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Please consider
sharing your
experiences and
interesting
observations with us
for the newsletter.

Partners News

February 2016

WELCOME NEW PIF MEMBER(S)

STEVE DEBAKER

Inside this issue:

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FUTURE ARTICLES

Future stories we are working on and hoping to share with you soon:

- *Roy D' Antonio of Associated Title on the things to look for in title issues when buying or selling a real estate holding*
- *Dustin Bronson on woody biomass.*
- *Toward spring, learn about the forest fire two years ago in NW Wisconsin*
- *Watch for periodic updates from Dick Steffes on issues relevant to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Stewardship Fund*
- *Information on the Managed Forest Lu, pros and cons and what DNR Foresters can and cannot do for the landowner*

If you have questions that you would like to see addressed in the newsletter, suggestions for, or have articles for, future newsletters, please contact us at partnersinforesstry@gmail.com or by mail:

Partners In Forestry
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INTERVIEW WITH:

JANE SEVERT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WISCONSIN COUNTY FOREST ASSOCIATION

Margo and Joe spent time in a casual conversation and interview session with Wisconsin County Forest Association Executive Director Jane Severt. We are very pleased to present this conversation through Partners News. Jane has an incredible passion for her job, and it is always a pleasure to discuss forestry and especially the County Forests with her.

PIF: Please tell us some of your background. I have been very impressed with your ability to convey important messages and have been curious as to your past experiences:

I was born and raised in Lincoln County. My father was Forest Administrator on the Lincoln County Forest as I was growing up, so I had deep ties to the county forest. I did not go to forestry school until my son was ready to leave home for college, and I then enrolled at UW Stevens Point to pursue a forestry degree. At Point I worked for the Dean's office, for professors as a laboratory assistant, as a peer advisor, and as a tutor with the university's Tutor Learning Center. During school I had valuable internships with Wisconsin Valley Improvement and the Ashland County Forestry Department. My first full-time forestry position was with Lumberjack RC&D, where I served as supervisor of the Wisconsin's Forest Inventory & Analysis Program. But my heart was truly in the County Forests, and when a position opened up in the Ashland County Forest I jumped at it. After working as county forester, and upon the resignation of Fritz Schubert, I was appointed Forest Administrator in Ashland County. After a couple of years the Administrator position opened in Lincoln County, so taking that job brought me back home. I had served 3 terms on the Lincoln County Board, prior to my forestry career and having grown up in Lincoln County, and the opportunity to take the position my father served in for 35 years was very gratifying. My father was a true conservationist and never forgot who he worked for; the taxpayers of Lincoln County. He was a great custodian of the county forest.

In 2007 the opportunity arose for my current position as executive director of the Wisconsin County Forests Association. I truly understand and appreciate the values of Wisconsin's County Forests so this position was appealing, and afforded the ability to stay close to home, my office is now near Rhinelander. My job entails promotion of the County Forests, I try to elevate the recognition of the program, stress the advantages of the local control and often give presentations to county boards about the value of their own forest. We also coordinate promotion of the County Forests to the general public, as we did with the Discover Wisconsin episode.

PIF: What is the Wisconsin County Forest Association?

Joe Swantes and I wrote an article called the Evolution of County Forests, in which I describe the formation of the association.

(PIF note) Following this interview we print that very informative article)

PIF: Are the County Forests members?

Yes, The County Forests themselves are the members of the Association.

PIF: What is the funding source for WCFA and even the County Forests themselves?

The County Forests pay \$1600 each annually in supporting dues to WCFA, plus an acreage assessment of .046.

As for the County Forests themselves, funding comes from a variety of sources. By statute, the State of Wisconsin has an obligation to compensate the counties for public uses of the lands. This support comes through a variety of grant and loan funds issued from Wisconsin's segregated forestry-account coupled with technical assistance from WDNR. Counties must be vigilant in taking advantage of grants and funding opportunities to maximize the work that can be accomplished. Funding for county forests, whether at the county or state level, is scrutinized during every budget cycle. Retention of these important funding sources is essential to ensure the continued future success of county forests and their continuing value to the citizens.

Worth mentioning here is the County Forest Administration Grant. All 29 forests take advantage of this grant which funds 50% of a professional forester position as County Forest Administrator or Assistant County Forest Administrator. This grant even helps counties with their dues to WCFA as our organization is a promotional non profit for the forests and acts as a point of contact to DNR. Over the last 5 years this grant has averaged \$42,000 annually per county.

PIF: Is there any other staff at WCFA?

I was grateful to have Jeff Barkley for a 2 year stint as Assistant Executive Director, and I am just as happy to say that Gary Zimmer has taken that role. Many of you will know Gary from his time at the Ruffed Grouse Society. Gary also serves on the Natural Resource Board, and we are very cognizant of this to avoid any conflicts of interest.

(PIF note: Gary spoke at one of our very early annual meetings and recently it was he to second the motion on the NRB to approve the new Legacy forest project)

PIF: What is the acreage statewide in County Forests? How many counties have County Forest Crop lands?

