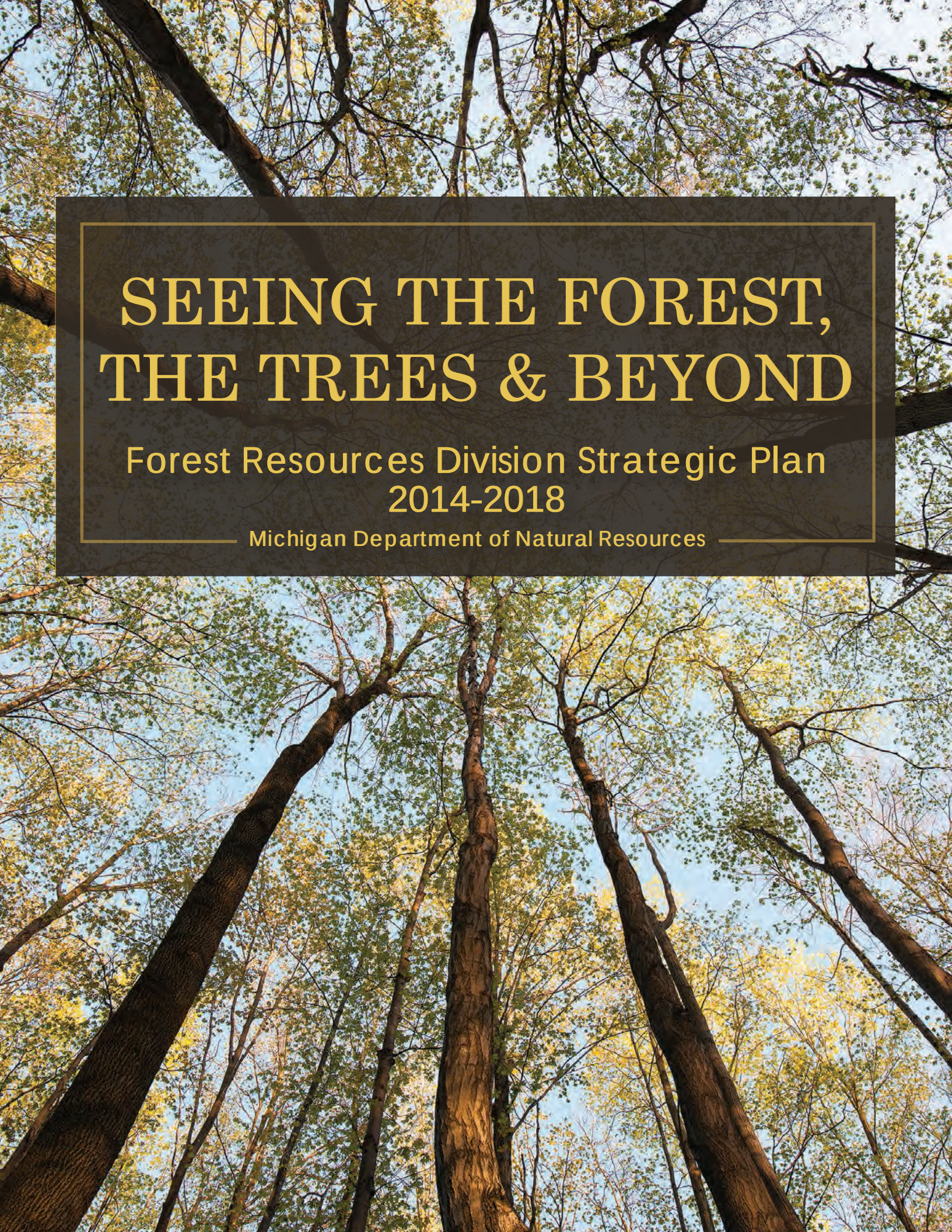

SEEING THE FOREST, THE TREES & BEYOND

Forest Resources Division Strategic Plan 2014-2018

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

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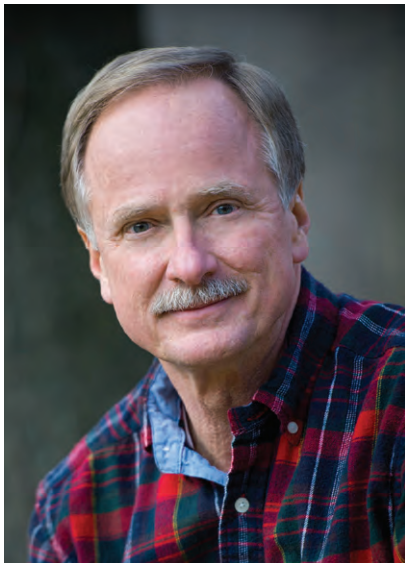
Cover photo by Tom Haxby, Forest Resources Division inventory and planning specialist.

From the Director



Greetings,

Planning for the future health and sustainability of Michigan's state forests is important work that directly affects these natural resources and the economic, recreational and environmental pursuits tied to them. As Michigan continues to move forward, our state forests will be an even bigger part of those landscapes.

The Department of Natural Resources' Forest Resources Division has developed a five-year strategic plan to guide decisions and actions governing the health of Michigan's state forest resources.

The goals and objectives of this plan lay the groundwork for meeting the division's mission and complement the DNR's overall strategic direction. The plan provides a benchmark for determining actions that:

- Are scientifically and economically sound;
- Ensure rich outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities;
- Protect and enhance forest resources for the future; and
- Best speak to the needs and interests of all stakeholders.

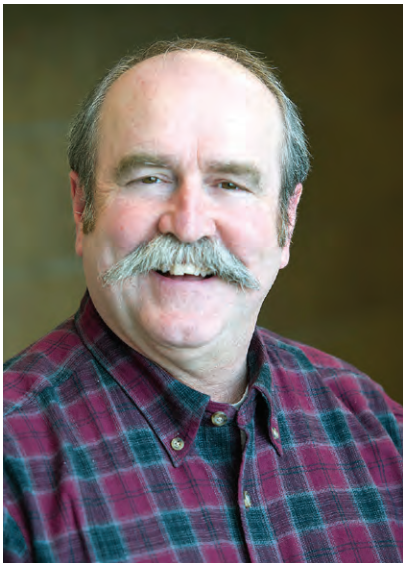
Many organizations have had a hand in shaping this plan and will be full partners in implementing it. Throughout the creation and development of this strategic plan, Forest Resources Division staff stayed firmly committed to an inclusive and transparent process – ensuring that stakeholder needs and ideas have been well represented around the table from start to finish and are reflected in the final product.

