

## Forest Types of Michigan

# What's a Management Plan?

MSU Forestry Extension Team

Making a forest management plan involves putting your ideas down on paper, describing the forest and your goals, and recording practices that will help gain what you want. This plan is best written with the assistance of someone with forestry expertise, usually a consulting forester. Some of the complexity comes in when a plan needs to satisfy the needs of various cost-share or property tax programs. Most owners will want a plan that satisfies the eligibility requirements for as many programs as possible, even if an owner is not currently interested in any of the programs. This leaves more options available for the future.

Of course, a forest management plan does not need to be used for any program. Nor is cost-share required to obtain a plan. For many owners, hiring a consulting forester to write a plan that serves the needs of the forest owner is enough. Relationships between owners and consultants can be lifelong friendships with great benefit to the owner who is interested in working with his/her forested property. Forest ownership and management can be an incredibly rewarding experience that can be shared with family and friends. Owners can establish family legacies that extend generations into the future.



## Forestry Assistance Programs

Enrollment in public programs or private programs such as Tree Farm requires a forest management plan approved by an agency identified with that particular program. There are state and federal programs with checklists of what is needed in a plan. Most programs also have an approved list of consulting foresters or

other resource professionals who have undergone training in what a particular program needs in a plan. For example, the Forest Stewardship Program has a list of “approved plan writers”; the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a list of “technical service providers”.

These various agencies work together, as best they can, to have common plan requirements so that a forest owner can have one plan that will meet the requirements of almost all programs. This means that a forest owner may sometimes have a plan element included that he/she may not particularly be interested in. Consultants that have gone through program training sessions are aware that it is usually in the best interest of the forest owner that a plan meets the requirements for as many programs as possible. A forest management plan can also help establish the most advantageous classification in federal taxation on timber sale income.

A forest owner interested in a cost-share or property tax program must recognize and understand the goals of the program. If those goals are consistent with the goals of the owner, then agreement is usually beneficial to both parties. Forest owners who enroll only for the benefits but have no interest in following through with the obligations are likely to have an unpleasant experience. Of course, enrolling in a program is an option for an owner. Forest owners are not required to enroll in any cost-share or tax incentive program.

Many forest owners begin with participation in cost-sharing the expenses of having a professional forest management plan written through the Forest Stewardship Program. This program is administered through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Private consulting foresters work with forest owners to develop an approved forest management plan. Completion of this plan is intended to satisfy eligibilities for most other programs.

The NRCS currently administers most of the cost-share programs open to forest owners, although the bulk of the emphasis in Michigan is for agricultural properties. Two of the more popular programs are the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Michigan has two property tax incentive programs for owners of forested property who are interested in timber management and meet eligibility requirements, which include an approved management plan. Forest owners need to think seriously about these programs before enrolling because the commitment is long-term, and withdrawal penalties are in place. (More information can be found on the DNR website [[www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr)] for the Qualified Forest Property Program and the Commercial Forest Program.)

### Benefits of a Forest Management Plan

- Permanent record (with updates) of property characteristics and activity schedules
- Formal tool to help share owner ideas with spouses, children, other relatives, partners, friends, neighbors, and others
- Requirement for property tax reduction programs
  - Qualified Forest Property Program
  - Commercial Forest Program
- Requirement for resource management cost-share programs
- Evidence of “active involvement” for federal income tax treatment of timber sale income

### Content Considerations

- Owner and property identification
- Maps of various kinds
- Resource descriptions & inventories
  - Forest stands
  - Wildlife habitat
  - Rare / unusual species
  - Cultural / interesting sites
  - History of property & past management
  - Recreation opportunities
  - Water resources, ponds, wetlands, etc.
  - Visual quality
- Recommendations for actions & activities
  - Timber harvest schedules
  - Habitat improvement schedules
  - Plantings
  - Roads, trails, bridges, etc.
  - Other practices
- Appendices as needed

## Whom Should You Contact?

Sometimes excellent recommendations come through friends and neighbors. However, homework will likely yield a wider range of information. Conservation districts are set up as a clearinghouse of information. Some districts employ foresters that can provide a one-on-one conversation. These districts have their own websites.

There are several online resources.

### Michigan Forest Pathways website —

<http://miforestpathways.net>.

The website was designed as a clearinghouse of forestry information for forest owners, including a roster of agencies and services.

### Michigan DNR — [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

Click the link to “Forestry”, find the “Programs” drop-down window, and then “Private Forest Land” for information on the following programs:

- Forest Stewardship Program
- Qualified Forest Property Program
- Commercial Forest Program
- Forest Legacy Program

### Forestry Assistance Program (FAP)

This program was funded in 2012 for three years by the Michigan Legislature. Through the MDNR, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and conservation districts, the FAP helps foresters encourage private forest owners to manage their properties. Participating conservation districts have a page on their respective websites.

### Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

— [www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs).

The NRCS has several cost-share programs that are funded at various levels from year to year. The NRCS has its own technical service providers (TSPs) to

work with forest owners on applicable programs. Many TSPs are also approved to write forest stewardship plans through that DNR-administered program.

### Consulting Foresters

These are professional foresters who work independently for the forest owner and no other industry or agency. Their ranges of expertise vary, and forest owners should shop around for the best fit. Many consultants are trained to work with particular cost-share programs and know the requirements to satisfy program needs. (More about consulting foresters can be found in MSU Bulletin E-3188.) To find a consulting forester, go to:

- Association of Consulting Foresters — [www.acf-foresters.org](http://www.acf-foresters.org).
- Michigan Forest Association — [www.michiganforests.com](http://www.michiganforests.com).

### Michigan Forest Association (MFA) —

[www.michiganforests.com](http://www.michiganforests.com).

The MFA consists of forest owners and others who share common interests in forest management. Meetings, a magazine and a newsletter help keep members informed about forests and forestry. The MFA also publishes a list of forestry consultants who are also MFA members.

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See the Michigan Society of American Foresters' publication, *Forest Management Guidelines for Michigan*, on their website: <http://michigansaf.org>.