

# STATE FOREST SYSTEM

## General Background

At four million acres, Michigan's dedicated state forest system is one of the largest in the nation. Through the Forest Resources Division (FRD), the DNR manages these forests for timber production, wildlife habitat, mineral development, and recreation. The FRD completed a strategic plan, which is intended to guide management activities and decision making relative to state forest resources. A revision is underway for the strategic plan and will be published in the spring of 2019.

A copy of the current plan is available on the DNR website and can be accessed via the following link:

[https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/FRD\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_513006\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/FRD_Strategic_Plan_513006_7.pdf).

The three Regional State Forest Management Plans, available at the following link:

<http://www.michigan.gov/regionalforestplans>, project an average of 61,000 acres per year will be prepared for timber sale over the next seven years. Approximately 900,000 cords are harvested per year, generating over \$40 million in revenue annually to the State of Michigan. Access to both state and private timber resources is important to the state's economy. Michigan's state forests provide a consistent supply of wood to help support and maintain a diverse forest products industry. The forest products industry contributes over \$20 billion annually to Michigan's economy, a level reached two years ahead of the goal set at the Governor's 2013 Forest Products Summit. State forests provide more than 20 percent of the raw material used by the forest products industry.

Timber harvest also produces important wildlife habitat, which benefits hunting and other outdoor recreational activity. Hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts support wildlife habitat management enhancement through license fees, and have a significant impact on local economies, contributing over \$2.3 billion. Access to natural resources, including wood products and wildlife species, directly supports quality of life and Michigan's economy.

The FRD is also responsible for protection from wildfire and for wildfire suppression on nearly 20 million acres of public and private land. Road access for motorized firefighting equipment is important for the protection of life, property, and natural resources. Forest Resources Division also takes the lead in conducting prescribed burns on DNR-managed land, and last year completed 75 burns on 5,937 acres. These burns benefited wildlife habitat, assisted in the control of invasive species, and reduced woody material in preparation for planting trees.

Management of the state forest system includes responsibility for significant infrastructure such as forest roads, bridges, staff offices, connectivity, garages, and storage facilities. Due to limited funding, much of the infrastructure is in dire need of maintenance, repair, or enhancement.

## Facilities Inventory/Assessment

The DNR manages many forestry-related buildings that are used to house staff, as well as provide access to the public for information, permits, and timber sale contracts. A DNR-wide initiative was completed in 2013 that collected in-depth information on buildings, and the facility inventory was updated in spring 2016 with the assessment of all FRD structures. The collection of this data allows the DNR to make informed decisions for providing safe and functional facilities for staff and the visiting public.

Based on available funding, critical repairs are made annually to ensure employee and public safety, as well as to limit further structural decline. Due to limited funding, some repairs and routine maintenance has been deferred and this will eventually lead to increased costs. The largest facilities issues have been identified and a five year plan has been developed to address them.

### **Roads and Bridges Inventory/Assessment**

There are roughly 13,000 miles of DNR state forest roads that require administration and maintenance. The FRD Strategic Plan identified the need for a better inventory of the state forest road system under FRD jurisdiction. Public Act 288 of 2016 mandated a classification system and road inventory be completed by the end of 2017 for Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) roads and by the end of 2018 for Upper Peninsula (UP) and southern Lower Peninsula (SLP) roads. Approximately 7,600 miles of state forest roads were identified in the 2017 inventory in the NLP. A comprehensive assessment of associated infrastructure, such as bridges and culverts, will be done for those roads in the NLP in the coming year. In 2018, UP and SLP roads were inventoried totaling 5,600 miles.

The thousands of miles of forest roads located on state forest land are used not only to provide access for timber harvest and wildlife habitat improvement, but also for mining, fire suppression, water access, recreational uses, emergency services, and local traffic. Adverse issues with roads and bridges, particularly environmental issues such as sedimentation or run-off, are reported and placed in a Resource Damage Report (RDR) database. These repairs include road and bridge work, as well as recreational trail maintenance projects.

Presently, FRD is responsible for over 200 bridges, many of which are located on recreational trails managed by DNR Parks & Recreation Division (PRD). Approximately 21 percent of these bridges have been inventoried to date, with the condition documented by consulting engineers. There are thousands of culverts on the road system, many of which are in need of upgrading or replacement in order to ensure good passage of fish, to prevent sedimentation from entering streams, and to maintain the integrity of the road.

### **Priorities**

Where possible, FRD seeks to consolidate space with staff from other DNR divisions and other state agencies. Major repairs and renovations of field offices throughout the state are priorities in order to provide a safe working environment to support the DNR's mission. Having adequate structures in place protects employees, lengthens the lifespan of equipment, and provides for public safety. FRD currently has over \$1.5 million of repair needs documented. This figure does not include a new building at Newberry which would consolidate staff and office locations, and replace other deteriorated and out-of-date facilities and/or leases.

Other priorities include providing access to state forests and road infrastructure that is safe and appropriate. Most of the state forest roads and their infrastructure (bridges and culverts) are in need of some type of repair or replacement. However, due to limited funding, the priority has been to address public safety issues and situations where major environmental damage is occurring. Examples include a road washing out or a bridge becoming inadequate for the intended transportation needs. Providing right-sized structures and adequately maintaining roads helps limit the amount of sediment entering waterways, which is significant for fisheries habitat. It also provides access for logging and mining

operations, especially where bridges are needed. Ongoing maintenance and repair of state forest roads and bridges is important for meeting forest certification standards. Forest certification strengthens Michigan's forest products sector and is essential for primary wood producers in Michigan to have continued access to national and international markets. There are currently 455 reported instances of erosion issues and/or inadequate road infrastructure with an estimated repair cost of almost \$7 million.

Maintaining the transportation and infrastructure systems in the state forest provides improved and easier access for firefighters, hunters, anglers, campers, and trail users. It conserves resources and provides habitat for various fish and wildlife species. It also provides access to wildlife populations and fosters increased participation in hunting, fishing, camping, and other recreational opportunities. Improved access to revenue generating natural resources also supports natural resource management and extraction activities (e.g., harvest of timber, extraction of oil and gas), which provide a critical boost to the state's economy. An important step in maintaining this transportation system is the creation of a thorough inventory of culverts and bridges and identification of location, condition, and priority for replacing unsafe or deteriorated infrastructure. Professional engineering services are required to adequately appraise the condition of many bridges and critical culvert locations. With adequate funding, this effort can be completed within two years.

The purchase and use of temporary bridges and crane mats (which facilitate passage across wet areas) has proved invaluable for accessing state forests for timber harvesting, reforestation, wildlife habitat management, and environmental protection. They also provide a temporary solution for access until a permanent structure can be built for roads that have had longtime access to public land. Both portable bridges and mats are in great demand and more may need to be acquired as need outpaces the supply.

Securing funding for capital investment is a top priority. A significant issue impacting capital outlay for state forest land is the limited availability of funding. The Forest Development Fund (FDF), which is comprised of timber harvest revenue, is the primary source of funding for most state forest activities, including wildfire suppression and timber management. Access to state forest lands is critical for these functions as well as for providing access for recreation and mineral extraction. In FY 2016, 2017 and 2018, timber revenue was above average which allowed the FDF fund balance to increase. This growth provides an opportunity to fund priority capital outlay projects.