

Washburn County Forest 2013 Annual Report



New Snowmobile Trail Bridge over Whalen Creek – Trail 39

Forest Administrator

Mike Peterson

Department Employees

Buck Pettingill
Mark Heil
Duran Bjorklund
Jeremy Erickson
Josh Buckridge
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WDNR Liaison Forester

Amy Morales

Park Ranger / Deputy Sheriff

Vacant – Re-assigned by Sheriff

Forestry Parks and Recreation Committee

L.H. “Skip” Fiedler - Chair
James Dohm – Vice Chair
Steven Waggoner
Anthony Baier
Terry Leckel, Sr.

2013 ANNUAL REPORT – WASHBURN COUNTY FOREST

TO: The Honorable County Board of Supervisors
Washburn County, Wisconsin

Supervisors:

We submit for your approval and adoption, some of this department's highlights and activities during 2013.

TIMBER MANAGEMENT

The timber sale program took in a lower than normal revenue of **\$1,941,527**. The lower revenue was due primarily to weather conditions and the adjustments to our annual allowable harvest compensating for salvage of wind damaged timber.

An extended spring and wet summer early in 2013, coupled with deep snow and colder than normal temperatures late in 2013 reduced the amount of harvesting activity that we saw on the forest. We also offered less aspen acreage for sale in 2013 to balance the additional acres of wind damaged aspen that we harvested as a result of the July 2011 wind storm. Normal allowable harvest acres were restored for 2014.

Wood markets were strong overall. There appeared to be good demand for most wood species and products. The only exception was red oak pulp. Several paper mills restricted the amount of oak they were accepting and we saw prices drop and many contractors struggled to move red oak pulpwood. We saw a gradual but steady increase in stumpage values for most species throughout the year.

All contracted salvage sales from the July 2011 storm were finally completed in 2013. The only exception was a few small sales that we sold directly to contractors. These were, for the most part, scattered tree removal from hardwood and oak sites by small contractors with the ability to clean up scattered trees.

In July of 2013, the Forestry Department switched from selling wood by volume (cords) to selling by weight. Approximately 75% of wood deliveries are measured at the mill by weight. Prior to 2013, we needed to convert the mills' weight scale to cords in order to reconcile wood removals. Wood weights are highly variable depending on season, length of time on landing, wood species components, size, and other variables. Selling wood by the ton to match a majority of our wood markets that purchase by the ton eliminates much of the variability between conversion factors and actual wood weight. The switch to selling by the ton did create concern and confusion with a number of our bidders, but this gradually has become more accepted.

RECREATION

The recreation program grew and expanded with several projects and funding sources. We continue to see increases in the number of people using the forest for numerous activities. Much of the growth of our recreation program is due to a concerted effort to provide more outdoor recreational opportunities for the public.

ATV

Washburn County's ATV Trail system consists of 103.3 miles of funded summer trails and 139.3 miles of winter trails. Annual maintenance contracts are awarded to the Forestry Department in

the form of grants. It is important to note that as a result of a great deal of effort by Washburn County, the Wisconsin County Forests Association and the Wisconsin ATV Association, the State Legislature increased the annual per mile maintenance rate from \$450/mile to \$600/mile. These additional funds have been very important in maintaining our trail systems.

In 2013, trail maintenance grants were awarded at a rate of \$600/mile for summer trails and an additional \$100/mile for winter ATV trails. In addition, the new UTV (side by side) program, enacted in 2012, allowed for an additional \$100/mile on all trails open to UTV use. These programs created a total grant award of \$89,840 for maintaining trails. A majority of these funds are distributed to local ATV clubs for equipment and material reimbursement.

A change to the ATV funding program, however, eliminated funding for 2013. Historically, ATV funds were awarded based on projected revenues from ATV registration funds and an allocation from gas tax. The State determined that in the future, funds could only be dispersed after they were received rather than based on projections. This created a one year lapse in funding availability. Funding for annual maintenance was awarded, but no new project funds were available. Despite lack of funds, Washburn County did have several projects that carried over from the 2012 that were worked on or completed. They include:

- Stony Brook Rehabilitation – Wild River Trail to Waggoner Road
- Canadian National Bridge
- Ole Lake Trail – Long Lake Road to Birchwood Firelane

It is important to note that the bridge projects were all bid out to private contractors, with some County and volunteer work from local clubs. All ATV rehabilitation projects were completed using county equipment and labor; contracted equipment and materials; and a tremendous amount of volunteer work from the local ATV clubs. The Birchwood Bobcats, Rolling Hills, and Minong Clubs invested a great deal of their personal time and club resources to make these projects a success and the Forestry Department and Committee applaud their efforts. All grant funds awarded to these projects are generated from registration stickers on ATV's and disbursed by the State of Wisconsin.

The vacancy in the Park Ranger / Deputy Sheriff position has a large impact on our trail systems. We have little direct access to any trail patrol work or enforcement. Law enforcement is a critical factor in protecting trail systems during periods of closure and also to help protect user safety. The position had spent a great deal of time patrolling these trails for enforcement which has provided a great deal of protection to the investment that has been made in the ATV trail systems in Washburn County. In April of 2011, however, this position was pulled from Forestry Department duties by the Washburn County Sheriff. We have seen several lost ATV trail easements/agreements on private lands with landowners citing lack of enforcement as a primary reason for not allowing trail use to continue.