Wisconsin's 29 counties with county forest lands enrolled under Wisc. Stats. §28.10 and §28.11 manage nearly 2.4 million acres of forests, the largest public ownership in the state. We may as well give the whole list so readers can grasp the scope of the County Forest in their area of interest.

Wisconsin County Forest Acres

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Ashland 40,323 | Iron 174,159 | Polk 17,144 |
| Barron 16,265 | Jackson 122,091 | Price 92,268 |
| Bayfield 169,395 | Juneau 17,799 | Rusk 89,006 |
| Burnett 105,425 | Langlade 130,003 | Sawyer 115,197 |
| Chippewa 34,583 | Lincoln 100,843 | Taylor 17,611 |
| Clark 134,254 | Marathon 29,937 | Vernon 997 |
| Douglas 278,900 | Marinette 230,032 | Vilas 41,113 |
| Eau Claire 52,734 | Monroe 7,281 | Washburn 149,034 |
| Florence 36,395 | Oconto 43,706 | Wood 37,762 |
| Forest 13,645 | Oneida 82,279 | |

PIF: Are the County Forests quite uniform in management? DNR Silviculture Handbook and DNR Forestry guidance, for example?

County Forest Program operations are guided by a 15-year comprehensive forest plan adopted by each county board of supervisors and approved by WDNR. This adoption and approval process is required under Wisconsin's County Forest Law. Any changes or updates during the life of the 15-year forest management plan must follow the same process. This plan development involves direct public input.

Annual allowable harvest goals are calculated based on forest plan data, forest reconnaissance data, and past harvest data. Counties strive to meet allowable harvest levels, maintaining forest health while working to meet desired future forest conditions. On an annual basis, less than 2% of the county forest land base is entered for active forest management.

DNR Forestry is a huge help to the County Forests, as technical forestry assistance provided by WDNR augments the work accomplished by county staff in the management of county forests. An agreed upon level of assistance is provided annually, with approximately 48,000 hours (~27 full time equivalents) of WDNR assistance provided annually, valued at over \$1,800,000. This is a very important benefit.

PIF: This probably is a good time to ask about certification, SFI and FSC have become common terms which we even enjoy on most MFL lands today. Do the county forests embrace certification?

Twenty-seven of Wisconsin's County Forests are third party certified under either or both Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) forest certification systems.

The smallest county forests, Vernon and Monroe, chose not to participate in forest certification due to the low number of acres enrolled in their respective counties. Our county forests were first awarded forest certification certificates in 2006. Each county chooses their preferred forest certification system; SFI, FSC or dual. Direct costs for forest certification, such as fees and audit expenses, are paid by Wisconsin's segregated forestry account. Indirect forest certification costs, such as forestry department staff time spent on extra documentation and additional steps in the field to comply with forest certification standards, are absorbed by the counties. Forest certification audits occur on an annual basis.

Wisconsin's County Forests regularly receive outstanding marks during annual certification audits. Forest certification auditors who have come to know Wisconsin's county forest program truly admire and value the role these forests play across the landscape. The local control, number of opportunities for public input, and tremendous recreational offerings our forests provide consistently draw praise. One auditor even stated he views Wisconsin's County Forest Program as the model for public land management in the U.S.

PIF: A couple times now you have mentioned 'Segregated Forestry Funds'. Is this from what we call the Forestry Mil tax?

Yes, segregated forestry funds are the same as the mill tax; 0.002 times your property assessments by constitutional amendment from years ago. This is in the State portion of our real estate tax bills.

PIF: Does any particular County stand out as perhaps having the best timberland growing the highest value products, or in some other way simply tell us your favorite? Ironically, it was your home turf that was my very first experience on County Forests, with my uncle Dr. Walt Theide. Doc's tree farms were surrounded by Oneida and Lincoln County Forest and our favorite hike was of course in the incomparable Harrison Hills. What an incredible gem those hills are.

The Harrison Hills are fabulous, but so is the Underdown area in Lincoln County.

We have such a wonderful diversity of County Forests, I refuse to choose a favorite. But with that said Langlade, Lincoln, and Ashland counties continue to impress me. With their potential for growing high value hardwoods in a sustainable fashion they will be true value makers in the coming years. But of course, having worked on the Ashland County forest first as a forester and then County Forest Administrator and later Lincoln County Forest Administrator, and growing up so close to Langlade, perhaps a little bias is due. We discussed the unique qualities of Langlade County (I do love that county forest) but Washburn, Sawyer, Rusk (especially the Blue Hills area), Ashland, and Iron also stand out for me. Each county forest has its unique characteristics; The bluff areas, unique campgrounds, Yellow River bottomlands, etc. in Juneau County. The Wild Rivers areas in Florence County. The beautiful hardwood forests of Forest County. The Lake Michigan shoreline and forests in Oconto County. The Lake Michigan shoreline and beech forests of Marinette County. Etc., etc., etc. YOU SIMPLY HAVE TO LOVE THOSE COUNTY FORESTS!!!

PIF: Some counties actively increase the size of their forests in using the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program with their own match! We certainly encourage the expansion of county forest areas, as this can be a significant assistance to mitigate forest fragmentation. I hear Forest County has made a great effort to increase the size of the county forest as well increase the blocking and they deserve a lot of credit! Is there any lesson there that can be used to get other county forests to follow suit?

