



Hello Forest Landowner,

Thank you for contacting the Michigan [Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR) for information about your forest. The DNR [Forest Resources Division](#) seeks to be a resource for private landowners throughout Michigan while also managing 4 million acres of public forest land for multiple benefits including recreation, wildlife habitat, environmental services, and timber production. This letter gives information about several topics related to private forest land management in Michigan. [*Note: underlined words in this letter have hyperlinks to websites, most of which are also listed on page 5.*]

FORESTS

Michigan ranks 11th in the nation with 20.3 million acres of forest land, which is 55% of the land area of our two peninsulas. The Federal and State governments own and manage 8 million acres of forest land, primarily in northern Michigan. Private corporations own and actively manage almost 3 million acres of forest land. However, private individuals and families own more than 9 million acres or 45% of the forests throughout the state. Your own forest may not be huge, but altogether the 400,000 family forest owners in Michigan are by far the largest group of forest owners in our state.

FORESTERS

There are more than 250 professional foresters in Michigan who are available to help you manage your forest for whatever goals you may have for your unique forest. But before you contact a forester, you should know that there are at least three types of foresters who commonly work with private landowners.

1) “Consulting Foresters” are independent consultants who provide many types of forestry services for a fee to forest landowners. They work directly for the landowner and serve only the interests of their client, the landowner. Common services include writing forest management plans, planting trees, improving wildlife habitat, and administering timber harvests. The [Association of Consulting Foresters](#) provides a list of their members on their website. The Michigan Forest Association, a group of forest landowners who join together for networking and advocacy, also maintains a [list of consulting foresters](#).

2) “Industrial Foresters” work for local sawmills to buy trees from private landowners or to manage forest land owned by a forest products company. There are many excellent industrial foresters in Michigan, and landowners should recognize that they work for sawmills that are buying the trees, rather than for the private landowner who is selling their trees. Forest landowners should seek multiple bids for any timber sale to ensure that they are getting the current market value for their trees. You can contact the [Michigan Association of Timbermen](#) or the [Sustainable Forestry Initiative](#) to find an industrial forester or a “Qualified Logging Professional” (insured, trained, and experienced logger) in your area.

3) “Government Foresters” work for public universities and government agencies to provide free information, educational workshops, and forestry programs for the public. The DNR employs three Service Foresters and several other staff who administer forestry programs for private landowners. The MSU Department of Forestry and MSU Extension employ several natural resources educators that develop educational programs for landowners. The DNR and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) together support the “Forestry Assistance Program” which funds twenty Conservation District foresters. These [Conservation District foresters](#) provide general forestry information to landowners for free, and then refer landowners to consulting foresters or industrial foresters for further services like writing forest management plans and administering timber sales.

Any of these foresters can be registered by the State of Michigan as a [Registered Forester](#) (RF) or certified by the Society of American Foresters as a [Certified Forester](#) (CF) if they have the required college degree and several years of experience. Only consulting foresters are certified by the [Association of Consulting Foresters](#) (ACF). Professional loggers and some industrial foresters may have training and continuing education through the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. All foresters should conform to strict



[ethical standards](#) to ensure that they provide honorable service to society and competent stewardship of Michigan's amazing forests.

FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANS

A written plan is the foundation for good forest management and accomplishing your unique goals for your forest. There are two programs in Michigan that offer financial assistance to help pay for a portion of the total cost of developing a forest management plan. Plan writers are allowed to set their own prices, so interview several foresters before hiring one to develop a forest management plan with you.

