Caring for Forests and Serving People

Working in partnership 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.
Thanks for your interest in the work of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources - Division of Forestry. On the following pages you’ll see a few highlights from your investment in our work in 2016. While much of our day-to-day work is not highly visible, all of it provides important and valuable public benefits.

Many of our accomplishments are due to the close working relationship between our 450 employees and a wide range of stakeholders, including the forest industry, family forest landowners, consulting foresters, tribes, counties, fire departments, conservation organizations, communities, other state and federal government agencies and many others. We’re grateful for the collaboration we enjoy with stakeholders.

We appreciate the leadership of Paul DeLong who served as the Chief State Forester of the Division of Forestry for the past 13 years. His able leadership made it an easy decision for me to step into this role as Chief State Forester in November. Thanks also go to Darrell Zastrow, the Division’s Deputy Administrator, who filled in during this time of transition before retiring at the end of year after a 35-year public service career with DNR Forestry. My goal is to continue the high standard of leadership set not only by these two, but also by Wisconsin’s first state forester — E.M. Griffith — and his first group of forestry employees who established in the early 1900s many of the programs that still serve as the foundation of our Division some 112 years later.

Wisconsin has always been at the forefront of sustainable forestry and we had the great opportunity to showcase our leadership in many forestry programs during the national Society of American Foresters convention hosted in Madison this fall.

Our focus in 2016 has been on great customer service and the highest priority work to maximize public benefits from the 17.1 million acres of forests in Wisconsin. We continue to effectively protect and sustainably manage Wisconsin’s forests so that they provide the full array of benefits to all those who live, work, and play in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Fred Soubra
Chief State Forester, Wisconsin DNR — Division of Forestry
in Partnership

Division Provides Emergency Response Support

The Division of Forestry’s WILDLAND FIREFIGHTING PROGRAM uses the Incident Command System, a management system developed in the 1970s to enable effective and efficient use of resources. This standardized approach to the command, control and coordination of emergency response provides a common hierarchy within which responders from multiple agencies can be effective. With our well-trained staff, resources and organizational structure, the Division is uniquely positioned to assist with a variety of emergencies in addition to wildfires. During 2016, we assisted areas impacted by severe storms, flooding and wind damage. In addition to ground resources, the Division provided 47 flights in response to emergencies impacting Wisconsin’s citizens and resources.

Telling the Story of Sustainable Forestry

Division of Forestry employees shared information about our programs throughout the year. For a statewide fire prevention campaign called “WEATHER TO BURN,” staff partnered with meteorologists to share the current fire danger with the public during newscast weather reports. Our 2016 Wisconsin State Fair exhibit showcased the thousands of products made from trees that people depend on daily, wood products made by the 1,170 forest products producers in Wisconsin, and the variety of jobs supported by Wisconsin forests. Visitors also learned that forest products add $24.7 billion annually to Wisconsin’s economy.

State Assists with National Forest Management

With the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF), the Division of Forestry celebrated many successes implementing the GOOD NEIGHBOR AUTHORITY (GNA) this year. The GNA authorizes the state to implement forestry practices on the national forest. The desired outcome for the GNA is to assist the CNNF in implementing their land management plan. Accomplishing this means more forests and habitat being actively managed, more wood on the market, and stronger local communities. Besides state staff working on the GNA timber projects, the state has contracted with several consulting foresters and six counties (Oconto, Sawyer, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Bayfield) have signed on to work on GNA projects. There is a lot of work to do and consultants and counties play a critical role in getting it all done. Eighteen timber sales were set up and sold in calendar year 2016. The total volume sold for the fiscal year is 34,967 cord equivalents on 2,678 acres.

State Funds Support Stewardship of Wisconsin Forests

The Department has several grant programs that help partners care for Wisconsin’s forests. With about 70 percent of Wisconsin’s population living in urban areas, Wisconsin’s urban forests serve a vital role in our communities. In addition to aesthetics, urban forests reduce air pollution, mitigate storm water runoff, conserve energy, and increase property values. The DNR URBAN FORESTRY GRANT PROGRAM funds a variety of projects that help increase the urban forest canopy (on both public and private property) and the benefits it provides. Thirty-six communities, nonprofit groups and counties shared $547,728 in 2016 state grant dollars to promote and sustain urban forest resources in Wisconsin.