Forest County has made great strides with recent expansion, and overall there is good hope to do more.

First, a bit of an acquisition primer. The county forests are very fortunate to have access to the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Land Acquisition Funds – Since FY2011 County Forests have been eligible for 50% cost-sharing for land acquisitions. Counties can receive grants for up to half of the appraised land value. As of June 30, 2015 – county forests have added 18,558.43 acres of land utilizing Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Funding. This includes 16,148.46 acres of new acreage and 2,409.97 acres of match lands. The total costs of these purchases is \$29,290,721.00 with \$14,199,142.38 coming from the Stewardship Fund and the remainder as county match. One note, Stewardship purchases have to be within county forest boundaries.

With that said, Clark and Bayfield both have had large acquisition projects. Langlade has had a couple sizeable acquisitions. Douglas has also had some interesting projects. Juneau County purchased a sizeable chunk of Yellow River bottomlands with the assistance of The Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund has also assisted Douglas County with some acquisitions. Mr. Jim Swanke worked diligently with Rusk County for the county's acquisition of important river frontage where the Thornapple River meets the Chippewa River.

PIF: How did the Counties budget support fare in the last state budget for county forests?

The State of Wisconsin and the legislature recognize the value of our county forests and generally support our program very well. We did lose a portion of the funding our counties receive through the County Forest Administration Grant with the elimination of "capacity" grants. WCFA's Board of Directors and others are actively working to restore this funding.

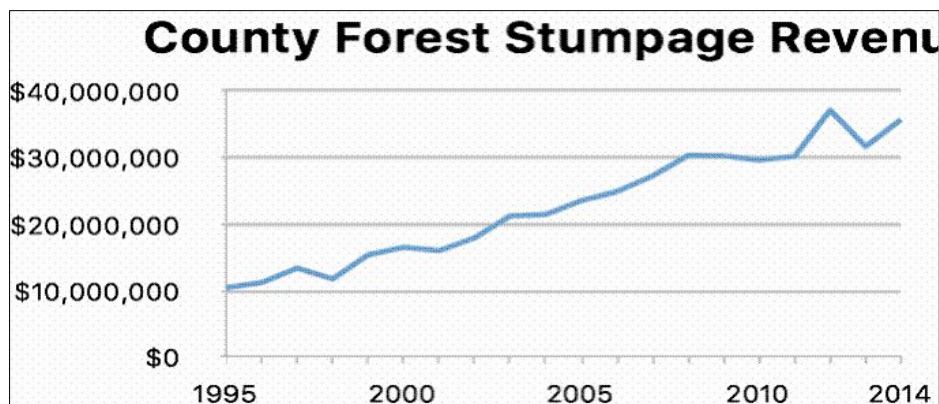
PIF: Harvests from the County Forests is a steady influence through the ups and downs of national forest harvests and private land sales. That consistency is critical for Wisconsin's forest products industry. Wisconsin mills have sold their land and lost the ability to dampen price fluctuations. Given that timber prices are fluctuating dramatically, it is very likely that county forest revenues will begin to reflect that. In some years it could be way up and in other years way down. Are the County Boards prepared for the roller coaster ride?

Is Jane able to warn them to hang on for the ride?

Well, I guess only time will tell.

PIF: Can you highlight the economic benefits to a couple example counties from the County Forests?

The county forests have truly seen an economic boom from timber sales, as you can see from the following graph.



In 2015 Sawyer County is set to exceed \$3 million in stumpage revenue. In fiscal year 2015 Bayfield County saw a revenue of \$6,046,259 or a return of almost \$1000 per acre harvested. In FYI '15 Iron County was over \$2.4 million, Douglas County exceeded \$3.9 million, Clark County was at almost \$3.5 million. In Eau Claire County FY revenue topped \$1500 per acre harvested. Total value of revenue from County Forest Stumpage in FY2015 was \$38,863,370, with the average sale topping \$55,000 on 70 acre average size sale. The average revenue per acre cut was \$788.67. Timber sale revenues have increased substantially in recent history while harvest levels remained relatively consistent. Annually, the county forests continue to grow more timber than they harvest, so the economic outlook on the forests is bright as long as we are able to retain and hopefully grow Wisconsin's forest products' markets.

PIF: Those are impressive economic returns. As we have long known with county forests, one thing that resonates is the steady income from well managed land. Can you tell us where some of this revenue is used to benefit the counties' citizens?

Income from timber sales on the county forest directly offsets county tax levies. Income above and beyond county forestry department operational needs provides funding for county highway departments, sheriff's departments, social services and other needs depending on individual county policy and financial structure.

County forest management revenues not only offset county tax levies, they provide working capital for management of the forests, support recreational opportunities, and help compensate towns in which the forests lie. By law, towns containing county forest land receive \$.30 per acre annually (\$713,528 total in 2014) as acreage share payments; funding source for the acreage share payments is Wisconsin's segregated forestry account. Towns also receive a minimum of 10% of county forest timber sale revenues, distributed based on acreage of county forest within the town, which equated to \$1.50 per acre of total county forest land (\$3,570,000 total) in 2014.