The [Forest Stewardship Program](#) (FSP) encourages long-term stewardship of family forest land by connecting landowners with professional foresters to develop a Forest Stewardship Plan that helps landowners *manage, protect, and enjoy their forests*. The DNR has trained and certified more than 130 private sector foresters and wildlife biologists, and there are at least several foresters available in every county. Funding from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) helps lower the total cost, and this partial cost share is made available through grants to the Plan Writer to minimize payment hassles for landowners. The cost share is \$225 per plan plus \$0.50 per acre up to \$2,500 per landowner. Landowners can easily enroll in the program any time of the year by completing an easy two page form with their Plan Writer. A DNR Service Forester reviews the plan for meeting USFS standards for a simple yet comprehensive Forest Stewardship Plan. More information about the Forest Stewardship Program is available online at www.Michigan.gov/ForestStewardship. Since 1990, more than 5,400 landowners in Michigan have used their Forest Stewardship Plan to help them *manage, protect, and enjoy their forest*.

The [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) also administers a financial assistance program to develop a forest management plan. The financial assistance from the NRCS is much higher than the Forest Stewardship Program, but the landowner must apply at their local NRCS office for a contract with the NRCS for a "conservation activity plan" (CAP 106). Applications for funding are accepted year round, but there is usually a "sign-up cutoff date" in the winter, and contracts are usually funded in the summer. After getting a contract, the landowner then hires one of 50 Technical Service Providers (professional foresters certified by the NRCS) to write the plan. The NRCS District Conservationist in each county reviews the forest management plan to verify that it meets program guidelines. The [Michigan NRCS](#) has more information about forestry and financial assistance programs on its website.

Fees, plan quality, and plan contents can vary widely so please call at least three professional foresters to ask about prices and the contents of their plans. Feel free to ask for references and an example plan to read one of their previous forest management plans before you hire them. Consulting foresters frequently travel several counties away from their office, so do not feel obligated to hire the closest forester. Very low prices or very high prices are not always accurate indicators of plan quality. You do not have to use either of these two financial assistance programs to develop a forest management plan, but they are helpful to ensure consistent quality of the plan and also to lower your costs.

PROPERTY TAXES

The State of Michigan offers two tax reduction programs to help lower your property taxes on forest land, and both of these programs require a written forest management plan prior to enrolling in the program.

The [Qualified Forest](#) (QF) program reduces property taxes by up to 18 mills for landowners with parcels between 20 and 640 acres and who comply with their forest management plan to optimize their forest resources. Landowners do not have to allow the public on their land to hunt or fish, so this program is more attractive to family forest owners who own land for their own recreation. There is a \$50 application fee and an annual fee equivalent to 2 mills to help fund the operation of the program. The MDARD administers the Qualified Forest program and more information is available at www.michigan.gov/qfp, including the minimum requirements for a QF forest management plan and a list of about 175 "Qualified Foresters" who can write plans for the Qualified Forest program. Rich Harlow is the program administrator, and the phone number for the Qualified Forest program is 517-284-5630.



The [Commercial Forest](#) (CF) program provides a specific property tax of \$1.25 per acre for landowners that have at least 40 acres of forest and are engaged in sustainable timber production in support of Michigan's forest products industry. Participating landowners must make their land open to the public for foot access for hunting and fishing, so this program is usually more attractive to corporate forest owners who own large forests in the Upper Peninsula. The application fee is \$1 per acre with a minimum fee of \$200 and a maximum fee of \$1,000. The DNR administers the Commercial Forest program and more information is available at www.michigan.gov/commercialforest, including the application forms and the required components of a CF forest management plan. Any of the 225 Registered Foresters in Michigan can write a forest management plan for the Commercial Forest program. Shirley Businski is the program administrator for the Commercial Forest program, and her phone number is 517-284-5849.

While it is not required to use a financial assistance program for developing a plan for these two tax programs, many landowners benefit from using either the FSP or NRCS programs to develop their forest management plan and then enroll in the separate Commercial Forest or Qualified Forest programs. Participating in a financial assistance program may hinder the schedule for developing a forest management plan in time for the application deadlines of the Commercial Forest program (April 1) or the Qualified Forest (September 1) program and delay entry into the tax program for an entire year.