Michigan's forests are integral to our state's land-based industries and regional and place-based economies. More than that, they are part of Michigan's very identity and natural heritage. By thinking and acting strategically, our Forest Resources Division is poised to do its best work for the care and management of Michigan's state forests.

Sincerely,

Keith Creagh, Director
Department of Natural Resources

From the Chief



Dear Citizens,

The Department of Natural Resources' Forest Resources Division (FRD) is charged with managing 4 million acres of state forest land for the economic, environmental and social needs of Michigan residents.

In addition to responsibilities on state forest land, FRD — along with our many partners — is involved in the protection of private forest land in the areas of wildfire protection, forest health monitoring and planning, Commercial Forest applications and assistance with land management.

As you can imagine, these duties are no small task and in order to successfully accomplish our goals and objectives, we felt it was necessary to develop a strategic plan to guide our work and decisions for the next three to five years.

We're proud to share with you *Seeing the Forest, the Trees & Beyond: 2014-2018 Forest Resources Division Strategic Plan*. This plan is just the beginning of a long process that will evolve and develop as we achieve our mission and adapt to changing needs, all the while maintaining and enhancing the core functions of healthy and abundant forests.

During the facilitator-led strategic planning process, we worked very hard to ensure that staff with different responsibilities and experience levels from across the state have been included. It is equally important that our partners and customers are also involved.