PIF: Lets talk about ecological benefits on the County Forests. Is there any known inventory on the County Forests for special features?

We are curious as to where and how much old growth acreage and special habitat (hemlock, cedar, "orchid" swamps, etc.) is found on county forests, and if the managers recognize the value of these

small remnants and protect them, or do they look at most everything in terms of board feet and recreation potential?

Landscape conservation opportunities provided by Wisconsin's County Forests are extremely important to a wide variety of floral and faunal species. County forests protect thousands of lakes and wetland ecosystems, and thousands of miles of rivers and streams. Actively, sustainably managing our forests and keeping them healthy improves water quality and provides clean air for our environment.

There are identified high conservation value areas, not equated to old growth ---but to key to water resources, wildlife habitat, rock outcrop features etc. These areas are identified as "High Conservation Forests" under FSC forest certification standards and "Conservation Opportunity Areas" under SFI forest certification. In addition, each county forest has special ecological areas known to and appreciated by both those who work on the land base and the forest users. A baseline vegetative inventory, using the re'leve plot method, has been conducted on "High Conservation Forest" areas of FSC certified forests.

PIF: What is the consensus (among the foresters and folks managing and caring for these lands) regarding opening/developing motorized ATV/UTV trails on county land?

Are all these decisions made by the county board?

Yes these decisions are made locally by each county board. It is very important for citizens to be engaged in their own county and help lay out a sound policy that is compatible with the county's recreational needs and ecological features.

PIF: Last winter PIF was, frankly, shocked by the Burkett proposal to sell Vilas County forest lands. In this time of economic uncertainty in the north, the public forests are a true bright spot, economically, ecologically and socially. We have just discussed the incredible economic returns of these forests. A staunch conservative recently told me that managing land for the public is the best thing government does. What else do we need to do to get the word out on the immense value of not only the County Forests, but most all public lands? Are most County Boards aware of the vast economic and recreational importance of the forests to the tourism industry? Another aspect is the sense of identity the county forest gives the residents. They are in place so long that people enjoy the landscape and come to feel the forest is theirs. It is important that the county board members are aware of this to avoid the disregard Mr. Burkett displayed last year.

We need to continually educate county boards, as there is potential for turnover every two years. People need to communicate with their local representatives, that is the spirit for local input and local involvement. Wisconsin County Forests Association recognizes the importance of local engagement on each individual county forest. The input offered by Partners in Forestry last year when discussions regarding the possible sale of county forest lands occurred in Vilas County is one example of how significant that engagement can be. I appreciate that.

Another important benefit to note is how Wisconsin's County Forests provide outstanding recreation opportunities. Recreational offerings vary widely from county to county. It is important to realize that many counties do not receive enough revenue from trail passes, boat launch fees, etc. to cover the costs of recreational operations. Those recreational offerings are often paid for through timber sale receipts.

However, the recreational offerings do benefit local businesses and communities by drawing visitors to the county forest. In this regard, county forestry and parks departments, through timber sale revenue, are truly providing a service to their communities. Many citizens of Wisconsin cannot afford the luxury of owning their own private woodlands and they rely on public lands such as our county forests for many things. As a wise, now retired, county forest

administrator once said of the county forests; “Over the years we have always had people who say the county forest lands should be sold and the property put back on the tax rolls, but this land improves our quality of life so much. The forest is just too valuable to the people of this county. Where else would you go to hunt? Where else would you go to fish? It’s the counties most valuable asset, there is no doubt about it.”

The true values of Wisconsin’s County Forests really do go far beyond the dollar revenues they bring to the counties.

And we also discussed a few other forestry issues with Jane!

PIF: What are your thoughts on the new MFL bill? We are a bit concerned over the ease and lax attitude in withdrawal as we are losing one big objective of the law.....prevention of forest fragmentation.

We are on record supporting the bill because of the proposed financial return to local units of government. Wisconsin’s MFL program is extremely important for the promotion of sustainable forest management and forest health. The majority of Wisconsin’s forestlands are privately owned and they provide an essential supply of raw material for our forest products industry and a variety of ecological benefits to society as a whole. Through my role on Wisconsin’s Council on Forestry I have become more familiar with the program and it appears private forestland owners are eager for some changes to be made. Ensuring the program remains viable for forest landowners and valuable to state taxpayers in general is critical but it is a difficult charge.

PIF: What about deer numbers? Vilas County Forest Supervisor, John Gagnon, recently told me that his greatest disappointment in his career on the County Forest has been the loss of the white birch to high deer numbers. We have covered this extensively, yet many folks say there are too few deer. Last fall I displayed a photo in these pages showing our only white birch regeneration on our home property....on top of lumber piles 10 feet above the ground. I sometimes say the NRB will have to decide someday if timber or deer are the priority in Wisconsin. Frankly, I think this feeding of deer is just plain wrong. I have been on the Vilas CDAC and was not popular at all when I expressed these concerns. I will acknowledge, however, that deer numbers are not consistent on the landscape.

WCFA has taken a strong position on this, and of course we share your concerns. This is a difficult topic for our membership as not all members agree with the position we have taken but the majority do.