Washburn County also made a minor change to our ordinance structure. Prior to 2013, ATV trails automatically closed April 1 and did not re-open until Saturday morning of Memorial Weekend. The new language allows the Forest Administrator to open trails prior to Memorial Weekend provided that weather and trail conditions allow opening early without causing trail damage and that fire danger is not an issue.

The Forest Administrator worked closely with Washburn County Tourism to develop an ATV scenic tour on our ATV trail systems. 36 unique tour stops were developed with number signing and a self guided tour map. The tour generated a tremendous amount of interest and should attract additional tourism to our area.

Snowmobile

January and February brought good snow conditions and a great deal of snowmobile activity. We received snowfall early during the 2013/2014 winter season. Trails were opened in mid December and trail conditions were excellent through the entire winter.

The same program funding lapse that occurred in the ATV program also impacted Snowmobile grant. No additional funds were awarded during 2013 due to the State's desire to allocate grant monies based on funds on hand versus projected revenues. Grants were awarded for annual maintenance, but no new projects. Despite the program lapse, Washburn County had several projects that were carried over from 2012 as follows:

Washburn County received a grant (\$168,346) to replace the Whalen Creek Bridge in the Township of Trego. The bridge was relocated to a new crossing site. The trail was cleared and the site was prepared in 2012. The project was also bid out, contract awarded and the bridge was constructed/installed in 2013. The project came in significantly under budget.

The Assistant Recreation Administrator, with the assistance of the Rolling Hills Snowmobile/ATV club were able to secure land use agreements to move 6 miles of snowmobile road route onto private woodlands in the Madge and Beaverbrook area. We were able to secure Snowmobile Trail Aids (\$50,285) to construct 12 miles of new trails and a majority of the project was completed in 2012. Final touch up work and minor remaining tasks were completed in 2013.

Annual maintenance contracts are awarded to the Forestry Department. In 2013, maintenance was awarded at a rate of \$250/mile for snowmobile trail maintenance. A total of \$63,900 was used to maintain trails and was primarily distributed to local Snowmobile clubs for equipment and material reimbursement.

Campgrounds

The Minong Flowage drawdown caused significant impacts on Totogatic Park in 2013. Camper numbers and registered sites were down, particularly early in the season. As the summer progressed, usage at the park increased as visitors discovered the large areas of exposed sandy beach along the shoreline. We also noted that our reservation website attracted many new visitors to the park that took advantage of the lack of reserved sites later in the summer. Revenues for Totogatic Park were down significantly, which was not unexpected.

The Forestry Department took advantage of the lower water levels and armored the exposed shorelines with rock rip-rap in order to reduce erosion damages that had been occurring. In addition, the boat landing was upgraded with new concrete ramp pads.

Other improvements at Totogatic Park included a new wood pen, new playground equipment and replacing the roof on the shower building.

Campground registrations and revenues were lower at Totogatic Park. Sawmill Campground use was approximately the same as 2012. We expect usage and revenues at Totogatic to return to normal levels for 2014.

The reservation website continued to see more use. We saw a great deal of reservations that occurred near the end of 2013 as campers booked their summer, 2014 stays. The system does an excellent job of tracking reservations and seems to be very user friendly. We still are working

with the contractor that designed the system in order to allow us to better reconcile the financial data with revenues generated through the credit card system.

The Harmon Lake Trailhead and the Dugan Run Equestrian Trail have continued use and a slow increase in the number of users. Both trailheads were used fairly frequently and received many favorable comments. An endurance race was hosted on these trails in 2013, drawing approximately 75 participants. We expect that this race may become an annual event, which should draw additional visitors and use of these camping facilities in the future.

Other trails

The Dugan Run Equestrian trail continues to have increased use, especially in the fall as insect activity drops and fall colors appear. The Department receives many compliments on this facility. We are still, however, struggling to promote the development of a local club that will help maintain the trail system. There are a few individuals that provide a great deal of help, but a large portion of the trail inspection and maintenance work is being done by the Forestry Department.

The Wildcat Mountain Bike Trail sees a great deal of use. Local enthusiasts do a tremendous job of monitoring and maintaining the trail and little additional help is needed from the Department.

Good snow conditions were available throughout early and 2013 and the ski trails saw a great deal of use. Early snowfall allowed us to open the ski trails in mid December of 2013 and trails were in great condition throughout the entire winter of 2013/2014. This was the fifth full year that the Forestry Department took on the grooming duties for both the Totogatic and Nordic ski trails. We received numerous compliments on the groomed conditions and the Departments grooming efforts did not add significant workload to our program.