All of the pieces of this plan are crucial to FRD meeting our mission. Some pieces might not seem specific, but that's by design. Identifying the mission, vision, values, goals and objectives is just the first step in the strategic planning process. Details of how we're going to achieve our goals and objectives will be developed in upcoming action plans.

Sustainable and healthy state forests are an important asset to every Michigan resident. In addition to supplying high-quality resources that contribute to local economies, they provide critical habitat for wildlife and give us a place to hunt, fish, hike, camp, reflect and make memories.

Thank you to staff, customers and partners who helped craft this strategic plan. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively to protect and manage Michigan's world-class forest resources.

Sincerely,

Bill O'Neill
Chief and State Forester, Forest Resources Division

Michigan's Forest Resources

Michigan is blessed with an amazing variety and diversity of forests from those that line our city streets to those that cling to the rugged Lake Superior shoreline and all that lies between. The Forest Resources Division (FRD) is equally diverse in scope and mission from its private and urban forestry programs to the direct management of one of the largest state forest systems in the nation.

The 4 million-acre state forest is part of a 20 million-acre statewide forest resource, helping to protect the watersheds of the largest system of fresh surface water on earth. Professional, sustainable management of the state's forests provides the leadership, expertise and blueprint for the larger statewide forest resource and is a catalyst for the forest products industry which generates $14 billion annually and sustains 154,000 jobs.

Steps for Sustainable Management

FRD inventories and evaluates one-tenth, about 400,000 acres, of the state forest each year, ensuring a complete and comprehensive review of the entire state forest system over a continuous 10-year cycle. This state-of-the-art inventory program provides key decision-making information for resource managers to propose needed treatments. Each of the 15 Forest Management Units that comprise the state forest system conducts an annual open house to present information to the public to solicit comments regarding proposed treatments. A compartment review follows in which staff weighs input and resource objectives and formally approves treatments.

Forest certification identifies and recognizes well-managed forests and verifies sustainable forest management practices. Michigan's state forest system is unique because it is dually certified with both the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) programs. This rigorous, two-party certification helps ensure retention of forest-based jobs and forest sustainability through an independent, third-party review of environmental, social and economic benefits of forestry practices.

Strength in Partnerships

Working with many partners, FRD is responsible for ensuring that Michigan's state forest land is sustainably managed and protected to provide diverse hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities.

Two appointed forest resource advisory groups work with FRD giving their time and talent to help the division meet its goals and mission. The Timber Advisory Council (TAC) provides advice to the governor, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) on issues and concerns related to timber management in Michigan. The DNR director appoints members of the Forest Management Advisory Committee (FMAC) who assist in balancing environmental, social and economic issues related to managing Michigan's state forest system.

With the guidance of the TAC and FMAC, and through the work of FRD, Michigan's state forests provide a consistent supply of wood to help support and maintain a diverse forest products industry comprised of more than 270 mills, over 1,200 manufacturers and nearly 600 loggers. The state forest provides more than 20 percent of the raw material for these operations and will average more than 60,000 acres of harvest annually.

Reforestation is a vital part of FRD's mission. An average 6 million seedlings are planted on about 6,000 acres of state forest land each year. These seedlings are produced in the DNR's Wyman Nursery and include 1 to 2 million seedlings planted annually for habitat to support the federally endangered Kirtland's warbler.

Private Lands Forestry

Families and individuals own the largest proportion – 62 percent or about 12 million acres – of Michigan's forests.

The DNR entered into a partnership with MDARD and the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts in 31 counties. The DNR provides training, funding and technical assistance to foresters hired by the districts. District foresters provide forestry assistance to landowners and support for private consulting foresters.

FRD administers the Commercial Forest program which was initiated in 1925 to provide a property tax incentive for private landowners to retain and manage forest land for long-term timber production and to open their lands to public access for hunting and fishing. Approximately 1,800 landowners are currently registered, providing an additional 2.2 million acres for hunters and anglers.

The Urban and Community Forestry program reaches more than 5 million people living in participating Michigan communities. The program's focus is on helping communities better manage their urban forests.