I would encourage readers who care about this issue to see the WCFA Position Paper on White Tailed Deer by going to the following links.

<http://www.wisconsincountyforests.com/our-positions>
[/http://new.wisconsincountyforests.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/white-tailed-deer-herd-management.pdf](http://new.wisconsincountyforests.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/white-tailed-deer-herd-management.pdf)

*** NOTE: PIF has chosen to print quotes from the WCFA position in the paper copy as some of our readers do not use the internet.

PIF: We have talked in the past of the very inequitable stumpage values often seen between public and private timber sales. Much of this can be attributed to the large size, but even in comparable size sales the public forests often arouse a bidding frenzy. Do you have any more insight into this?

Like many issues this is very complex. Many things can be in play, from weather to local conditions to a bidders individual needs. The free market can be an amazing phenomenon as it

works to correct differences. There is no doubt that the public sales tend to attract good bidding. We do share the concern about prices peaking to a point where industry panics.

Thank you immensely, Jane, I am certain we all will better appreciate the value these County Forests are with your great information.

***In our Position Statement relating To White Tailed Deer Management we state:

Recent legislative decisions appear to place a greater emphasis on social and political interests than contemporary research, established science, and the observations of resource management professionals.

These decisions continue to pursue artificially high populations of whitetail deer by continuing to allow baiting and feeding, despite continued spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), and limiting the ability of professional wildlife managers to control populations.

The outcomes of the State's current approach to whitetail deer management will likely have a negative effect on forests and, subsequently, the forest products industry, the tourism industry, and the ability of northern local units of government to raise revenue from local timber sale programs.

PIF uncovered an old story from the September 2007 Foto News following Jane taking on the WCFA director position and we share a few quotes from that story here.

After two and a half years as Lincoln County Forest Administrator, Jane Severt has moved on to a position that puts her finger on the pulse of all of Wisconsin's county forest land. Severt started her new job Aug. 1 as executive director of the Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA).

"I think they just needed one collective voice to represent their views to make sure that they were going to be included in things that were important to the management of their forests," said Severt, whose father Ole Hanson was Lincoln County's forest administrator at the time.

As WCFA executive director, Severt also sits on the Great Lakes Timber Producers board, the Lake States Resource Alliance, and the State Council on Forestry.

The Evolution of Wisconsin's County Forests

By Jane Severt, Executive Director, Wisconsin County Forests Association & Joe Schwantes, County Forest Specialist, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

In the late 1800's and very early 1900's, farming was promoted as the appropriate use of land in northern Wisconsin, trees were often seen as obstacles. Promoted agricultural land use coupled with a growing demand for lumber to build large metropolitan areas in southern Wisconsin, northern Illinois, and eastern Minnesota led to massive deforestation. Much of northern Wisconsin proved marginal at best for use as farmlands, and when the depression era hit many of these lands were abandoned and became tax delinquent. By Wisconsin law, such lands were forfeited to the county.

By 1927, 4.5 million acres of land had been tax delinquent at least once. For the same reasons the land had become tax delinquent, no one was interested in purchasing them and returning them to the tax rolls. Local governments were faced with providing services such as fire protection and road access without the necessary income from property tax revenues. One solution was to return these lands to what they were best suited for – growing timber.

The framework for Wisconsin's county forest system was put in place by the state legislature beginning in 1927 with the passage of Wisconsin's Forest Crop Law (FCL) and County Forest Reserve Law. Enrollment in these programs ensured reforestation and sustainable resource management would occur. These lands also provided public access rights for hunting and fishing, lands were enrolled under FCL for a 50-year contract period. In November of 1928, Langlade County was the first county to officially enroll acres in a county forest program under the FCL. Rural zoning and a 1929 FCL amendment further defined

parameters for county forests and from 1929 to 1949, 2 million acres across northern Wisconsin were enrolled by counties under Wisconsin's FCL.

During the 1960's a group of state leaders expressed concern regarding what would happen to county owned lands enrolled in Wisconsin's FCL after the fifty-year contracts expired. There were disagreements between the state of Wisconsin and counties regarding control and management of county forests.

Governor Gaylord Nelson established a Forest Crop Advisory Committee, in place from 1960 to 1962. This committee's work led to separate statutory definitions for county forests and private forest lands enrolled under Wisconsin's FCL. County Forest statute language was formally adopted on September 16, 1963

The purpose of Wisconsin's County Forests, as defined in state statute §28.11(1), is to: *provide the basis for a permanent program of county forests and to enable and encourage the planned development and management of the county forests for optimum production of forest products together with recreational opportunities, wildlife, watershed protection and stabilization of stream flow, giving full recognition to the concept of multiple-use to assure maximum public benefits; to protect the public rights, interests and investments in such lands; and to compensate the counties for the public uses, benefits and privileges these lands provide; all in a manner which will provide a reasonable revenue to the towns in which such lands lie.*

In addition, during the early 1960's county forests reached a point where emphasis was

shifting from reforestation, blocking, construction, and protection of county forests to forest management and timber revenues from sustainable management efforts continued to increase over time.

Wisconsin's County Forest program experienced some turbulent times during the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's as state policy for county forests continued to develop.

