

FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANNING

PURPOSE OF FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Forest management planning is a means of allowing you, the landowner, to practice good stewardship of your property and its resources. The planning process helps you identify what resources and opportunities are available on your property and what you would like to realize from your property in terms of financial gain and long-term enjoyment. Most important, forest management planning is a means of identifying what can be done to enhance and protect the values and aspects of your property that are most important to you. Planning also helps ensure that your property and its resources will be in good condition for future generations.

A FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

A forest management plan is a detailed written document that includes three important elements:

- a thorough description of the property and the resources on the property,
- a specific list of goals or objectives for management of the property, and
- a schedule of activities to be performed on the property to help realize goals and objectives.

There is no specific format for including these elements in a plan; however, all three must be covered to some extent if the management plan is to be useful. Suggestions for items that might be included in each section follow.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

The management plan should describe your property in enough detail to allow you to identify specific opportunities to realize your objectives. The property description also should help you identify limitations to management (for example, steep slopes that limit accessibility). This section of the plan might include:

- A narrative description of the property, including
 - The location and acreage of the property or portion to be managed.
 - A description of the topography (level, rolling, steep).
 - A description of the soils and the opportunities and limitations posed by the soils.
 - A description of planned or existing access (i.e., roads and trails).
 - A description of the water resources on the property.
 - A description of the timber resources on the property. This section should include the results of a detailed inventory of the trees on the property, often referred to as a “timber cruise” or a “cruise.” The description of the timber resources should include specific information about the sizes (diameters and heights), species, and ages of trees on the property. Estimates of volumes and values of forest products also should be made. If your forester has divided the property into several “forest stands,” he or she should provide this information for each stand.
 - A description of the wildlife resources on the property. This section usually describes the food resources, water resources, and cover available for general groups or specific species of wildlife. If you would like to know your property’s suitability for specific species, you should let your forester know.

- A description of other renewable and non-renewable resources of interest on the property. This might include recreational and aesthetic values, minerals, oil and gas, and harvestable products such as mushrooms, herbs, and mosses.
- A history of past and present activity on the property.
- A history of past fire, disease, insect, and livestock grazing impacts on the property and some indication of future risk.
- Maps clearly showing the property boundaries, existing roads, streams, ponds, and ephemeral, or temporary, drainages. It is also a good idea to include copies of a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Soil Survey map and a U.S. Geological Survey topographic map of the property. Property boundaries should be clearly indicated on each map. If your forester divides the property into forest stands, a map that clearly delineates the stands should be included.

IDENTIFICATION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Having a clear understanding of your goals and objectives and communicating them to your forester are critical if your plan is to be useful to you. Goals are general statements that express your broad desires for the property. Objectives are specific statements of exactly what you would like to achieve through management. For example, a commonly expressed goal is to “realize some income from the property while practicing good stewardship.” Specific objectives might include managing for sustained sawlog production while enhancing songbird nesting habitat and protecting ginseng patches. It is usually a good idea to first identify broad goals for your property and then break each goal into specific objectives. Your forester should help you do this. If he or she doesn’t, you might consider hiring a new forester.

You may list as many objectives as you wish; however, you must realize that not all your objectives can be met on every acre of land. Depending on your specific objectives, you and your forester may have to work together to identify areas where different activities and uses can take place. Objectives that are incompatible may have to be met on separate portions of your property; whereas, groups of compatible objectives can be met together on a single acre.

SCHEDULE OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Your management plan should include specific activities that will be conducted to help meet your objectives. The timing of activities should be as specific as possible and should reflect your management priorities. In general, activities for the next 10-20 years should be discussed in detail. Longer term plans may be mentioned but probably will remain vague. The planning process is ongoing; expect to plan again in about 10 years, or sooner if the property experiences significant changes. Look for the following items in this section of the plan:

- Plans and activities that help you achieve each of your management objectives should be discussed in detail. If improvements are to be made, it is important that the plan specify exactly where, when, and with what resources the improvements will be made. All of the costs and expected revenues associated with each activity should be estimated.
- If timber management is one of your goals, you should be provided with a detailed timber management plan. This section of the plan should include mention of a silvicultural system to be implemented or specific timber improvement projects to be completed.
- If your timber is ready to harvest now, information on available markets, prices, and product specifications should be included, and plans for sales and contracts should be developed. It is worthwhile to have a professional forester help you sell your timber products. The higher price you will realize with professional help will more than offset any fees charged.

- If wildlife management is one of your goals, a habitat management plan should be included. If you plan on doing some of this work yourself, you should be provided with detailed instructions and supplementary information.
- If you plan to install roads and trails on the property, the locations and specifications should be included in the plan.
- Best Management Practices (BMPs) and water quality issues should be discussed in detail. Plans for closing roads after use (if applicable) should be emphasized.
- A specific date for review of the plan should be made. Your plan may need to be updated or modified during the course of management.