IMPLEMENTING YOUR FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

After you have a written forest management plan, you should consider joining the [American Tree Farm System](#). Tree Farm is a great program that helps participating landowners show society that they are managing their forests sustainably according to their "Standards of Sustainability," recently updated in 2015. Your forest stewardship provides public benefits to everyone, and Tree Farm helps inform society about the value of forests and sustainable forest management. Tree Farm also provides educational resources for forest landowners. Tree Farm's "big green sign" is the sign of good forestry!

The [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) offers financial assistance to landowners to implement conservation practices on their land. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is the most common program to provide funding for forest landowners. Applications for funding are accepted year round, but there is usually a "sign-up cutoff date" in the winter. Contracts are usually funded in the summer and last for 3 years. A NRCS Forest Management Plan, or a Forest Stewardship Plan, or a Tree Farm Plan is required to guide the implementation of conservation practices before you are eligible to get financial assistance. Common forestry practices to get funding include stream crossings, forest trails and landings, riparian forest buffers, forest stand improvement, tree or shrub planting, site preparation, brush management, early succession habitat, upland wildlife habitat, and wetland wildlife habitat.

Deer hunters might be interested in having their land approved by the [Quality Deer Management Association](#) as meeting their cornerstones and standards. Their [Land Certification Program](#) requires a forest management plan for forested properties. This is a wildlife management program rather than a true forest certification program like the American Tree Farm System.

Landowners who are passionate about their forests might be interested in joining the [Michigan Forest Association](#). The Michigan Forest Association (MFA) connects its members with 400 other landowners who love their forests and like to talk about their land. MFA is the voice for Michigan's forests to inform the public and policy makers about forestry issues. Dues (only \$40) include quarterly magazines and monthly newsletters. MFA's annual meeting connects forest landowners to network, socialize, learn new things, and have fun. MFA also sponsors a weeklong forestry workshop for teachers during the summer.

TIMBER SALES

One of the primary benefits of investing in a forest management plan is that it helps you prepare for a timber sale. A well-planned timber sale should have both economic benefits for you and ecological benefits for your forest. A forest management plan will help you to determine what trees to sell, and more

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importantly, what trees to keep so that you can improve your forest when you harvest your timber. All timber sales should be conducted to accomplish your stated goals for your forest, whether those are improving wildlife habitat, increasing access for recreation, removing diseased trees, modifying the species composition, improving “crop trees” for future harvest, or just generating some current income.

Timber sales can be a long and complicated process so it is often a good investment to hire a consulting forester to help you administer your timber sale. A consulting forester will help you decide what trees to sell and market the sale to multiple buyers to get the best price for your trees. Your forester will also ensure that the loggers follow “Best Management Practices” to protect your soil and water resources. Consulting foresters also provide customized timber sale contracts which are often more detailed than the typical contract that a timber buyer provides. Foresters can also help you reduce the [taxes](#) on the profits of your sale by calculating your “basis” and “depletion” for capital gains. Consulting foresters may charge hourly rates, set fees, or a percentage of the sale price for their services in administering your sale.

Most timber sales in Michigan are either a “lump sum” sale where the buyer pays in full for the marked trees before the harvest begins or a “mill tally” sale where the buyer pays an agreed price for a unit of wood (cords, boardfeet, tons, etc.) when it is cut and delivered to the sawmill. Most selection harvests in hardwoods forests (oak, maple, beech, cherry, etc.) are sold in a lump sum sale. If you are thinning a pine plantation or clearcutting an aspen stand, those types of large volume harvests are often sold in a mill tally sale. Mill tally sales require a higher level of trust and usually some extra oversight.

Whether you hire a consulting forester or not, be sure that you have a clearly written contract that describes exactly what will occur and when it will occur during your timber sale. The seasonal timing of the harvest is important to protect your soil and to reduce the potential to spread diseases like oak wilt. A detailed contract will protect both the seller (you, the landowner) and the buyer (logger or sawmill) in a timber harvest. It is the landowner’s responsibility to know the location of their property corners and property lines so investing in a survey conducted by a licensed land surveyor can be a good investment.