In 1968 Wisconsin counties with lands enrolled under the state's County Forest Law came together to form Wisconsin County Forests Association, Inc. (WCFA). The original articles of incorporation state that the organization's "purposes shall be to provide a forum for the consideration of problems and policies of concern to the committee of the County Board of each county in the state responsible for forestry programs of the county, including those programs carried out under SS 28.10 and Chapter 77 of Wisconsin Statutes." Additional purposes contained in the articles include the following:

- Provide leadership and counsel to county forestry committees in relation to forestry policies and programs
- Encourage local county and county board participation in forestry programs
- Provide leadership in obtaining financial support for forestry programs and work.
- Act as a liaison between state and county legislative representatives and other public official with respect to proposed and existing forestry programs.

- Work with private groups and public agencies toward the goal of strengthening forestry and forest related programs in Wisconsin

Organization by-laws dictate function and structure, including the process for election of a 17 member board of directors. WCFA's Board of Directors, comprised of county forestry committee members, interacts regularly with county forest administrators and WDNR's County Forest Specialist. The association's executive director represents the forestry interests of its 29 member counties in a variety of ways including service on numerous boards and committees focused on forestry and forest policy issues.

Today, Wisconsin's county forests manage nearly 2.4 million acres of forest lands, which is the largest public ownership in the state of Wisconsin. Comparatively, the state of Wisconsin owns approximately 1.5 million acres and the federal government owns 1.5 million acres. Wisconsin county forests provide a tremendous source of revenue to counties and towns from the sale of forest products, essential raw material for Wisconsin's \$20 billion timber industry, a wide variety of recreational opportunities for Wisconsin's \$11 billion tourism industry, and landscape level conservation opportunities.

Wisconsin's County Forests are "Unique to the Nation" and provide innumerable benefits to the citizens of Wisconsin and beyond.

If you are concerned about your deer being hungry and adjusting to the lack of concentrated foods with the feeding ban, consider helping them with a more natural diet. A little timber stand improvement to thin some overly thick aspen or red maple will provide them with browse.

We are pleased to provide this perspective on the Vilas County Forest with Forest Administrator John Gagnon.

PIF: Please give us a little background on your forestry career and your time in Vilas County.

John: I received my bachelors degree from the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point in 1986, having majored in Forestry Management with minors in Business Administration and Resource Management. I spent the first four years of my forestry career with the State of Indiana on the Owen-Putnam State Forest working in the Central Hardwood Forests. In 1989 I married Barb, my wife of 26-years, we have one daughter, Meghann. We moved to Neillsville in 1992 where I worked as a Timber Sale Administrator for the Clark County Forest. In 1993 we moved to Eagle River where I took the Assistant Forest Administrator position with the Vilas County Forest. As the Assistant Forest Administrator I was responsible for the Forest management of the Vilas County Forest - planning and executing the timber sale program, reforestation, reconnaissance, and timber stand improvement projects. In 2014 I was promoted to the Forest Administrator. I enjoy hunting , bicycling, cross country skiing and outdoor photography.

PIF: In your twenty years on the Vilas County Forest, what have been your greatest successes and achievement?

John: I would not single out any particular success but rather feel that my greatest achievement has been maintaining the sustainability of the Vilas County Forest throughout my career and for future generations. However, having said that, I feel that re-establishing the great pinery (red and white pine) on the Vilas County Forest is of significance and will continue to become more prominent in the future.

PIF: What have been the most disappointing?

John: The most disappointing aspect of my career has been the loss of the White Birch resource on the Vilas County Forest. Attempts that were made to regenerate White Birch on the Vilas County Forest failed due to heavy deer browse. Most of the White Birch cover type was naturally converted to other forest cover types such as aspen, northern hardwoods, and oak or planted to red pine or white pine.

PIF: Except for obvious riparian areas, are there any places off limits to timber harvesting, because of special ecological concern, and where?

John: Vilas County has not designated any specific areas that are off limits to harvesting. Currently Vilas County Forest does not harvest White Cedar or Hemlock.

PIF: It is seen that natural pine stands (especially red pine) slow significantly in growth as they age. What are your plans to balance aesthetics and ecological benefits of older pine vs. fiber production/regrowth in regenerating these stands?

John: In general, we have also chosen longer and/or extended rotation ages for our natural pine stands. Red and white pine stands are evaluated based on their condition, age, and stocking level. The older under stocked stands are generally targeted for regeneration in order to fully capture the site. Stands with great visibility such as those along major highways or high use areas are generally target for longer rotation

ages, as are stands that are fully stocked. The biggest limitation in regenerating pine will be in manpower and dollars. Limited budgets and small staff puts a limit on the number of acres that can be prepared for regeneration. Focusing on natural regeneration where possible is the key to being able to stretch those resources further.

PIF: Vilas County has cut quite a lot of younger rotation age aspen recently. In your recon on these stands what are some of the things you look for in deciding when to harvest these aspen stands? Deciding to cut now or allow to grow.

