

FORESTRY FACTS



COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURAL
& LIFE SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology

No. 48

February, 1990
(Updated 2002)

Getting The Most From Your Woodland

Jeff Martin

Many people own wooded acreage, and many others hope to acquire forestland. But few people have really analyzed WHY? Yet a full understanding of why you own land, what you want to do with it, and what is needed to reach your goals, can significantly help you get the most from your woodland.

Basically this is a two-step process:

- Deciding what you want (setting your goals)
- Deciding how to get what you want (preparing a management plan).

Setting Your Goals

For this step you need two tools: pencil and paper; a little time for "brainstorming" and perhaps a group of people: your family members, co-owners, partners, etc. Setting your goals will require that everyone involved spend time discussing the many possibilities and wants they have for using the property. And when the discussion is over, a written set of goals should be produced.

However, you will need to be very specific in identifying your wants. For example:

- Wanting more income isn't sufficient. You will need to decide how much and when it is most needed today - to pay off a mortgage, or in 10 years - to send a youngster to college.
- It's not enough to say you want more wildlife. You need to decide what species are most desired and whether better hunting, improved bird watching, or just a greater variety of species is your aim.
- Perhaps you wish to improve the aesthetic qualities of your property. To do so you will need to decide whether to enhance the view from your house, or possibly convert some acres to other tree species for greater diversity and visual variety.
- You may want more access in the woodlot. But do you want a good road system for hauling firewood, better "sightlines" from your deer stands, some scattered walking trails for bird hunting, a network of cross-country skiing trails, or a route for snowmobiles?
- Or, you may just be growing bored and want to try a new challenge. But are you interested in trying to grow high quality walnut, figure out how to establish red oak reproduction, or find a way to get your family interested in conservation activities?

These are only a few examples of the many possible reasons landowners have for managing their woodlands. You will probably have other goals in mind, so you need to develop your own list.

Most active woodland managers have more than one goal. They don't focus on just income production or grouse habitat. Instead they try to accomplish several things at once. For example: when you are out cutting firewood are you: a) producing fuel? b) thinning the woodlot?, c) making brush piles for rabbits?, or d) enjoying yourself? Many woodland owners would probably answer "all of the above." To see what some active landowners have to say about forest management, turn to page 4.

The really great thing about woodland management is that achieving several goals at once is usually quite easy. Applying the proper techniques will help you create woodlot conditions that provide a number of benefits. However, to do this you will need a management plan.

Preparing Your Management Plan

For this step several tools are needed: pencil, fresh paper, your list of goals, and a map or aerial photo of your property. It is also very important to have a forester assisting you.

Now that you have set your goals, a plan is developed by:

- Determining your present forest conditions – "Point A,"
- Identifying the forest conditions needed to achieve your goals "Point B,"
- Determining the management activities required. What is needed to get from "Point A" to "Point B," and
- Putting the plan on paper, describing what you will do and when.

To determine present conditions you will need an inventory of your woodlot - a cruise. Your forester should do this for you. The cruise will be a detailed description of the species you

have, as well as their volumes, sizes, qualities, site capabilities, etc. This will be done for each of your woodlot stands. You will also want to mark stand boundaries on your map or photo and tentatively locate proposed roads or trails. The cruise information will show the current status of your woodlot; for example, those stands that are overstocked and may need a thinning, those stands having mature trees calling for a harvest cut, the areas in need of planting, and the stands to leave alone for a few years.

When you discuss your goals with a forester you will learn what future stand conditions are needed. For example, more grouse habitat may require young aspen stands on part of the property, or a need for more income in 10 years may require a certain volume of marketable sawlogs in other stands. As these discussions take place your forester will also indicate what is possible or feasible on your property both from a biological and economic standpoint. For example, your desire to raise walnut may be impractical because of sandy soil conditions. Or your desire to prune every red pine in your plantation may be a poor financial move.

You and your forester will now need to identify the management activities necessary to get those desired future conditions. Perhaps some small clearcuts will be needed to obtain the young aspen stands, or a thinning may be needed to maintain the growth rate of your potential sawlog trees. Maybe you will need to prepare a bare field before planting it to red pine. Perhaps the young trees will require a herbicide application in a couple of years to release them from weed and grass competition. In addition to deciding what to do, you will need to decide when to do it. This schedule of activities and proposed timing will form the heart of your written management plan.

The road to getting the most from your woodlot can be quite straightforward, but considerable thought is needed to avoid a wrong turn. Before working in your woodlot make sure you:

- Decide what you want and list specific goals,
- Get a forester to help you,

- Evaluate your current forest conditions,
- Identify the conditions needed to achieve your goals,
- Find out what is feasible for you and your land,
- Decide what management activities will be needed, and
- Prepare your written management plan.

And finally, remember to use your plan as you conduct management activities, don't keep it on the shelf! You should also keep good records about things you have accomplished and update the plan if changes are needed. For more help with management planning contact a forester.

“You know, I can be sitting here and not feeling very good and I go up into the woods and start cutting and I feel just as fit as a fiddle!”

“I guess I do it because deep and down it's the right thing to do, and I want to do it because it helps the land.”

“I think that what keeps me doing this is the challenge of learning...there seem to be so many more open areas to learn in this area (walnut management) than most other areas I'm exposed to ... I look for outside activities. I think you need it.

Why Do Landowners Manage?

Recently some of the top non-industrial private forest landowners in Wisconsin were asked to express why they manage as they do following are some of their comments:

“If you give me a winter day and if I have my choice at going ice fishing or going to the woods to cut, I'll go to the woods and cut rather than go ice fishing.”

There's got to be a future somewhere. If it's not in farming, maybe the woods will give us something eventually, I mean the kids... If you make it (tree planting) a family affair, I think it's more fun that way... The kids got to realize that its important for them and important for us... It's a family project, really.

“My basic reason for doing this is I just want it to look as nice as it can. I love the way the woods looks when you get the junk out and when you get the trees pruned up! I don't do it for money or anything else. I do it because I like the way it looks.”

“I work closely with the forester all the time. We do not always agree. He'll bend with me.”

“This (tree planting) is putting something back instead of always taking it away.”