There are many excellent loggers in Michigan so be sure that you are working with a “Qualified Logging Professional.” Look for loggers that have been trained by the [Michigan Sustainable Forestry Initiative](#) or are members of the [Michigan Association of Timbermen](#) or are certified as a [Master Logger](#).

FUN!

Landowners purchase forests and spend many hours every year working in their woods for a variety of reasons. For some landowners, forests are an economic investment to secure future income. For others, owning a forest is an ethical choice to improve the world by slowing urban sprawl or providing other environmental services. But for many landowners, the primary motive for owning forest land is the enjoyment that they receive by spending time in their woods. *Forest owners do a lot of activities in their woods because it is just plain fun!* So as you work with your forester to navigate these programs and choose the best ones for you and your property, don’t forget that most family forest owners in Michigan own their forest because they simply enjoy being out in their own woods. Good forest management should not only improve the ecology and economics of your forest, but also your enjoyment of your land.

Please contact me by phone or email if I can be of further service to help you steward your forest.

Thanks,

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INTERNET RESOURCES FOR FOREST LANDOWNERS

DNR Forest Resources Division – www.michigan.gov/forestry
DNR Forest Stewardship Program – www.michigan.gov/foreststewardship
DNR Private Forest Land – www.michigan.gov/privateforestland
DNR Urban and Community Forestry - www.michigan.gov/ucf
Qualified Forest Program - www.michigan.gov/qfp
Commercial Forest Program – www.michigan.gov/commercialforest
NRCS Financial Assistance – www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/mi/technical/landuse/forestry
Forest Stewardship Plan Writers - www.michigan.gov/foreststewardship
NRCS Technical Service Providers - www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/technical/tsp/
Michigan Forest Association Foresters List - www.michiganforests.com/forester.htm
Michigan Society of American Foresters - http://michigansaf.org
Association of Consulting Foresters – www.acf-foresters.org
Conservation District Foresters – www.michigan.gov/mifap
Michigan Association of Conservation Districts - http://macd.org
Tree Sales - http://michigan.gov/documents/dnr/DirectoryOfMichiganSeedlingNurseries-IC4175_258828_7.pdf?20141113140132
DNR Hunting Access Program - www.michigan.gov/hap
DNR Wildlife Landowner Incentive Program - www.michigan.gov/dnr/rip
DNR Wildlife - www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/Landowners_Guide/index.htm
Michigan United Conservation Clubs – www.mucc.org
Quality Deer Management Association – www.qdma.com
National Wild Turkey Federation - www.nwtf.org
Foresters for the Birds - http://vt.audubon.org/foresters-birds
DNR Forest Health - www.michigan.gov/foresthealth
MDARD Forest Pests – www.michigan.gov/exoticpests
USFS National Forest Health - http://ffh.fs.fed.us
DNR Invasive Species – www.michigan.gov/invasivespecies
Midwest Invasive Species Network - www.misin.msu.edu
MSU Diagnostics Laboratory - www.pestid.msu.edu
Michigan Association of Timbermen - www.timberman.org
Michigan Sustainable Forestry Initiative - http://sfimi.org
Michigan Master Loggers - www.mimlc.com
Michigan Forest Products Council - www.michiganforest.com
Forestry Taxes - www.timbertax.org
Sample Timber Sale Contract - www.nhdfl.org/library/pdf/Forest%20Protection/timbersaleagreement.pdf
Project Learning Tree - www.michiganplt.org
Project WILD - www.michigan.gov/michiganprojectwild
Michigan Environmental Education Curriculum Support – www.michigan.gov/meecs
Michigan Forest Pathways - http://miforestpathways.net
Michigan Forest Association - www.michiganforests.com
American Tree Farm System - www.treefarmssystem.org
My Land Plan - http://mylandplan.org
National Woodland Owners Association - www.woodlandowners.org
Ties to the Land (succession planning to pass forest to next generation) - http://tiestotheand.org
Conservation Easements – http://landtrust.org/Links/linksTABLE.htm
MTU School of Forest Resources & Environmental Science - www.mtu.edu/forest
MSU Department of Forestry – www.for.msu.edu
MSU Extension Forestry - http://msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/forestry
MSU Soil Testing Laboratory - www.spnl.msu.edu
USDA Soil Web Survey - http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm
USFS Private Woodland Owners - http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/flg
USFS Ecosystem Services - www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices/index.shtml
USFS State and Private Forestry - www.fs.fed.us/spf



