

A Forest Stewardship Story About Wildlife Habitat



Bill McKinley and a ten point buck taken on their property in 2012.

Bill and Celeste McKinley purchased 865 acres of forest land in the central Upper Peninsula in 2005 for recreational property. They enjoy fishing, nature walks, bird hunting, and deer hunting on their property that was previously owned by a larger hunting camp. The McKinleys started working with Upper Michigan Land Management in 2006 to help them manage their forest and to improve their wildlife habitat. The McKinleys have harvested timber, planted apple and oak trees, dug ponds, and planted food plots on their property.

The McKinleys conducted a commercial timber sale in 2008 with the help of Dean Francis and Todd Green, their foresters at Upper Michigan Land Management. They did a selection harvest in their northern hardwoods and also clearcut several stands of mature aspen. Bill reports, "We were shocked by the appearance of the aspen clearcut in the first year, but we now have phenomenal habitat for grouse, woodcock and deer." The McKinleys were skeptical about timber harvesting because of a poor experience in the 1990s, but their consulting foresters helped guide them through the entire process. Todd sent out competitive bids, helped select an excellent logger, and worked with the logger to construct recreational trails, travel corridors, and linear food plots on the logging roads. Todd also established a riparian management zone to protect the soil and water quality near the river that runs along the western side of the property. Bill said, "Hiring a forester was worth the cost because it helped us avoid the negative aspects that we experienced in our previous timber sale twenty years ago."

The McKinleys constructed a 1/4 acre pond near their cabin in 2013. Todd and Dean, who also provide wildlife services, designed the pond with a local engineering firm, arranged for the DEQ permit, and hired a local excavator to dig the pond. Bill and Celeste enjoy the nice aesthetics and watching birds at their pond.

Bill and Celeste hired Upper Michigan Land Management again in 2014 to develop a Forest Stewardship Plan. They needed a forest management plan in order to enroll in the Qualified Forest program to lower their property taxes. Bill and Celeste wanted a written plan to maximize their habitat management efforts over the next twenty years. Dean recommended a Forest Stewardship Plan to Bill because it is a simple yet comprehensive plan, and the DNR also offers a partial cost share to lower their total cost. Dean conducted a forest inventory, and then wrote up a plan for forest management to improve wildlife habitat. Bill says, "The entire process was very easy for us because Dean knows the programs and helped us navigate our enrollment."

In 2014, the Michigan Forest Stewardship Program helped 265 landowners like Bill and Celeste McKinley develop Forest Stewardship Plans covering almost 57,000 acres around the state. Call the DNR Forest Stewardship Coordinator at 517-284-5884 or explore www.michigan.gov/foreststewardship to find a professional forester or wildlife biologist near you who can help you manage, protect and *enjoy* your forest.