

COMMUNITY FOREST CONFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

FOR THE

BAYFIELD WISCONSIN COUNTY FOREST

2/28/05

Ownership/Management Structure and Governance:

History:

The Wisconsin Legislature passed the Forest Crop Law in 1927 authorizing counties to create county forests from tax delinquent lands. In 1929 the Legislature passed legislation that specifically exempted counties from having to pay the “acreage share fee” that private landowners had to pay. In 1931 legislation was passed providing county forests a payment of 10 cents an acre annually for all acres in County Forests, which was required to be used solely for the development of the forests. In return for this aid counties were required to pay a 75 percent severance tax to the state from forest products cut from their forests.

The Legislature reduced the severance tax to 50 percent in 1937 and again to 20 percent in 1963. The 1963 legislation also established a permanent county forest program and each county forest had a designated forest boundary. There are private lands within the boundary of each County Forest but the lands the counties acquired for their Forests are owned by the Counties.

The first forest was established in Langlade County in 1928. Forests have continued to be established since that time and today there are 29 containing approximately 2.35 million acres.

The Bayfield County Forest was established on April 25, 1932 from 124,711 acres of tax delinquent lands. Lands continued to be added to the Forest mostly by adding tax delinquent lands for many years, but as land values increased additions changed to land purchases. Currently the Forest contains about 168,000 acres.

Management:

All County Forests are managed for multiple uses such as timber, water, soil, wildlife, fish, and recreation under 10 Year Forest Management Plans. County employees do the basic management with oversight by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). WDNR oversight includes reviewing and approving 10-year management plans, and reviewing a cross section of timber sales, reforestation projects, and thinning projects for compliance with the 10-year plans. The WDNR has a Liaison Forester

assigned to each Forest for this purpose and also to help implement each years work program.

Bayfield County staffs its Forest with a professional forester Forest Administrator, 4 professional staff foresters, a technician, and an office manager. Our County recreation program consists of several small campgrounds and boat launches and a significant snowmobile and ATV trail program which are managed by our Tourism Department. In most Wisconsin Counties with Forests, recreation programs are managed by the Forestry Departments.

Our foresters do all of the professional forest work. The technician does a wide variety of project works such as site preparation, tree planting and seeding, road maintenance, reconstruction, and repair, brushing, habitat improvements, etc. The office manager takes care of all of the office needs from typing, to keeping accounts for all timber sales, filing, budget tracking, receptionist, and about anything that someone needs help with.

The foresters individually make decisions for almost all of their projects. In complex situations they team up to review and discuss the situation and arrive at a team decision.

The Administrator reviews staff outputs to assure they are high quality professional products. A very large part of his reviews are in the field. He is responsible for the budget and he involves all of the staff in its preparation. He delegates work assignments to assure that the foresters and the technician get a variety of experience and makes them do presentations of their work to the County Forestry Committee as well as to interested publics. The Administrator is in the middle of developing the new 10-Year Forest Management Plan. He is doing some of the preparation and writing but has delegated major sections to his staff to develop. He is also in the middle of getting the Forest certified by SFI and has he the staff involved with that process.

A County Board of Supervisors Forestry Committee comprised of 5 Board members oversees the Forestry Program. Their role is to develop policy, do oversight to assure that the program is functioning properly, to approve the semiannual timber sale programs, to make final decisions on proposed land acquisitions, to make decisions on special items such as to go or not go for Forest Certification, and to annually evaluate the performance of the Administrator. The Forestry Committee does not get involved in the routine management of the Department.

The Local Political Framework:

As noted above the WDNR has an oversight role for County Forest programs. A 13 Member County Board of Supervisors runs county government in our County. Other counties in Wisconsin for the most part have larger Boards than our County. Our Board is then divided into a variety of Committees, such as the Forestry Committee, that deal with the routine policy development and oversight of the various County Departments. Some examples of other Departments we have are Human Services, Health, Planning and Zoning, Veterans Services and Highway.

The County does the emergency dispatch for all units of government in the County so we have many ongoing daily contacts. Wisconsin has a layer of government below the county level called Town Government. Towns are like mini counties. We have 25 Towns in our County. Their responsibilities by law are to take care of the Town road systems and to provide Fire and Ambulance Services. All of them have Town Halls and hold monthly public meetings. Each Town is different in the services they provide in addition to the 3 required by law. Some have recreational facilities, some have libraries, some have museums, etc.

Ten percent of the revenues from the County Forest go to Towns containing County Forest lands.