GREAT BOOKS FOR A FOREST LANDOWNER'S LIBRARY

- 1. Woodland Stewardship: A Practical Guide for Midwestern Landowners.** 2nd Edition, 2009. This book, written by a team of educators and foresters from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan is an excellent manual on how to manage your forest for a wide variety of goals. It is only \$16 and is available at www.bookstores.umn.edu. A free pdf of the entire book is online at <http://woodlandstewardship.org>.
- 2. Owning and Managing Forest: A Guide to Legal, Financial, and Practical Matters.** Revised, 2005. This book is written by Thomas McEvoy, an Extension Professor at the University of Vermont. It contains excellent advice on the legal and financial issues of owning and managing a family forest. Cost: \$33
- 3. A Landowner's Guide to Managing Your Woods.** 2011. This book is authored by a landowner, forester, and logger to give a balanced view of forest management and how to maintain a small forest for long-term health, biodiversity, and high-quality timber production. Cost: \$15
- 4. Michigan Trees: A Guide to the Trees of the Great Lakes Region.** Revised, 2004. This book is the classic text on tree identification in Michigan authored by two professors at UofM. It has drawings instead of photos, but the book has more complete information than the ID books with prettier photos. Cost: \$15
- 5. Michigan Forest Communities: A Field Guide and Reference.** 2004. This book, authored by Dr. Don Dickmann at MSU, describes 23 forest communities in Michigan. The book is available from MSU Extension for \$15, or a free pdf is at <http://web2.msue.msu.edu/bulletins/Bulletin/PDF/E3000.pdf>.
- 6. Positive Impact Forestry: A Sustainable Approach to Managing Woodlands.** 2004. This book is written by Thomas McEvoy, an Extension Professor at the University of Vermont. It is a great introduction to silviculture, the science and art of growing and managing forests. Cost: \$33
- 7. Managing Michigan's Wildlife: A Landowner's Guide.** 2001. This book, edited by two biologists for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, is the classic text in Michigan for landowners on wildlife habitat and managing forests for preferred game species. This book about wildlife habitat management is only available at www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/Landowners_Guide/index.htm.
- 8. Estate Planning for Forest Landowners: What Will Become of Your Timberland?** 2009. Nothing is more dreadful than death and taxes, but this book helps landowners prepare for both. To ease your pain, it is free at http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/gtr/gtr_srs112.pdf. See also www.timbertax.org for related resources about taxes related to owning forest land and harvesting timber.
- 9. Trees Are the Answer.** Revised, 2010. This book is written by Dr. Patrick Moore, one of the founders of Greenpeace. His perspective on forestry will appeal to both tree huggers and loggers. Cost: \$16
- 10. A Sand County Almanac.** 1949. This book by Aldo Leopold is one of the foundations for environmental ethics that continues to inform forest stewardship of both private and public lands. This book will help you to articulate your own ethical approach to managing your forest. Cost: \$10.
- 11. Last Child in the Woods.** 2008. This book by Richard Louv is a strong argument that our nation's children are suffering from "nature deficit disorder." This book will give you great ideas about how you can bring school groups, scout groups, church groups, or even your own children out into your forest to experience and enjoy nature. Cost: \$10.
- 12. The Forests of Michigan.** 2003. This book by two MSU forestry professors is an interesting history of Michigan's forests over the last few centuries. It is currently out of print and rather hard to find, but Don Dickmann and Larry Leefers are working on a revised edition to be out soon, hopefully by 2016.