The WISCONSIN FOREST LANDOWNER GRANT PROGRAM encourages private woodland owners, who hold more than half of the forested land in Wisconsin, to manage their lands in a manner that benefits both the forest resource and the people of the state. The program allows qualified landowners to be reimbursed up to 50 percent of the eligible cost of specified practices. In 2016, this program awarded $1,156,795 to forest landowners.

DNR and local fire departments work cooperatively on numerous wildfire suppression efforts and funding from the FOREST FIRE PROTECTION GRANT PROGRAM enables local fire departments to increase their level of preparedness and ability to respond and protect their communities. In 2016, fire departments in 196 Wisconsin communities received a total of $645,487 in grants for fire equipment, prevention, and training to enhance forest fire protection and suppression.
DNR Ensures Future of Working Forests

The Department of Natural Resources continues to invest in CONSERVATION EASEMENTS as a way to support sustainable management of Wisconsin’s forests. In 2016, DNR acquired three new conservation easements totaling 8,132 acres. Located in northwest Wisconsin (Douglas & Bayfield Counties), the Lime-St. Croix (Phase III) easement protects 7,090 acres, adding to the existing 67,346 acres previously acquired in 2012. The property hosts numerous waterbodies, mixed forests and globally significant pine-barrens habitat, and is open for public access.

The Upper Wisconsin River Legacy Forest protects a combined 1,042 acres with two separate easements (600 and 442 acres, respectively) in Vilas County at the headwaters of the Wisconsin River. These easements protect forestland and important riparian habitat, and keep the forestland open to the public for recreation.

The acquisition of these easements ensures forests remain as working forests, continue to provide public recreation opportunities and numerous other public benefits, and are sustainably managed. As a value-added benefit, these lands remain under private ownership.

Small, Stingless Wasps Released to Help Fight Emerald Ash Borer

EMERALD ASH BORER (EAB) is an invasive beetle that will kill the vast majority of Wisconsin’s ash trees. The pest has been found in 40 of 72 counties. To reduce EAB populations and help ash trees fight off the pest, DNR Forest Health staff release several species of small wasps that attack EAB eggs and larvae in the native range of eastern Asia. The wasps do not sting people or animals. They are produced by the USDA, and have been released in 13 counties in cooperation with the DNR Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, county departments and local governments.

Adult wasps found inside an EAB gallery in Walworth County. This wasp species attacks EAB larvae beneath the bark of an ash tree.

In May 2016, *Tetrastichus planipennisi* was found in EAB-infested ash trees at three locations in Kenosha, Racine and Walworth Counties where they had been released three years earlier. This indicates that the wasps successfully established and are attacking EAB larvae. Wasp surveys will continue at other sites.
Forests

Timber Sales on DNR Owned Lands

The Division of Forestry is responsible for forest management on approximately 1.5 million acres of DNR-owned lands. Department foresters have completely updated the forest inventory on all lands, with 86% of forested lands being updated in the last 10 years.

As part of that process, foresters worked with property managers to complete FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANS to guide management objectives and harvest schedules. Implementation of those plans expedited the completion of timber harvests that were well past their scheduled harvest date. Since 2014, the backlog of timber sales has been significantly reduced and timber harvest levels have stabilized to predictable and sustainable levels to meet the ecological, economic and social objectives identified in property management plans.

Measuring the Benefits and Value of Urban Forests

Wisconsin is the first state to expand the URBAN FOREST INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS (UFIA) PROGRAM to include all census-defined urban places. Another 179 field plots were established across 96 different communities during the 2016 field season, bringing the total number of plots to 259. Over the next five years, roughly 950 additional plots will be installed. Research partners at UW-Madison have developed the methodology to conduct a resource-efficient urban tree canopy assessment of communities in Wisconsin. Their work was first focused in Madison and is now expanding to all incorporated cities and villages. A public-facing, web-based software system to aggregate and analyze existing tree inventories is in development.

The urban forest assessment was featured in the March 2016 issue of The Municipality magazine, which is distributed to over 10,000 local elected officials, staff and partners throughout Wisconsin.

Consultants Help Reach Harvest Goals on Private Lands

Acres of sustainable timber harvests on private lands have increased, thanks to the work of consulting foresters participating in the COOPERATING FORESTER PROGRAM. Under this program, started in 1989, private consulting and industrial foresters voluntarily apply to participate and abide by DNR management guidelines. In return, DNR foresters exclusively refer private landowners seeking additional assistance to a cooperating forester.

