

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
1994 Public Act 451, Section 52506 Report  
Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20**

The Department of Natural Resources (Department or DNR) is required to provide a report to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and the Legislature detailing the following:

**(a) The number of harvestable acres in the state forest, as determined from information in the state forest management plan under section 52503.**

Forest certification systems evaluate whether harvesting is being conducted in accordance with sustainable forestry principles that consider a broad range of environmental, social, and economic criteria. Forest certification systems do not determine the number of harvestable acres. The *2013 Regional State Forest Management Plans* (RSFMPs) for the northern Lower Peninsula, eastern Upper Peninsula, and western Upper Peninsula regions address the planning requirements of Part 525 and forest certification systems. The 2013 RSFMPs collectively plan an average of 61,000 acres prepared for annual harvest during fiscal years 2016-2025.

**(b) The number of acres of the state forest that were harvested and the number of cords of wood that were harvested from the state forest.**

There were 57,945 acres of state forest harvested in FY 2020, producing an estimated volume of 995,578 cords.

**(c) The number of acres of state-owned lands owned or controlled by the Department, other than state forest that were harvested, and the number of cords of wood that were harvested from those lands.**

On non-state forest lands owned or controlled by the Department, there were 1,730 acres harvested in FY 2020, producing an estimated volume of 44,082 cords.

**(d) Efforts by the Department to promote recreational opportunities in the state forest.**

Management of the state forest recreation and trails programs was moved from Forest Resources Division (FRD) to Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) beginning January 1, 2012. Through a 2018 Director's Order, state forest rail trails were designated as state recreation areas.

During FY 2020, the various trails programs in Michigan were promoted at local, regional, state, and national levels. However, the impact of COVID-19 resulted in the cancellation, postponement, or moving of many events to an online forum. This online access provided a different, and sometimes more accessible, option to participants both within the state of Michigan and beyond. The pandemic and resulting stay at home order also had a profound impact on trails use, with numbers increasing considerably and a substantial increase in first time users. Online tools were developed and marketed to specifically help people find recreation resources close to home. In addition, events such as The Trails Week Challenge took on a virtual format.

The Department continues to promote the Recreation Passport program and other trails-related information through the DNR website, statewide marketing campaigns, and social media. The social media presence established for Michigan's Iron Belle Trail has increased its followers and continues to send out targeted information on the trail. Travel Michigan and Pure Michigan both produced materials promoting trails in Michigan.

The Department website added interactive maps for equestrian trails and campsites and all state-managed non-motorized trails, adding to the interactive maps for the Iron Belle Trail, snowmobile, ORV, and linear trails already available. The Department also maintains and updates annually an inventory and map of all state forest roads open to ORV use in accordance with Public Act 288 of 2016. In addition, the Department is working to update and improve its Recreation Search web application, which provides a search tool and information for all recreation activities on state land. Information on trails and campsites on state forest land will undergo a comprehensive review in 2021. A winter recreation web page has been expanded to include activities such as fat-tire biking.

Press releases on camping and trails activities and recreation improvement projects on state lands were issued regularly throughout the year, including "Showcasing the DNR" features, as well as seasonal-themed news articles for state forest camping and trail recreation opportunities.

The Department continues to partner with state agencies and other units of government and non-profit organizations to promote and develop trails. The collaborators include the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, the Top of Michigan Trails Council, the National Park Service, the North Country National Scenic Trail, the North Country Trail Association, the USDA National Forest, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

The Michigan Trails Advisory Council (MTAC), a group established to advise the Governor and the Department on the creation, development, operation, and maintenance of motorized and non-motorized trails in accordance with the 2013 *Michigan Comprehensive Trail Plan* ([available here](#)), continues to discuss and make recommendations on trail-related issues. Several advisory groups meet regularly to advise the Department on trails. In February 2020, the DNR hosted the first joint annual meeting of all five trails advisory committees to share information and discuss common themes and shared issues. The *State Trails Implementation Plan*, which was approved by the Department Director at the January 2014 Natural Resource Commission meeting, lays out priority actions the Department and MTAC will take over five years to sustain Michigan's title as the Trail State. The 2013 Trails Plan is currently being updated with input from the public, advisory groups, all DNR Divisions, and stakeholders. An online survey conducted to provide input on the Trail Plan received over 3,800 responses. In September and October 2020, a series of virtual input meetings was held with DNR staff, partners, stakeholders and the public, reaching over 400 participants in total. The new plan is expected to be complete in 2021.

