



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
FOREST, MINERAL AND FIRE MANAGEMENT DIVISION

## OLD GROWTH AND BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP FACT SHEET FOR MICHIGAN

### What is old growth?

The term "old growth" describes an ecological condition where forest vegetation is dominated by trees in the mature stages of their life cycle. Although this may evoke an image of huge redwood trees with ferns dominating a shady forest floor, Michigan's forests do not fit that picture. This state's forest landscape is dramatically different in species, topography, and human use when compared to that of the Western U.S., where the most publicized old growth issues have taken place.

The key difference between "eastern" and "western" old growth is that old growth efforts in the west gravitate toward *preservation* of forest ecosystems, while eastern old growth efforts typically revolve around restoration of forested ecosystems. These ecosystems include ecologically important openings that are not forested, early successional stands and extensive areas of catastrophic or frequent disturbance (e.g., windthrow). Given the importance of these ecological land form variations, the term "old growth" is not entirely accurate. Old growth/bio-diversity stewardship (OG/BS) is the term that is being used to reflect the broad values of these forested ecosystems.

Working definition: Old growth forests are those that approximate the structure, composition, and functions of native forests. These native conditions generally include more large trees, canopy layers, native species, and dead organic material.

### A brief history of OG/BS.

Maintaining a healthy diversity of ecosystems, species, and genetic material is an important aspect of good resource management. Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) policies have drawn attention to biodiversity issues since the early 1980s. The Statewide Forest Resources Plan (SFRP, 1983) stated, "On public lands, the development of specific forest management plans will incorporate a sensitivity to protecting those natural values found within the forest boundaries...."

Ten years later, the State of Michigan passed the Biological Diversity Conservation Act (now Part 355, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, P.A. Act 451 of 1994, as amended), stating that "...it is the goal of this state to encourage the lasting conservation of biological diversity." Similarly, when the MDNR revisited

the Statewide Forest Resources Plan in the early 90s, an addendum to the plan served as official department guidance for managing, allocating and/or delineating old growth on state forest lands.

Michigan's three national forests, Hiawatha, Ottawa, and Huron-Manistee, have planning processes that address old growth and biodiversity. Recently, the Huron-Manistee identified and designated 173,000 acres of forest lands with old growth characteristics.

Other states have undertaken efforts to review or explore strategies for conserving biodiversity within their borders. Michigan, however, is one of the first states to formally develop a plan that specifically addresses native old growth forest condition and biodiversity restoration on state-owned forest lands and other state owned lands (such as state park and recreation areas).

### Basic Michigan criteria for OG/BS designation.

To effectively identify sites that could be considered old growth and contribute to biological diversity, a working group consisting of foresters, biologists, ecologists and planners from the MDNR, the Nature Conservancy, Huron-Manistee National Forest, and Michigan Natural Features Inventory compiled a set of design criteria that guide decisions on whether a site should potentially be part of the OG/BS system:

1. Is it representative of an important ecological type?
2. Does it connect or link two other blocks of old growth?
3. How large is the area?
4. What is the distribution of this ecological type across the state?
5. Is the ecological type common across the state?
6. Does the site contain scarce or special species, communities, or cover types?
7. How old is the forest stand?
8. What sort of landscapes surround the site?

In some cases, the early stages of restoring old growth may be achieved and/or enhanced by limited stand manipulation. For example, red pine plantations can be actively managed with the objective of creating a stand that has characteristics of native red pine stands.

### Public involvement is the key.

Coordination and cooperation among all involved will be

necessary to determine an outcome which best meets the needs of the land, ecosystems, and variety of demands made by Michigan's citizenry.

#### OG/BS planning process.

At the current stage in the planning process, there are two important phases: Design and Criteria, and Resource Selection (see Figure 1). Throughout this process there are opportunities for public involvement.

#### Design and criteria.

The Design and Criteria phase is intended to review, modify, and finalize criteria and guidelines for old growth and biological diversity stewardship for state-owned forest lands.

Organizations that have expressed an interest in the OG/BS process have been invited to participate in a Public Advisory Team (PAT). The PAT will review the working group's draft criteria and guidelines, and provide input, comments and other recommendations. At the same time, DNR will solicit comments from groups and individuals. At the end of the design phase the criteria and land use guidance elements should be finalized and ready to be applied to resource selection.

#### Resource selection.

In the selection phase, local design teams in the DNR working directly with the public in their area will apply the criteria and guidelines to identify, select and recommend specific parcels of forest land that have OG/BS potential. After the local design teams have compiled their lists of recommended sites, the DNR will solicit public comments on the OG/BS system identified on state forest land. From this, the recommended OG/BS system will be presented to the Natural Resource Commission.

#### Frequently asked questions.

##### **How long will this process take?**

The OG/BS Design and criteria Resource Selection phases are expected to take at least two years (see Figure 1).

Old growth and biodiversity stewardship is a stellar example of the complexity of public land management. It includes public participation, diverse scientific disciplines and short and long-term goals and objectives for the myriad biological, social and economic values and benefits natural resource ecosystems provide for current and future generations.

##### **Will areas that are designated OG/BS exclude all human influences on that land?**

Recreational opportunities, particularly trails, primitive camping, hunting and fishing are not necessarily excluded from the OG/BS system. There will also be times where active management may be necessary, particularly if exotic invasive species or serious forest pest/disease problems occur. Additionally, protection from wildfire will be necessary if that fire threatens private homes or property.