In addition to these programs, FRD's survey staff establishes property boundaries needed for timber sales and for protecting public land from trespassing.

Cooperatively Managing Michigan's State Forests

Hundreds of land use issues, such as land acquisitions, exchanges, disposals, permits and recreational events are granted annually through comprehensive review with DNR and public stakeholders.

The FRD Resource Assessment Unit provides geographic information systems and digital mapping support to the entire DNR. This data gives DNR land managers access to critical information that benefits all citizens.

FRD works closely with the DNR's Minerals Management, which administers the leasing and development of the state's metallic, nonmetallic, and oil and gas mineral resources in a manner that ensures protection of natural resource values, while optimizing revenue for the people of Michigan. Over the last 10 fiscal years, the leasing of state-owned mineral rights has generated more than $760 million in revenue. The state constitution requires that this revenue go into the Michigan State Parks Endowment Fund and the Game & Fish Protection Fund. These funds allow for improvements to facilities, public land, fish and wildlife habitat, as well as providing increased recreational opportunities.

Wildfires, climate change, exotic insect and disease pests, urban expansion, and forest fragmentation are challenges to the future productivity and sustainability of Michigan forests. FRD programs and staff play key roles in addressing these challenges and in keeping all of Michigan's forests healthy, abundant and diverse.

Protecting Michigan's Forest Land

FRD has a nationally recognized wildfire program that is charged with protecting state and private forest resources. FRD responds to an average of 500 wildfires yearly. With the help of specialized training from FRD staff, local fire departments respond to additional wildfire threats. Tracking fire weather conditions and administering 55,000 burn permits annually are key fire prevention activities. Five DNR pilots and aircraft are supplemented by three contract aircraft, flying hundreds of hours to ensure early detection and timely fire suppression efforts to keep wildfires small. These pilots also provide critical intelligence on active fires to help ensure firefighter safety.

FRD maintains four incident management teams to manage and oversee large and complex wildfire incidents. Most of FRD's fire-trained staff is qualified to assist with national fire emergencies. This national assistance returns revenue to Michigan while providing wildfire expertise and resources highly sought by other states and federal agencies. This reciprocal agreement has the added benefit of providing experience and training to Michigan's firefighting staff as well as procuring national fire assistance to Michigan when the need arises.

Prescribed fire — the controlled application of fire by experts under specified weather conditions — plays an important role in the sustainable management of forested lands, wildlife habitat and the restoration of natural communities. FRD staff provides prescribed burning leadership and expertise on all state-managed lands.

Staff at the DNR's Forest Fire Experiment Station (FFES) researches and develops equipment for fighting wildfires. The FFES works with wildfire fighting entities to develop prototype specialized equipment used across the nation.

A new era of exotic forest pests continues to challenge the health and sustainability of Michigan's forests. FRD works with other state and federal agencies and universities to prevent, evaluate and manage the occurrence and impacts of both native and exotic forest insects and diseases.

The work of the Forest Resources Division is broad in scope and touches the lives of every Michigan citizen. With the vision expressed in this strategic plan, FRD has the privilege of continuing to meet its long-standing responsibilities to protect, manage and enhance the state's forest resources for the benefit of all Michigan residents, now and in the future.

Preparation & Planning

Why We Developed a Strategic Plan

Organizations perform best when they choose an explicit course of action and concentrate attention and effort on pursuing that course. A strategic plan establishes pathways to achieve high-level goals and objectives that will lead to greater success in the future.

Forest Resources Division's strategic plan provides the direction to focus and align the division's resources with department and division goals. It is not a detailed road map, rather a compass to allow us individually and collectively to get from point A to point B. This strategy will help make the division more adaptable to emerging issues, increase operational efficiency, and improve the way the division conducts business.

It is our hope that each employee, partner, customer and stakeholder will see how they can be a part of the future and help chart the path through the forest. We invite you to share in this future and help shape it through your involvement and interest in our state forest system's vast and complex resources.