With the help of many partners, the Department's Wildlife Division (WLD) continues to manage Grouse Enhanced Management Systems (GEMS), walk-in access for ruffed grouse hunting areas across the northern Lower and Upper Peninsulas. The goals of this work are to provide unique hunting opportunities, promote hunter recruitment and retention, expand local economies, provide a destination for the traveling wing-shooter, and

accelerate timber harvest opportunities. The Department manages 19 GEMS, 6 in the northern Lower Peninsula and 13 in the Upper Peninsula. The Department continues to maintain and enhance the MiHUNT web application, which shows the four million acres of state forest land open to public hunting, along with habitat information useful to planning a hunting trip or other recreational activities.

The DNR Fisheries Division (FI) actively manages many lakes and streams located within the state forest system, providing wide-ranging recreational fishing opportunities. FI is responsible for stocking fish in many waters within state forests that enhance these opportunities. Fish habitat improvement projects are conducted within the state forests to optimize natural fish populations. Many dams overseen by FI are in state forests and are managed for sport fishing opportunities. Fisheries investments in annual dam maintenance activities ensure these facilities continue to provide recreational opportunities. Much of the campground use within the state forests is associated with, or generated by, water-related activities including fishing. FI also implements regulations on many waters within the state forest system that are complementary to the goals of the individual forests and optimize the fishing related opportunities within the forest.

**(e) Information on the public's utilization of the recreational opportunities offered by the state forest.**

A total of 287,086 ORV licenses and 231,788 trail permits were sold in FY 2020, a 15.1 percent increase in ORV licenses and a 17.8 percent increase in trail permits compared to FY 2019.

There were 133,714 snowmobile trail permits sold in FY 2020, a decrease of 4.1 percent compared to FY 2019.

State forest camping revenue increased from \$1.4 million in FY 2019 to nearly \$1.8 million in FY 2020. Revenue from Recreation Passport sales also increased in FY 2020, which by formula, increased revenue in the Forest Recreation Account from \$1.2 million in FY 2019 to \$1.3 million in FY 2020.

**(f) Efforts by the Department to promote wildlife habitat in the state forest.**

The RSFMPs for the northern Lower Peninsula and eastern and western Upper Peninsula provide direction to multi-divisional field staff for timber and wildlife habitat management of state forest lands. WLD works jointly with FRD to develop management prescriptions through the compartment review process to ensure wildlife habitat management goals in the RSFMPs are reflected in approved stand level treatments. In FY 2020, WLD participated in reviewing about 400,000 acres of state forest to determine wildlife management needs. Beyond vegetative management reviews, this acreage was considered for habitat improvement and habitat planning on sites with specific plant and animal concerns. This is accomplished via identified featured wildlife species that are used to help direct management and to ensure clarity in evaluations of management.

In addition, WLD conducted intensive wildlife habitat management in the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula in 2020. This included managing 1,546 acres to create or maintain forest openings, 621 acres of intensive grassland or savanna, and over 2,247

acres of intensive wetland habitat which provide critical habitat for wildlife. Over 760 mast-bearing shrubs and/or trees were planted on state land for wildlife food. Many of these trees were red and bur oak in areas affected by beech bark disease. Additionally, in the southern Lower Peninsula, over 300 new acres of forest management was conducted on State Game Area land.

**(g) The status of the plan and whether the Department recommends any changes in the plan.**

Operational implementation of the strategic *2008 State Forest Management Plan (SFMP)* is enabled through the RSFMPs. The SFMP was amended on October 9, 2014 to add aggregated data for projected acreages and expected treatments for cover types provided by the RSFMPs, as well as to update several categories of High Conservation Value Areas (including Ecological Reference Areas and Dedicated Habitat Areas). Monitoring of the first four years of RSFMP implementation, and further analysis of the model that was used, revealed over-estimated projected timber sale acreage. RSFMPs were written for a 10-year period (fiscal year 2016-2025) but work on a new plan began in 2018 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2021, utilizing industry-standard software and the most up-to-date forest inventory information. The new state forest management plan will replace the 2008 SFMP and the 2013 RSFMPs.

**(h) The status of certification efforts required in section 52505 and a definitive statement of whether the Department is maintaining certification of the entire state forest.**

The state forest system was originally awarded forest certification in December 2005 under the auspices of Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) and Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC). A full recertification audit was conducted by NSF-International (in partnership with SCS Global Services) from October 26 to 29, 2020, which resulted in the continued certification of the state forest under both certification systems.