##### **We already have public lands that have been designated as wilderness areas. Why do we need OG/BS lands also?**

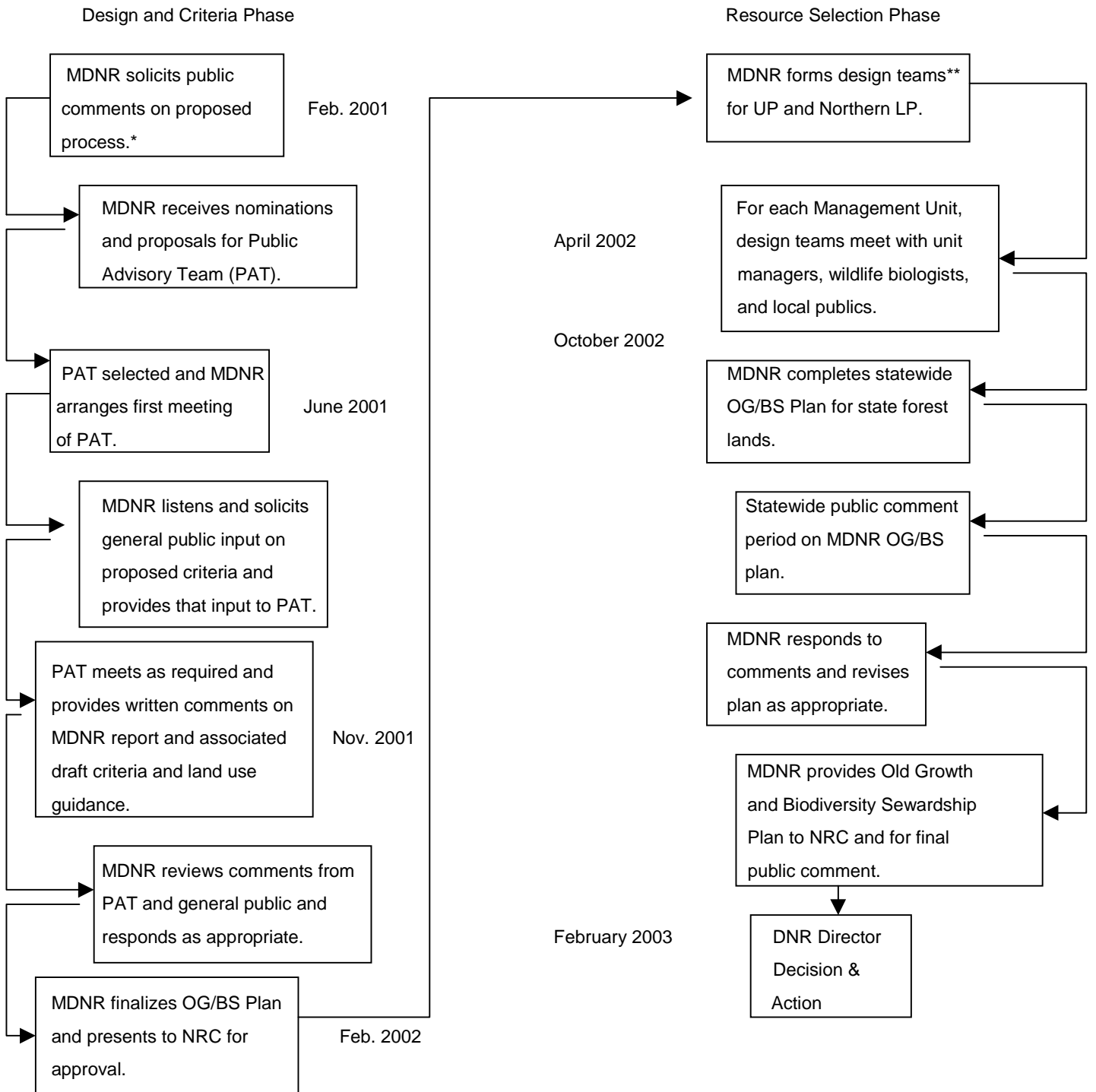
The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as "...in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Although OG/BS lands may be primarily shaped by natural processes, they will be selected to represent a particular ecological type that is important to Michigan. Wilderness Areas may not provide all the old growth or biodiversity attributes desired.

##### **Will private landowners with property that neighbors state OG/BS networks be required to manage their lands the same way?**

Selection of OG/BS parcels will take into consideration the entire landscape. Management of the OG/BS designated lands will only apply to state property. Neighboring private landowners will remain apprised of any management activities so they may manage their lands in a similar manner if they choose.

##### **Does Michigan have OG/BS lands at this time?**

The U.S. Forest Service estimates there are between 60,000 and 70,000 acres of true, native "old growth" within Michigan's 19.3 million acres of forested land. Most of this acreage is located in the Upper Peninsula, including Porcupine Mountains State Park, the McCormick and Sylvania Wilderness Areas of the Ottawa National Forest, and the privately-owned Huron Mountain Club. The national forests are designating additional acreage on federally managed lands. State land managers have also identified some potential OG/BS areas on state forest land that will be considered using the approved OG/BS process.



\*Resource Management Deputy also initiates discussion with Michigan's three National Forests to develop a shared concept for Old Growth.

\*\*Design teams: forest management planners, wildlife biologists, state park interpreters, by region.

**Figure 1. A diagram of the public input process for old growth/biodiversity stewardship.**

This public input process diagram was taken from Appendix 1 of the February 8, 2001 version of the "Proposed Old Growth and Biodiversity Stewardship Planning Process and Draft Criteria for Michigan's State Forests and Other State Owned Lands" summary report. The final item in blue was added for clarification on 10/11/01. The suggested timeline was laid out in 2000 but may be revised to afford appropriate conduct of each step

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Printed By Authority of: The Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Total Number Of Copies Printed:

Total Cost: \$

Cost Per Copy:\$

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