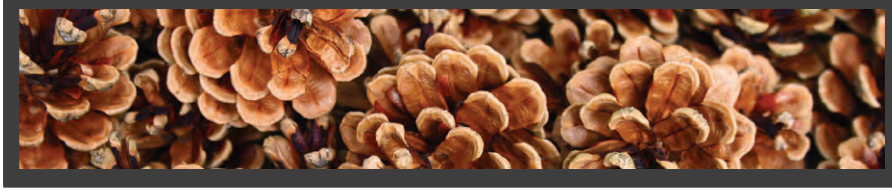
How We Developed our Strategic Plan

We crafted this strategic plan so that each employee in our division would see themselves and their role in achieving its broad goals. Likewise, every stakeholder, customer, co-manager, and member of the public will better understand our priorities and mission and how they fit into our vision.

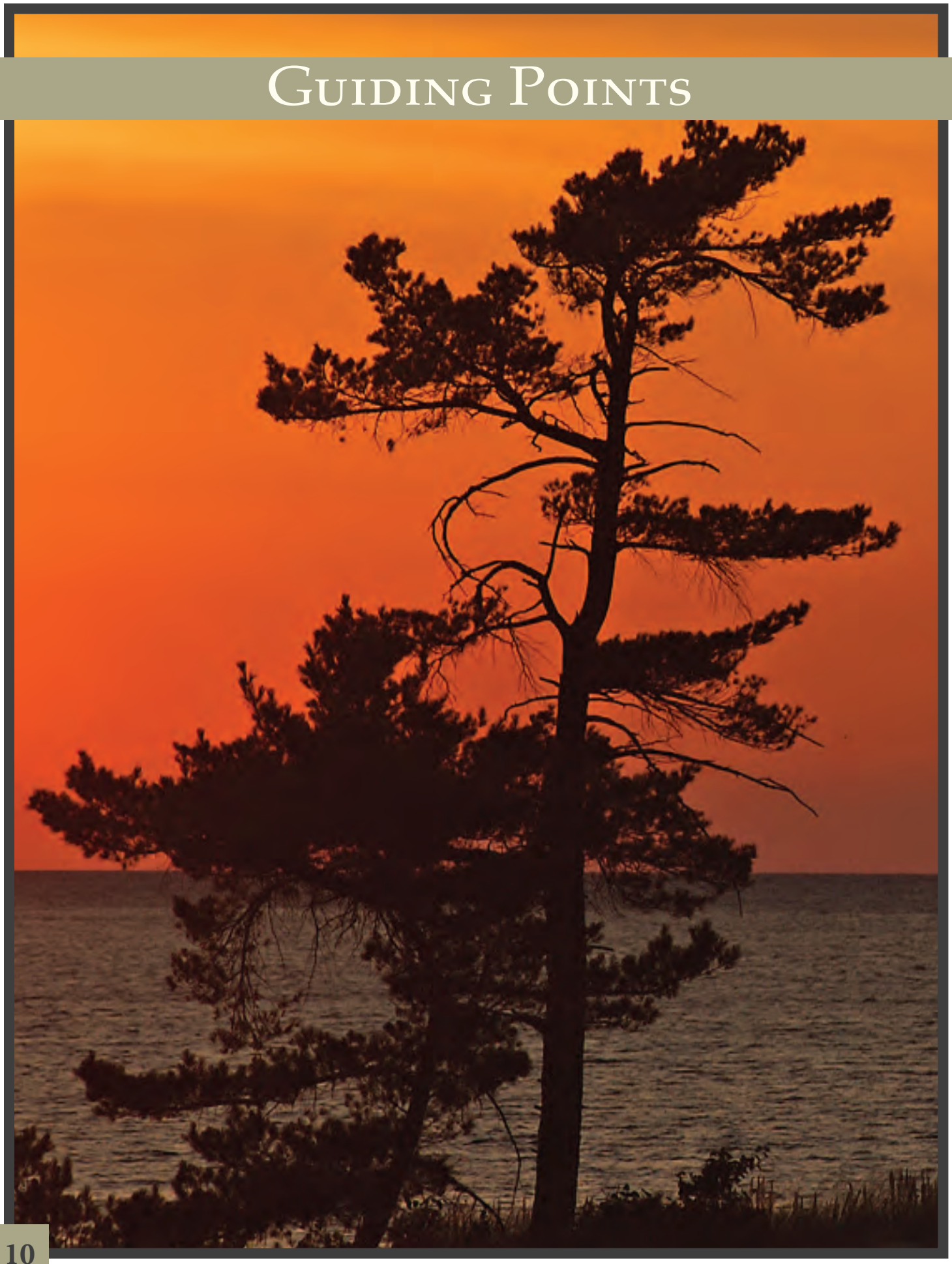
To achieve this, we first researched who we are and where we have been. We did this with the knowledge that this world of sustainable, professional forest stewardship requires the Forest Resources Division to be dynamic, efficient and responsive with a clear picture of the role and purpose it will serve.