John: A major factor in entering aspen stands is to even out the acres of the aspen resource - bring the aspen resource into a regulated state. The two biggest factors in the decision to cut now are the condition of the stand and operability of the harvest. Stands that were declining for one reason or another were targeted first for early entry. Then stands that have a minimum volume of 15-18 cords per acre were set for harvest. The entire aspen resource was evaluated in the last three years and the harvest schedule was manipulated based on these factors and others (such as age of stand and adjacency to other aspen stands).

PIF: Will any particular species dominate timber sales on the Vilas County Forest in the next decade?

John: Vilas County planted a lot of red pine in the 1980's, these stands are now ready for thinning. The red pine resource on the County Forest is close to 6,000 acres and with a thinning rotation of 10 years and regeneration of natural stands Vilas County could potentially be harvesting 500+ acres a year of red pine in the next decade. That would be nearly half the allowable harvest of approximately 1100 acres.

John can be reached at the Vilas County Forest headquarters in Eagle River.

Mark Hovel contributed to this interview.



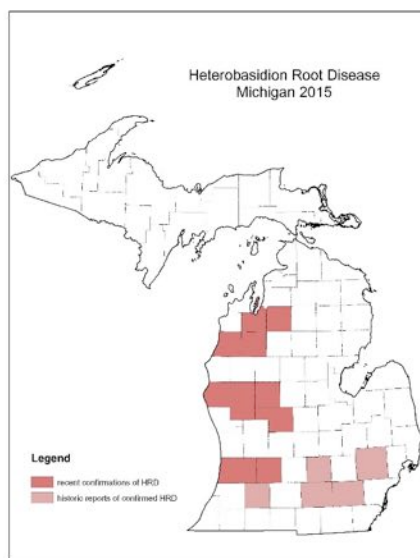
John Gagnon, Jane Severt and Joe Hovel

Be on the lookout for HRD (Heterobasidion Root Disease) in Michigan and Northern Wisconsin!

By Tara Bal^a, Dana Richter^a, Bob Heyd^b, Roger Mech^b, and Scott Lint^b

^a School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science, Michigan Technological University

^bMichigan Department of Natural Resources, Forest Health Specialists



With the recent confirmation of active decline pockets in Michigan, interest is growing in managing and protecting trees susceptible to this root disease. Heterobasidion Root Disease (HRD) is caused by the fungus *Heterobasidion irregular*, but you may also know it as Annosum root rot, or some of its previous scientific names, '*Fomes annosus*', or *H. annosum* (which is the Eurasian species).

The current known distribution of HRD is outdated and incomplete for North America, but Wisconsin, Ontario, and Quebec have been detecting, monitoring, and managing HRD since the early 1990s. It was also found in southern Minnesota for the first time in 2014. The MI DNR and Michigan Tech have partnered with the U.S. Forest Service to determine the distribution of HRD in the Lake States, finding several infected stands in new counties in Michigan since 2014 (Figure 1). There are also infected stands in Wisconsin that are very close to Menominee Co. in the UP (Figure 5).

Trees susceptible to HRD include all pines (red, white, and jack) but can also be found in hemlock, cedars, balsam fir, larch, white spruce, and some hardwoods. In Michigan, we are focusing detection efforts in older pine plantations that have been thinned at least once, as windborne spores infect freshly cut stumps or wounds and the fungus spreads throughout grafted root systems. This is why infected stands are said to have "pockets" or circles of dead and dying trees (Figure 2). Red pine plantations that are regularly thinned every few years for utility poles are extremely susceptible! The Wisconsin DNR is also surveying and confirming HRD.



Figure 2. Aerial imagery showing pockets in 2 different plantations, including larger pockets and some much smaller scattered around the site. Photos by S. Lint

Disease symptoms can appear anytime, usually after at least 3 years but sometimes decades after a thinning. Declining and dead trees appear in an expanding circular pattern, potentially causing serious economic loss. Once HRD is at a site, it will remain there for decades. HRD fruiting bodies grow at the base of trees and stumps (Figure 3), usually intermixed or sometimes buried in the duff. They tend to look like bits of dirty popcorn or a squashed shelf mushroom with a whitish edge. The conks do not form every year, though the disease is still spreading, so it can be hard to detect by just looking for the fruiting bodies.



Figure 3. *Heterobasidion irregular* fruiting bodies or conks (starting at top left, clockwise), on a stump, at the base of a tree, at the base of a tree with duff scraped away, and smaller popcorn sized. Photos by S. Lint

A detection method we have been using involves setting out 'bait' discs (Figure 4) of clean red pine in suspect stands for 24 hours and checking them for the tiny hyphae and spores of HRD.

We are on the lookout for more HRD infected stands to determine its distribution and areas at risk. There are 2 look-a-likes, causing disease pockets that look like HRD, which include *Armillaria* and Red Pine Pocket Mortality (*Letographium*), so it is very important to contact us to help diagnose the disease! Conks may be present, even under snow, or the fungus can be isolated from wood, or we can examine aerial imagery and plan an investigation over the winter.



Figure 4. 'Bait' disc to trap HRD spores and detect its presence in suspect stands without visible conks. Photo by T. Bal

HRD can cause serious loss to natural and planted stands but preventative and responsive management can help mitigate that. In other states with a history of the disease, it may be recommended to treat stumps after a thinning with specific fungicide, either with a backpack sprayer or attachments on harvesters, or stand conversion may be recommended, if it meets the landowner's objectives and the site is appropriate for another tree species.