Our County includes the Red Cliff Tribe and we have a Tribal/County Committee that meets monthly to coordinate items that need to be shared in some way. It has proved to be a very good way to maintain a good flow of information between County government and the Red Cliff Tribe.

At one time the Wisconsin Tribes in the ceded territories claimed all of the timber harvested within the ceded territories on public lands. Most of the Counties Forest lands are in the ceded territories. As a result of their claims a Wisconsin Counties Forests Association (WCFA) was formed to challenge their claim. The claim was challenged in Federal Court and the counties won. The WCFA has continued and today provides quality leadership and counsel to all its 29 members. Each of the 29 counties pays a combination of a fixed fee plus an acreage fee to fund the WCFA. An Executive Director, who has one part time secretary, manages the WCFA.

Acquisition:

As noted above, acquisition of the County Forests came mostly from tax delinquent lands. Currently most newly acquired lands are purchased.

The reasons that there was an interest in establishing County Forests in the 1920s was first, that most of the best timber lands had been logged and left. There were many forest fires, some lands burning several times. The second was many people tried to farm land that was not capable of producing good crops and they failed and abandon the land. The combination of these 2 things left major acreage's of tax delinquent land. The legislature had hopes that these lands could have good forests rebuilt on them.

Long-Term Management:

The long-term goal of the Bayfield County Forest program is to produce a sustainable supply of multiple forest uses for the benefit of Bayfield County residents and visitors to our County. These are described in our 10 Forest Management Plan.

The County Forestry staff, the County Forestry Committee, by the entire County Board, and by the WDNR all monitor the Forest program in various ways. The most intensive monitoring is by the staff.

Monitoring improves as the science of forestry improves, as our planning and execution improves, and currently as we get into certification which requires additional monitoring by us, as we work on the Forest, and by the SFI certifying organization at specified times to maintain our certified status.

Community:

Community for us includes the residents of Bayfield County and all of the people that come from a wide variety of places to use and enjoy the Forest now and into the future.

We have not experienced any significant problems in maintaining a positive community attitude about the Forest. One of the reasons is the Forest has produced well for the public. Another reason is that the legislature made it very difficult to remove lands from County Forests.

One of the benefits has been revenue primarily from timber sales. In 2004 we sold over 2.4 million dollars of timber. Our Forestry Department staff costs are about 450,000 dollars annually and with other funds we receive for wildlife projects maintaining roads, etc. and funds we take from receipts for special projects we spend a total of about 600,000 dollars annually. This makes our Forest a very positive County asset.

In addition the Forest provides a wide variety of recreation experience opportunities such as ATV trails, snowmobile trails, horseback/hiking trails, bike trails, 168,000 acres available to hunters for a many species of game, trapping, fishing, photo opportunities, wildlife viewing, etc. These activities draw thousands of people to the Forest each year.

Lessons Learned:

Here are some things we have learned as well as some things those who preceded us learned and passed on to us:

- Use professionals to accomplish a profession forest management. People without any professional training originally managed most of the County Forests. They did a lot of good work but also they made avoidable mistakes because they did not have training in soils, hydrology, insects and disease, wildlife, silviculture, etc. Today our Forest and the others in Wisconsin all have professional management.
- Have a good Forest Management Plan and follow it. Whenever you find a flaw or a better way amend the Plan to keep it on the cutting edge.
- Have a good timber sale contract and administer it uniformly as its written.

- Lay out sales in a professional manner. This means that the silviculture is correct for the stands being harvested. That the logging access(es) and landing(s) are determined and designated as part of the sale layout. That marking or unit boundaries are clearly designated. That the cruising is quality. That the contract includes all the clauses needed to fully meet the objectives of the sale. That the sale map is accurate and completely shows the sale requirements that need to be on a map.
- Have a good monitoring program so you know the effects of your land management actions on the resources.
- Know your publics and users and keep them involved and informed, e.g., before you begin revising your Forest Plan ask them to give you their inputs. Don't write a draft and then ask for comments. You'll be perceived as having already made up your mind.
- Pay close attention to ensuring that you are always considering all of the multiple uses that your project may/will affect and how you can do the best job of balancing/enhancing them.
- Learn how to make the media your ally. Involving them, especially shoulder-to-shoulder on-the-ground and frequently, when there isn't a significant situation facing your Department that forces you to talk to them, will make them better educated and helpful to you in most cases.
- Always look around you to see how others are doing things. There are a lot of smart people in the country/world. Using good things that others have learned will make you better too.