We invited a broad group of employees to serve on the strategic planning team and utilized staff and stakeholder surveys, outreach and public involvement. Our facilitator and strategic planning expert, Colonel (ret) Berri K. Meyers, worked with us to use this information to develop our mission, vision, values, goals and objectives to plan the course of this division for the next three to five years.

The strategic planning process has guided us to define who we are, what we do well and what we need to improve to better serve the broad and diverse interests of our customers and to better manage and protect Michigan's forest resources. This strategic plan is the result of many facilitator-led meetings that have given us a strong starting point for development and change.



Guiding Points



The Department of Natural Resources

Mission

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use, and enjoyment of the state's natural and cultural resources for current and future generations.

Goals

- Protect natural and cultural resources.
- Ensure sustainable recreation use and enjoyment.
- Enable strong natural resource-based economies.
- Improve and build relationships and partnerships.
- Foster effective business practices and good governance.

Forest Resources Division

Mission

To manage, protect and provide for the sustainable use of Michigan's forest resources.

Vision

Vital, healthy and abundant forests that provide social, economic and ecological benefits.

Values

The following values guide the work of the Forest Resources Division:

- Integrity
- Collaboration
- Teamwork
- Conservation ethic
- Adaptability
- Professionalism
- Mentoring
- Sustainability
- Sense of purpose

Goals & Objectives

The four goals below have been developed to focus the work of Forest Resources Division (FRD). For each, various objectives are detailed that will move FRD toward these goals by 2018. Statements have been provided to help explain why each objective was developed. All of the goals and objectives are critical to FRD meeting its mission.

Goals: Representations of broad, high-level themes that are consistent with the division's mission, vision and values. FRD's four strategic planning goals (in no particular order of priority):

- **Goal 1:** Sustainably and proactively manage and protect forest resources.
- **Goal 2:** Promote and improve marketing and education.
- **Goal 3:** Invest in and empower staff.
- **Goal 4:** Create a sustainable business model.

Objectives: Key accomplishments necessary to achieve goals. The objectives for each goal are listed on the following pages.

Time-specific, detailed action plans will be developed for each objective to assist Forest Resources Division in accomplishing this strategic plan.

Goal One

Sustainably and proactively manage and protect forest resources.

Objective 1: Build and maintain partnerships to increase capacity, efficiency and efficacy of response capacity.

Successful partnerships are critical for the efficient management and protection of the state's forests and wildlands. FRD will place a greater emphasis on working closely with all of our partners to fully utilize our joint expertise and resources to find solutions to new problems and improve the ongoing management and protection of our natural resources.

Objective 2: Embrace cutting-edge technology to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of work on timber sales, forest inventory, the Commercial Forest Program and burn permits.

Aging technology must be updated in order to yield the benefits of technological advancements and improve efficiency.

Objective 3: Implement the Regional State Forest Management Plans, monitor the progress and create adaptive solutions.

Timber harvest levels and related strategies on how stands will be treated are outlined in the department's recently approved Regional State Forest Management Plans. These plans provide landscape level direction in achieving sustainable management of Michigan's timber and wildlife habitat management objectives. Annual monitoring of the plans is an essential means by which the DNR can assess success in achieving objectives related to timber harvests and wildlife habitat management. Adaptive solutions and adjustments may be necessary as unforeseen weather, insect and disease or other issues appear on the landscape.

