

Managing Private Forests on a Landscape Level

A multi-agency effort to manage private forest lands on a watershed scale for multiple public and private benefits.



Purpose

This document outlines the major steps that partners are taking to proactively increase the strategic delivery of services to help private forest landowners manage their land while also protecting water resources.

Issue

Forested landscape are a mix of private, tribal, and public land. Managing private forest lands is complicated by the large number of owners and of the multiple entities that provide service to private landowners. Additionally, private forest lands have the greatest risk of conversion to non-forest uses, especially lands that are not actively managed.

Goal

Significantly increase the protection and management of private forest lands that help protect water quality and provide a range of benefits by:

- Helping landowners get a Woodland Stewardship Plan to enroll in the Sustainable Forest Incentive Act.
- Enrolling private forest lands into conservation easement programs.
- Purchasing land for public use.

Importance of Private Forests

Nearly 191,000 private woodland owners in Minnesota collectively own more than 6 million acres (about one-third) of the state's total forest land. These are individuals, families, cooperatives, or small businesses who own woods for a wide range of reasons.

Private woodlands provide important benefits such as clean air and water, scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, hunting, angling, birdwatching, and the raw materials to make paper and other wood products. Minnesota's landowners help enhance these benefits for themselves and others through active involvement in caring for the health of their woods. Having a Woodland Stewardship Plan is an important step in helping private landowners actively manage their forests. Roughly 6,940 individual plans that are less than 10 years old have been written for 964,000 acres, or 16 percent of private forest lands.

As natural water filters, forests play important roles in keeping water clean. Trees and leaves slow the movement of rain to the ground. This slower-moving rain picks up less sediment when it hits the soil. Additionally, forest soils contain large pore spaces that trap sediment and pollutants. As a result, rainwater that leaves a forest to recharge groundwater or flows into lakes and rivers is clean. Keeping forests on the landscape is one of the best ways to protect drinking water. Forests along shorelines are particularly important, as they serve as the last barrier to filter contaminated runoff before it reaches a lake or river.

Landscape Stewardship Plans

A landscape stewardship plan (LSP) is a multi-landowner Forest Stewardship Plan written to address landscape-level issues across all ownerships. LSPs are used to develop local, comprehensive watershed management plans. Plans are based on:

- Investing in priority areas.
- Building a collaborative network of service providers that effectively work together to serve more landowners.
- Appealing to interests of both landowners and service providers.
- Managing for results.
- Encouraging flexibility when working with private landowners since every situation is unique.

Comprehensive Local Water Plans: One Watershed, One Plan

Plans created through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program are called comprehensive watershed management plans that address:

- Protecting, restoring, and improving surface water and groundwater quality.
- Protecting, restoring, and improving places where surface water and groundwater is stored and retained.
- Minimizing public spending to correct flooding and water quality problems.
- Enhancing, restoring, and establishing wetlands.
- Identifying priority areas for riparian zone management and buffer development.
- Protecting and enhancing habitat of fish and wildlife habitat and water recreational facilities.

Prioritize-Target-Measure Approach

Priority Watersheds

Recognizing that not all resources and issues can be addressed at the same time is essential to managing watersheds. Prioritizing down to the minor watershed is critical to the success of the landscape level plan approach. This allows private landowners to relate to and not feel threatened by the plan.

Targeted Parcels

Actions are targeted to specific areas and issues within the priority watershed, down to the parcel level within minor watersheds. This is done to target landowners whose woods will provide the most benefits.

Measure Success of Landowner Decisions

Monitoring happens when a landowner decides what actions they want to take—such as selling their land, enrolling into a conservation easement program, or enrolling into the Sustainable Forest Incentive Act—to measure progress toward management goals.

Results

Through Landscape Stewardship Plans and the Minnesota Forest Action Plan, the state's plan that guides the use of federal funds for forest management, the DNR and partners are working together to address the following national priorities:

- Conserve working forest land: Conserving and managing working forest landscapes for multiple values and uses.
- Protect forests from harm: Protect forests from threats, including catastrophic storms, flooding, insect and disease outbreaks, and invasive species.
- Enhance public benefits from trees and forests: Including air and water quality, soil conservation, biological diversity, carbon storage, and forest products, forestry related jobs, production of renewable energy, and wildlife.



Primary components of Private Forestry Management on a landscape level

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources • Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources • United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service

Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts • Soil & Water Conservation Districts Forestry Association • United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service • Consulting Foresters

Partners and Primary Roles

Landowners

Landowners are the recipients of outreach and education services. They act as final decision makers, funders, and implementers for projects to manage Minnesota's private forests.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Forestry Division (DNR Forestry)

DNR Forestry takes a leading role on education and outreach to private woodland owners. They provide program administration and funding for Woodland Stewardship Plans, DNR Private Forest Management cost-share program, Sustainable Forest Incentive Act and 2c Managed Forest Land incentives programs, and Forests for the Future and Forest Legacy conservation easement programs.

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)

BWSR takes a leading role on program administration for the state cost-share program, One Watershed, One Plan, and funds Reinvest in Minnesota easements for private forestry management purposes.

Local Government Units (LGUS): Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and Counties

LGUs take a leading role on implementing state and federal cost share practices, project coordination and implementation, website maintenance, and program administration for 2c Managed Forest Land and Green Acres incentive programs and Reinvests in Minnesota conservation easement program.

Consulting Foresters

Consulting foresters play a lead role in writing Woodland Stewardship Plans and helping private woodland owners with timber harvests and woodland management efforts.

United States Forest Service (USFS)

USFS plays a supporting role by providing program guidance and funding for the Forest Legacy and Cooperative Forest Management programs.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS takes a leading role on Conservation Activity Plans and provides program administration and funding for Environmental Quality Incentives, Conservation Stewardship, and Healthy Forests Reserve programs.

Local Forestry Technical Teams

A group of professionals (DNR, SWCD, Consulting Foresters, BWSR, etc.) who work collaboratively to implement Landscape Stewardship Plans and watershed management plans (through 1W1P) by engaging private forest landowners in forest management.

Private Forest Landowner Implementation Toolbox

