

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources
1994 Public Act 451, Section 52506 Report
Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-21**

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 53,923 acres of state forest harvested in FY 2021, producing an estimated volume of 1,035,966 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 1,466 acres harvested in FY 2021, producing an estimated volume of 47,823 cords.

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

During FY 2021, the various trails programs in Michigan were promoted at local, regional, state, and national levels. The impact of COVID-19 continued to affect events and resulted in more limited outdoor events, masking and other restrictions, and moving of many meetings to an online forum. The continued online access provides a different, and sometimes more accessible, option to participants both within the state of Michigan and beyond. Trail numbers continued to increase over 2020 with sales of Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) and Snowmobile permits being up 3 to 10 percent in FY 2021.

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 Ride Right promotion and safety messaging has been a successful way to communicate to the snowmobiling public and the DNR is working on a campaign to expand this safety messaging into ORV and non-motorized trail use.

The Department continues to enhance its website with additional mapping and ways to easily access information on DNR parks, trails, campgrounds, and facilities. 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. In 2021, an AmeriCorps member spent the summer collecting data on 76 state forest campgrounds in the Upper Peninsula and promoting the campgrounds and trails through various methods such as blogs and media interviews. Information on trails and campsites on state forest land continues to undergo a comprehensive review and staff are making recommendations to better the state forest camping experience.

The updated DNR Trails Plan was approved by Director Eichinger in November 2021. This plan was developed with assistance from Public Sector Consultants and with full engagement of the DNR's trail advisory groups, clubs, stakeholders, and DNR divisions, and included a two-day summit with all the Michigan trail advisory groups to kick off the planning. There were also robust opportunities for the public to provide input into the plan to make it as relevant as possible. The Michigan Trails Advisory Council unanimously passed a resolution of support and were very appreciative of the process and the importance of the plan.

The Trails Plan examines the state-designated system comprehensively, which includes four seasons of motorized and nonmotorized trail opportunities on both land and water. The four main goals cover (1) sustainable maintenance and development; (2) funding; (3) planning and collaboration; and (4) marketing, promotion and education to lead to outcomes of quality trail experiences and resource management, public stewardship, and community and economic prosperity.

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, along with its subcommittees continues to discuss and make recommendations on trail related issues. Several sub-advisory groups meet regularly to advise the Department on trails.

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. When appropriate, FI invests in annual dam maintenance activities to 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 313,362 ORV licenses and 261,168 trail permits were sold in FY 2021, a 9.2 percent increase in ORV licenses and a 10 percent increase in trail permits compared to FY 2020.

There were 138,516 snowmobile trail permits sold in FY 2021, an increase of 3.6 percent compared to FY 2020.

Nearly \$2 million in state forest camping revenue was collected during FY 2021, an increase of 11 percent over FY 2020. Revenue from Recreation Passport sales increased in FY 2021, which by formula increased revenue in the Forest Recreation Account from \$1.3 million in FY 2020 to \$1.6 million in FY 2021.

(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 the DNR Forest Resources Division 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 2021, WLD participated in reviewing roughly 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 2021. This included managing 4,674 acres to create or maintain forest openings, 623 acres of intensive grassland or savanna, and over 2,615 acres of intensive wetland habitat which provide critical habitat for wildlife. Over 453 mast-bearing shrubs and/or trees were planted on state land for wildlife food. Trees and shrubs planted included red oak saplings, hawthorn, highbush cranberry, and red osier dogwood. Additionally, in the southern Lower Peninsula, over 1,300 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 in early 2023, 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) on October 19-21, 2021, which resulted in the continued certification of the state forest under both certification systems.