Objective 4: Develop a comprehensive road and bridge replacement, repair and maintenance plan.

There are over 1,800 miles of improved department roads, 6,000 miles of unimproved roads, hundreds of bridges, and thousands of culverts that comprise the transportation system on state forest land. This transportation system provides access for public safety; public hunting, fishing and recreation opportunities; timber and wildlife management; wildfire protection; law enforcement; access to private and corporate lands; and more. A comprehensive plan will be developed to identify department-managed roads and infrastructure and formulate a strategy for continued sustainable management.

Goal Two

Promote and improve marketing and education.

Objective 1: Develop and implement a communications and marketing plan to highlight the values of Michigan's forests and forest products industry.

Communicating with the public is important to ensure understanding of the role FRD plays in sustainably managing and protecting Michigan's forest resources, and how important forestry is to the state's economy. To increase public awareness, FRD will create a systematic plan to share its good news and many stories of success and collaboration.

Objective 2: Develop and maintain user-friendly and relevant online content and presence.

FRD's website is a main portal for public outreach and education. With more people using mobile devices to access the department's websites, updated and easy-to-understand content, along with responsive design of all web pages, is vital.

Objective 3: Develop forest products marketing and utilization expertise and capacity.

The forest products industry in Michigan is important to the state's economy and management of the state's forest resources. Results from the Governor's 2013 Forest Products Summit identified several goals supporting and expanding the forest products-based economy in Michigan. This effort will enable FRD to lead in the promotion of the forest products industry, explore new opportunities and products and attract new investment.

Objective 4: Develop and execute a program that educates citizens in the management and protection of Michigan's forests.

FRD will take the opportunity to help Michigan's citizens better understand the importance of the state's forest resources including how much there is, how they are managed, how they can protect them and their value and importance to us as individuals and as a state.

Goal Three

Invest in and empower staff.

Objective 1: Develop and implement a mentoring program.

FRD possesses a wealth of historical knowledge and technical expertise. Division staff are an excellent resource to foster the development of new and emerging employees.

Objective 2: Enhance the employee recognition program.

Recognizing employee efforts and celebrating successes should – and will – be an important part of who we are in FRD.

Objective 3: Ensure all employees have an annual work plan and understand how it contributes to division/department goals.

It is important that FRD staff have a clear understanding of how individual efforts contribute to DNR and division goals, objectives and priorities.

Objective 4: Expand the existing training program, which includes position-specific needs for job standards.

FRD will monitor specific requirements and training milestones for major job classifications. We will work collaboratively with employees and managers to ensure employee development.

Goal Four

Create a sustainable business model.

Objective 1: Identify and align core priorities and responsibilities with resources.

Matching fund sources with core priorities on an annual basis is critical to achieving a sustainable business model. Identifying and aligning programs with funding will occur annually.

Objective 2: Develop sustainable alternative funding sources for FRD.

Work collaboratively with other entities to identify and seek potential funding sources to sustainably fund programs, including equipment replacement, beyond the sale of timber.

Objective 3: Develop a facilities maintenance and replacement schedule.

FRD will identify all buildings and building structures under its jurisdiction. Once completed, we will develop a maintenance schedule aligned with current budgets and identify where opportunities exist to share resources with other divisions and agencies.

Forest Resources' Investment Opportunities

Forest Resources Division (FRD) is fueled by the passion, experience and dedication of its employees and partners to manage one of the largest state forest systems in the nation. Keeping our forests sustainably managed, healthy, abundant and protected from wildfire and forest pests is no simple task. It's what we do!

It is important to know how we are financed and understand what investment opportunities are possible with some proposed changes. FRD depends on the sale of the state's forested resources to help sustainably manage the resource and fund the costs of running the division. In fiscal year 2013, the Forest Development Fund (FDF), which is primarily derived from the sale of timber on state land ownership, financed 67 percent of our division's annual budget. The General Fund made up 8 percent of the budget. Federal grants accounted for 16 percent. Other sources comprised the remaining 9 percent of the division's funding.

