



Developing a Forest Management Plan

Maine Forest Service, DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION, 22 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333

Forest landowners value their land for many reasons: from realizing an economic return (from timber or other sources) to providing ecological values (wildlife habitat, water and soil protection, carbon storage) and personal enjoyment (for recreation, solitude or other purposes). A well-written forest management plan is a blueprint for ensuring these diverse values will be available.

Why Develop a Management Plan?

Whether you are an experienced woodland owner or are just starting out, there is no substitute for the guidance and direction provided by a forest management plan.

If you:

- **Want income from your land now or in the future,**
- **Care about the appearance, health or condition of your woods,**
- **Hope to own your woodland for many years,**
- **Want to leave a healthy and productive forest as a legacy for your family,**

Then consider developing a forest management plan.

Just as you plan decisions in your life related to your own health, retirement or career, you should plan decisions related to your forest.

You might want to have a plan prepared to meet the requirements of the tree growth tax law, green certification (such as the tree farm program), or other state or federal programs.

How Do I Prepare a Management Plan?

A forest management plan does not have to be hard to create or difficult to understand. Some woodland owners develop their own plans, but most hire a licensed forester. In order to start the planning process, you need to know what you want to achieve with your forest. A talk with a consulting forester or your local Maine Forest Service District Forester can help give you a general sense of where you want to go, and then a plan will tell you how to get there.

What Should be in a Management Plan?

A comprehensive forest management plan should provide the information necessary and a flexible framework for achieving your goals including:

- Statements of your goals and objectives.

- Current condition of the woodland and potential for future benefits.
- Possible actions to achieve your objectives.
- Environmental laws that might apply.

Landowner Objectives. One of the most important parts of any management plan is a clear statement of the landowner's objectives (these could also be thought of as your goals, motivations, values or philosophy). These statements will guide the focus and content of the plan and the development of recommendations.

General Information. There should be information that puts the property and the plan into context. This might include details of the location of the property (such as town, county and state; tax map and lot; deed book and page), the owners, the plan preparer, the date the plan was prepared and the period covered by the plan. In addition the text should have a general description of the amount of land that is forestland, wetland, and non-forestland.

Maps. Maps sufficient to meet the needs of the landowner should be included in a plan. At a minimum there should be a map that shows the woodlot's position in the landscape, one that shows stand and parcel boundaries, and one that shows soil type boundaries. Maps should help a person develop a good picture of the property.

Conditions of the Woodlot. A description of the woodlot will flesh out the picture of the property provided by the maps. It might include an account of ownership and land use history, terrain, hydrology (streams, waterbodies, and wetlands), soils, access by roads and/or trails, and a description of boundary lines. Additionally, a description of the legal restrictions applying to the woodland should be included.

Non-timber Attributes. Regardless of management goals, most management plans will include

information about components of the parcel not directly related to timber production. This information could be important for legal considerations. Some things that might be included are a check for the presence of threatened or endangered species, rare and exemplary communities, and historical, cultural, or archaeological sites. In addition the plan might describe fish and wildlife habitat, water quality and waterbodies, recreational opportunities and aesthetic qualities.

Stand Descriptions. A *stand* is an easily defined area of the forest containing the same species mixture with similar heights, ages, diameters, densities, soils, health or other unifying characteristics. Each stand has its own economic and environmental potential and limitations so management options are outlined by stand.

A stand description typically has information about stand size (in acres), tree species present, tree size, stand history, health, *stocking*¹, quality, and growth rate. In addition, a description of non-timber properties might be included. Each stand description should have a statement of long-range objectives directly related to (1) your goals and (2) the ability of the stand to meet those goals.

Stand Prescriptions. Just as a doctor's prescription takes into account the overall condition of a patient, a forester's stand prescription takes into account the overall condition of the stand. The prescription also reflects the landowner's goals. The stand prescriptions should include suggestions to meet your objectives including: if, how and when to harvest, how to protect environmental values, how to enhance wildlife values, how to protect or encourage regeneration—in short the guidance you need to ensure the values you consider important are provided. A rough timeframe for completing forestry activities outlined in the plan and a recommendation for a time to update the plan should be included.

¹**Stocking**—A description of the number of trees, basal area, or volume per acre in a forest stand compared with a desired level for balanced health and growth; usually expressed qualitatively (for example, well stocked or poorly stocked).

“A land ethic...reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.”

~Aldo Leopold *A Sand County Almanac* 1949

Remember:

- A plan is just the start. As the landowner, you will be the one to make sure it is put into action. Foresters, harvesters and other natural resource professionals can help accomplish your goals. If you need assistance finding these professionals, do not hesitate to call your Maine Forest Service District Forester.
- Just as your forest is a living system, your management plan should be considered a living document. Unpredictable events (for example ice storms, hurricanes, fires, insects and diseases) might influence the steps needed to reach your goals. Also, your goals or circumstances might change. Don't be afraid to change your plan. In any event, your plan should be updated once every 10 to 15 years.

Where Can I Find Assistance?

Your Maine Forest Service District Forester can be your first contact in the management planning process. S/he can walk your woodland with you, answer your questions and give you the information you need to make the next steps.

Financial assistance, in the form of federal cost-share programs, property tax reduction, and income tax deductions, is also available for forest management activities including management planning.

Further Reading from the Maine Forest Service:

- *Selecting a Forester*
- *Selecting a Logger*
- *It's Your Woodland: an Owner's Guide*
- *State Income Tax Credit for Forest Management Planning*
- *The Maine Tree Growth Tax Law*

For more information, please contact:

Maine Forest Service
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
22 State House Station
Augusta, ME
04333-0022
(207) 287-2791 or
1-800-367-0223
forestinfo@maine.gov