If you have older pine, fir, or spruce plantations and suspect you may have HRD, please contact us or your local DNR foresters!



Figure 5. Confirmed counties in WI with HRD as of January 2016 (WI DNR).

Human and pet health in the woods!

Submitted by Joe Hovel

(PIF note: Lyme Disease has been rather well recognized in most of Wisconsin for over 20 years now, but it is spreading. Last year a friend in the UP said "I do not think we have it here.....yet!")

Source: A Peoples Pharmacy, Terry Graedon 2016

Lyme disease is transmitted by the bites of deer ticks that have now spread to half the counties in the United States. The ticks (*Ixodes scapularis* and *Ixodes pacificus*) that carry Lyme disease are becoming ubiquitous throughout the United States. According to the CDC, these ticks, also termed deer ticks or black-legged ticks, are now found in 50 percent of U.S. counties. That is up from only 30 percent of the counties in 1999.

Lyme Disease Can Be Serious: Lyme disease is transmitted by ticks but it is caused by bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The infection can cause fever, headache, fatigue and joint pain.

Chronic Lyme Disease: If the infection is not treated promptly it can become a chronic condition with neurological symptoms such as numbness, pain or tingling in the hands and feet along with cognitive difficulties. Muscles, joints, bones and tendons may also be affected. These symptoms can be very difficult to diagnose and treat. You can learn more about the complexity of Lyme disease and some associated infections such as *Bartonella* from A Peoples Pharmacy [interview with Edward Breitschwerdt, DVM, and B. Robert Mozayeni, MD](http://www.peoplespharmacy.com/2014/08/30/907-ticks-fleas-mystery-disease/) at <http://www.peoplespharmacy.com/2014/08/30/907-ticks-fleas-mystery-disease/>

Lyme Disease and the Heart: Some people develop irregular heartbeats or damage to the heart muscle. An extreme case is discussed in '[*Gone in a Heartbeat: A Physician's Search for True Healing*](#)' where the story of author Dr. Neil Spector, who needed a heart transplant after years of suffering with untreated Lyme disease.

Tick Checks Need to Become Routine:

As this tick-borne disease continues to spread, people will need to become more vigilant about checking for ticks and reporting bites and symptoms to their health care providers. Health care systems around the country will need to acknowledge Lyme disease as a possibility. Saying "it doesn't happen here" will no longer be appropriate.

Deer tick (clockwise from l: female, male, 2 nymphs on a straight pin.

Photo by Jim Occi, MA, MS

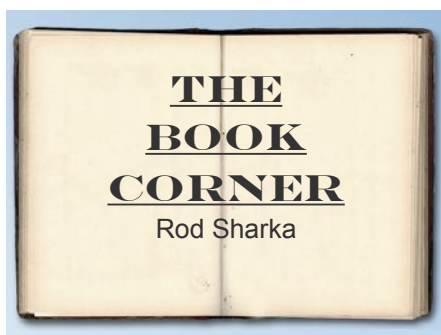


Have you checked out PIF's website?

www.partnersinfor-estry.com

The website is for members to expose your business, service or tree farm, share thoughts, ideas, articles, photos, and links.

This is your COOP, we need your input as much or more than your dues.



As a follow-up to David Hoffman's interesting article about "The Importance of Trees" that we ran in the December, 2015 issue of Partners News, I would like to suggest another excellent book for your winter reading pleasure.

*American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation,
by Eric Rutkow.*

Rutkow's *American Canopy* is not a technical or biological study of North America's trees. Rather, it is a fascinating in depth treatise that delves into the relationship between Americans and their trees across the entire span of our nation's history. As stated in the book jacket's synopsis: "Among American Canopy's many captivating stories: the Liberty Trees, where colonists gathered to plot rebellion against the British; Henry David Thoreau's famous retreat into the woods; the creation of New York City's Central Park; the great fire of 1871 that killed a thousand people in the lumber town of Peshtigo, Wisconsin; the fevered attempts to save the American chestnut and the American elm from extinction; and the controversy over spotted owls and the old-growth forests they inhabited. Rutkow also explains how trees were of deep interest to such figures as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Teddy Roosevelt, and Franklin Roosevelt, who oversaw the planting of some three billion trees nationally in his time as president. Never before has anyone treated our country's trees and forests as the subject of a broad historical study, and the result is an accessible, informative, and thoroughly entertaining read." Audacious in its four-hundred-year scope, authoritative in its detail, and elegant in its execution, *American Canopy* is the perfect read for history buffs, forest managers, and nature lovers alike.

(Rutkow, Eric, *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation*, 2012, Scribner.)

Note: If you would like to see more forestry related book reviews in future PIF newsletters, and know of other titles, both new and old, technical or historical, that you have read and enjoyed, I would welcome your recommendations (and reviews if so inclined). Please drop me a note for consideration in future issues. resharka@gmail.com or 7733 Palmer Lake Rd., Land O' Lakes, WI, 54540.

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