These funds all contribute to finance a division of nearly 300 employees that manage not only 4 million acres of state forest land, but provide wildfire protection, forest health, forest recreation, forest stewardship and urban forestry responsibilities for over 30 million acres of land where people live, work and play.

While the Forest Development Fund is a robust funding mechanism, it alone cannot sustain a division that is responsible for so much more than just growing and managing the timber on state forest land. It is also a highly variable funding source because it is so dependent upon economic market forces. Over the years, FDF has played an increased role in funding the entire division. It is imperative that a diverse and sustainable funding model be developed.

As an example, greater than half of the wildfire program is funded by the Forest Development Fund. While this is an appropriate use for a portion of the FDF, 72 percent of fires occur on private property in close proximity to people's homes. FRD fire suppression forces protect not just forest resources, but personal property and infrastructure on developed private lands.

With predictable funding sources, FRD will be in a better position to market Michigan's forest products, provide more industry data, analysis and support, and increase capacity for Michigan's expanding forest products economy. It will allow the department to improve wildfire response by strengthening partnerships and training provided to local rural fire departments — better protecting Michigan's natural resources. Additionally, it will allow for strategic investments in programs such as commercial and urban forestry, forest health, cultivation and other smaller, but equally important, responsibilities of FRD.

Restructuring the investment in Michigan's forests will enhance the forest products industry by increasing demand, shifting the perception of Michigan wood products from commodity to a value-added product, and using a more appropriate funding source.

Strategic investment in forestry will help FRD in its role of supplying a stable, dependable and abundant wood supply to a more than $14 billion industry, which is critical in sustaining and improving Michigan's land-based rural economies.

In Summary

Now is a great time to invest in Michigan and Michigan's forest products industries! Demand for our wood fiber is increasing and will contribute to Michigan's economic recovery.

Governor Snyder's 2013 Forest Products Summit resulted in specific goals for Michigan's forest products industry. Government, university, financial and industry representatives came together to develop the following goals to grow the timber industry:

- Increase the economic impact of the forest products industry from $14 billion to $20 billion;
- Increase the export of value-added forest products by 50 percent;
- Increase forest products-related careers by 10 percent; and
- Encourage regionally based industry development.

By continuing to work with its partners to best protect the resources that benefit local communities and foster regional economic prosperity, FRD will continue to maintain world-class state forest lands that provide quality outdoor recreation opportunities to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Michigan and the Michigan forest products industry has a unique opportunity to develop new rural economies tied to land-based industries using sustainable forest products. FRD will play a substantial leadership role in identifying and helping develop these opportunities.

The Forest Resources Division fully appreciates the priceless treasure we have in our forest stewardship and public trust. We also acknowledge the economic development opportunities that await the forest products segment of our economy. Obtaining a stable, dependable funding source will help us fully "manage, protect and provide for the sustainable use of Michigan's forest resources."

Appreciation & Recognition

Michigan's 4 million acres of state forest land are a great public resource that will yield countless benefits for future generations. Forest Resources Division is deeply grateful to DNR staff, the public, conservation and advisory groups, our customers, and our partners who helped develop this plan. Their support is invaluable.

Special thanks to:

- The citizens of Michigan
- The Timber Advisory Council
- The Forest Management Advisory Committee
- The forest products industry
- The Natural Resources Commission
- The Michigan Legislature
- Universities and researchers
- The Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs
- The Michigan State Firemen's Association
- Sporting clubs and conservation organizations
- State, local, tribal and federal governments
- Recreation interests
- The U.S. Forest Service
- Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- The Forest Stewardship Advisory Council
- Michigan Association of Timbermen
- Metallic, nonmetallic and oil and gas industries
- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Department of Natural Resources leadership and staff
- Colonel (ret) Berri K. Meyers, Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Learn more about the Forest Resources Division and Michigan's forests by visiting:
www.michigan.gov/forestplan

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