFITS FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.**