



Forest Stewardship Plans

A forest stewardship plan (FSP) is basically a blueprint for your forested property. It lays out what you want to achieve as a woodland owner and gives you a roadmap to get there for the next 10-25 years. The plan includes your goals, details about the trees and plants, the current state of your forest, and the actions you'll take to reach your objectives. The plan can encompass your entire property or focus on a specific area where you have a particular project, or anything in between.

Having an FSP is helpful because it guides you in managing your land in a way that's good for both you and the health of your woodlands. It helps you make smart decisions about things like conservation, timber harvesting, creating wildlife habitats, and more. It ensures your forest stays healthy and productive in the future.

First, clarify your goals and objectives

During the process of getting an FSP, it will be important to define your goals for your woodlands because that will guide the recommended practices included in your plan. You can share your objectives with the forester you work with to help them craft a plan that meets your needs. Your plan will be based on your objectives, the current condition of your woodlands, and how your forest can be improved to achieve the goals you have identified.

Components of a forest stewardship plan

Elements included in a comprehensive forest stewardship plan are:

1. A description of your objectives, such as maintenance of forest health, improving wildlife habitat, aesthetic enjoyment, privacy, periodic income, or any combination of these.
2. A general description of your property, including location, acreage, geographic features, history, surrounding land uses, etc.



Credit: Larin Krautkramer, Wisconsin DNR

3. An assessment of resources on the property, including forest health, timber, wildlife, water, soils, threatened and endangered species, aesthetics, and recreation opportunities.
4. Recommendations for achieving your objectives.
5. A timeline for implementing recommendations.
6. Property maps.
7. Space for periodic updates.

Benefits of a forest stewardship plan

Guidelines for achieving your objectives

An FSP provides a direction for achieving your goals and maximizing your enjoyment of your forest. It helps you monitor your progress and stay on track, and it provides a clear outline of what needs to be done to achieve your goals. Even if you plan to do nothing with your woods, getting a baseline assessment of the current conditions is important to gain an understanding of the resource you own. It can also help you avoid costly mistakes by matching goals

with what is feasible on your woodland. This can reduce the stress and anxiety that sometimes comes with owning a woodland property.

Better communication

An FSP facilitates communication of your objectives, intentions, and activities. This can help you engage with family and neighbors about what you are accomplishing on your property. It can also be an invaluable guide for heirs who will someday take ownership of the property. In addition, you may find a written plan useful when working with a natural resource agency or forestry professionals, as it will help them to better understand your goals, your values, and the unique aspects of your property.

Financial assistance programs

You may find that it can be expensive to implement some of the activities identified in your plan, such as replacing an undersized culvert or restoring an area that is suffering from invasive weeds. There are several federal and state cost share programs available to help with the expense of stewardship and conservation activities, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP). Depending on the program, a stewardship plan may either be required or greatly facilitate the application and approval process.

Another financial assistance program available to you is the Managed Forest Law (MFL) program. Forest stewardship plans written with the intention of joining the MFL program must be written by a certified plan writer. Joining the MFL program includes a tax incentive but requires you to comply with activities outlined in your plan. This is only true for plans used to be part of the MFL program.

Better stewardship

A written document is not required to be a good forest steward, and there are many outstanding landowners who have never created a formal plan. A written document is also not going to improve your stewardship in and of itself. However, having and following a written plan can significantly enhance the way you care for your property. You will look at your forest in a new and integrated way that considers the forest in the context of both space (the landscape) and time. Even the most seasoned forest owner can learn (or re-learn) something important in this process and gain a fresh perspective that sharpens skills and leads to improved stewardship.

How to get a forest stewardship plan

You can get an FSP in a couple of ways. You can hire a private forestry consultant to evaluate your property and write a plan for you. The cost of this service will depend on the size and complexity of the property. This may be a good option if you need a document quickly, such as for property tax purposes or for the sale or purchase of a forest property. Make sure to verify a consultant's professional forestry credentials.

To find a forester to write an FSP, reach out to your local DNR Forester or Cooperating Forester. You can find a local forester by visiting apps.dnr.wi.gov/fal.

The concept of a management plan may seem overwhelming, but don't let this get in the way of your starting one. Take the first step and schedule a walk-through with your local DNR forester. They can help you see what is in your woods, talk through your potential goals, and give you an idea of what might be in a stewardship plan.

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Learn more



Extension forestry educators lead classes and programs to engage landowners in the stewardship of Wisconsin's privately owned woodlands. We invite you to connect with us on social media, subscribe to our email newsletter, explore our website, and attend a future Extension event.

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