Reaching Out to Private Woodland Owners

In a more focused effort to reach Wisconsin’s private woodland owners who are not enrolled in any assistance programs (such as Wisconsin’s Managed Forest Law), the Private Forestry Program began a pilot program building on the success of the Driftless Forest Network (DFN)’s model for reaching non-industrial private woodland owners. The DFN is a partnership of public agencies and private organizations that uses social science research and targeted marketing techniques to reach woodland owners.

DNR sent direct mailings offering woodland owners in four counties across the state the opportunity to have a DNR forester visit their property. The woodland walk-throughs are intended to help lead landowners to on-the-ground action by providing them with assistance from DNR foresters and connecting them to resources they need to start actively managing their land. The Division will evaluate the success of the 2016 pilot project to determine whether the DFN model could be applied in even more areas of the state in future years.
People and fire have a long history in Wisconsin. The way fires start, the public perception of fire, and how fires are reported and managed have evolved tremendously over the last century. This holds true for fire towers. After 85 years of service, DNR towers have aged, and the steel tower infrastructure is no longer as sound and safe as it once was. Therefore, the Division decided to begin the process of decommissioning the fire towers. Going forward, DNR fire control will rely solely on citizen reporting and aerial detection of wildfires, capitalizing on successes in our aviation program.

**Division Helps Ho-Chunk Nation**

The Ho-Chunk Nation DNR approached the Wisconsin DNR about the possibility of building a Type 6x wildland fire engine, similar to what the Forestry Equipment Research and Development Center in Tomahawk constructs for the Forestry Division. The agreement details were worked out and the Ho-Chunk Nation provided a new F-450 chassis. The Equipment Center started with Forestry's standard design and added unique features desired by the Nation. Personnel from the Ho-Chunk Nation came to the Equipment Center to assist with the assembly of their own truck. The unit was completed in March of 2016 and Ho-Chunk Nation DNR staff received training on the operation and maintenance of their new unit. They were able to utilize it during the spring fire season and collaboratively at the Wisconsin DNR Operator's Conference. They have reported the truck is working well and they are extremely pleased with the final product.
Training to Combat All-Hazard Incidents

Various Division employees participated in INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS) training opportunities sponsored by the Great Lakes Forest Fire Compact. The Compact – which includes Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba and Ontario – promotes effective fire prevention, pre-suppression, and forest fire control in the Great Lakes Region. It facilitates the sharing of information, technology, suppression resources and, in this case, training opportunities.

Forestry personnel enhanced their ability to assume specific responsibilities, lead personnel, communicate effectively and ensure the completion of assigned duties while managing complex incidents such as wildfires and other natural disasters. The Incident Management Section Chiefs Leadership Academy focused on building the foundation for eight specific positions within the ICS structure. The Command and General Staff Course provided an overview of all command and general staff positions and included several small scenarios that culminated to a single one-day complex scenario. The advanced Complex Incident Management Course focused entirely on meeting the needs to address large or highly complex incidents.

Enhanced Wildfire Reporting and Real-Time Activity System

A rewrite of the FOREST FIRE REPORTING SYSTEM was initiated in 2016. For the first time, near real time point location of forest fires can be displayed for the public and DNR fire fighters. Within 15 minutes of the DNR being notified of a fire, the public will see a fire icon pop up on a map. Not only does this allow awareness of fires occurring in their area, but generally indicates a real potential for more fires to occur. This same tool is used by DNR staff but with a more robust map to help them gauge fire location with potential fuel types and hazards before dispatching to the fire. In addition, a new fire perimeter shape feature has greatly enhanced mapping.

Honoring Wildfire Preparedness Efforts

The highest national honor for wildfire preparedness and mitigation was awarded to the Conover/Land O’ Lakes COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN (CWPP) committee and the late Rich Martinson in March 2016. Notable committee achievements include the creation of a brush collection site that has been critical in reducing debris burning in the town and firefighters working with homeowners to identify wildfire hazards on their property with free home ignition zone assessments.
Northern state forests, managed by the Division of Forestry, continue to provide a wide range of recreation experiences tailored around unique natural features, including lakes and rivers, large land bases for motorized and non-motorized trails systems, developed and remote camping, and access and habitat for hunting. This hiker is enjoying a trail on the Black River State Forest.

In 2016 there were more than 1,170 forest products producers in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. This publication (PUB-FR-565-2016) is available in alternative format (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc.) upon request. Please call (608-264-6036) for more information.

Large photos throughout the report by Rena Johnson, courtesy of the National Association of State Foresters.

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