

A Forest Stewardship Story About Property Taxes



Randy, Rick and Kim Heuvelan harvesting bigtooth aspen for wildlife habitat improvement.

Rick and Kim Heuvelman, along with Rick's brother Randy, together own a 160 acre forest in Newaygo County. They bought 80 acres eleven years ago and added another 80 acres three years ago. And while they have been actively managing their land on their own, this year they decided that they needed some professional help. The Heuvelmans were interested in the Qualified Forest program to help lower their property taxes, and they knew that they needed a forest management plan to enroll. Rick says, "The reduced property taxes are nice, but we really want to be able to pass on a healthy forest to our children and grandchildren. Wood is a renewable resource and I want to manage it well, even if I don't see all of the results in my lifetime."

Rick contacted Jack Boss, a wildlife biologist at Ecosystems Management LLC near Grand Rapids. Jack is one of about 120 Plan Writers in the Michigan Forest Stewardship Program who have been trained and certified by the DNR. Jack recommended a Forest Stewardship Plan to Rick because the plan is simple yet comprehensive, and the Program also offers a partial cost share to lower the total cost. Most plan writers in the Forest Stewardship Program are professional foresters, but Rick enjoyed working with a wildlife biologist because wildlife viewing and hunting are important reasons for owning their land. Rick reports, "We figured the best way to ensure a healthy forest is to have a plan written by a professional."

Jack came out to their property and did an assessment of the forest. When Jack had a draft of the plan ready, he sent it to Rick, Kim, and Randy for their review. They asked lots of questions, and were pleased with the interactive planning process. Jack then sent the plan to a DNR Service Forester who reviewed and quickly approved the plan for meeting the Forest Stewardship Program standards. Rick said, "I enjoyed learning new things about my forest – the plan even mentioned frogs and huckleberries. Having a Forest Stewardship Plan has given me confidence that my forest management, based on professional advice, will achieve my goals for sustainable forestry and better wildlife habitat."

In 2014, the Michigan Forest Stewardship Program helped 265 landowners like the Heuvelmans develop Forest Stewardship Plans covering almost 57,000 acres around the state. Call the DNR Forest Stewardship Coordinator at 517-284-5884 or explore www.michigan.gov/foreststewardship to find a professional forester or wildlife biologist near you who can help you manage, protect and *enjoy* your forest.