FACILITIES/ EQUIPMENT/ACQUISITIONS

The boat launch fee was continued at the boat landing in Totogatic Park. In prior years, the revenue generated was used to assist with milfoil control on the flowage. 2012 was year 3 of a 3 year project. In 2013, control efforts were not undertaken, primarily due to the drawdown, but also due to denial of a permit to treat from the Wisconsin DNR. The boat launched fees were utilized for plan drafting purposes to develop a strategy for control after the water levels are restored.

A 5th wheel trail was purchased to replace an older unit on inventory. In addition, the new trailer has a heavier capacity to better fit the Terex PT-80 skid steer.

OTHER

The re-assignment of the Park Ranger/Deputy Sheriff position in 2011, continues to hinder the Forestry Department operations. Violations and complaints continued to increase throughout 2013. Of particular concern is a growing trend of private landowners cancelling agreements that allow recreation trails on their properties. Two separate instances occurred in 2013 where key sections of ATV/Snowmobile trail were lost, with landowners citing lack of law enforcement as a primary reason for no longer allowing trails. It appears evident that a portion of the public has recognized that we did not have a law enforcement presence on our forest or trails. This position was 100% funded by ATV and Snowmobile Enforcement Grants and timber sale revenue. These funded sources were removed from the Park Ranger position once it was absorbed by the Sheriff's Department. We will investigate replacing this position at such time when the Forestry Committee can be assured that work duties would remain those of priority to the Forestry Department.

Washburn County continued to participate in the Northern Trail Advisory Committee (NorTAC) that was formed from the dissolved Wild River Trail Commission. This Committee is made up of 10 member counties with 2 appointed representatives from each County. The intent of the group was to create a forum for the discussion of regional motorized trail issues, including planning, connectivity, and legislative issues. Skip Fiedler and Jim Dohm were appointed to the Committee as Washburn County's representatives. This forum allowed us to interact with other counties and regions to assure motorized trail connectivity and also policy consistency across the region.

One summer forestry intern was hired, using timber revenues, and the position was used to mark timber and update forest reconnaissance data.

Washburn County secured funds from the Sustainable Forestry Grant program under two separate grants. \$50,000 was awarded to help offset costs associated with reforestation of 2011 storm damaged sites. These funds were used for trenching and chemical site preparation in advance of planting planned for 2014. \$8000 was awarded to fund herbicide spraying of buckthorn, an invasive species, in the Stinnett area.

The stringent dam safety requirements implemented by the State of Wisconsin have made it very difficult to justify the costs of operating and maintaining wildlife flowages on the County Forest. Washburn County secured a grant to remove the Little Grassy Flowage in Barronett. This flowage structure was removed in 2013.

Washburn County Forestry continues forest certification under both the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification programs. It appears as though the certification efforts by Washburn County, along with the other county forests and state lands have allowed our wood markets to remain viable through the economic downturn. Other areas of the United States experienced mill closures in areas without reliable supplies of certified forest products.

Washburn County continues to be a strong participant in the Wisconsin County Forest Association. This group does a great deal of work legislatively and with various DNR and other State agencies to protect the integrity of our timber and recreation programs. The County Forest Administrator has been the chair of the WCFA Legislative Committee since 1999.

COUNTY FOREST ACTIVITY STATISTICS 2013

I. Reforestation

A.	Acres newly planted:	0	acres
B.	Acres replanted:	66	acres
C.	Acres seeded (jack pine):	2	acres
D.	Jack pine regeneration – scarified	52	acres
E.	Oak regeneration - scarified	0	acres
F.	White birch regeneration – scarified	5	acres
G.	Swamp conifer mowing	0	acres
H.	Northern hardwood regeneration – mowing	166	acres
I.	Northern hardwood regeneration – scarified	28	acres
J.	Site Prep (mechanical)	347	acres
K.	Site Prep (chemical)	332	acres

II. Timber stand improvement

A.	Red pine release (herbicide):	133	acres
B.	Pine release (hand):	34	acres
C.	Aspen sale residual removal:	0	acres
D.	Prescribed burning	0	acres
E.	Invasive – Buckthorn herbicide treatment	41	acres

III. Miscellaneous

A.	Christmas trees sold:	63	(120 in 2012)
B.	Firewood permits issued:	253	(215 in 2012)
C.	Bough permits issued:	20	(16 in 2012)
D.	Dispersed camping permits issued:	66	(26 in 2012)

VI. Timber Sale Statistics

A.	Timber value contracted	\$1,719,445	(\$1,604,388 in 2012)
B.	Acres established:	3,198 acres	(3,078 acres in 2012)
C.	Acres sold (goal of 3400 acres):	3,467 acres	(3,078 acres in 2012)
D.	Acres closed out:	2,930 acres	(4,110 acres in 2012)
E.	Volumes removed:	total cord equivalent = 63,997	
	1. Pulpwood total:	61,038	
	a. Aspen pulpwood	23,223	cords
	b. Mixed hardwood pulpwood	30,591	cords
	c. Pine pulpwood	6,872	cords
	d. Spruce/fir pulpwood	352	cords
	2. Sawtimber total:	1,315	mbf (thousand board feet)
F.	Road projects		
	1. Graded 20 miles of County Forest Roads		
	2. Graded 5 miles of Firelane and other trails.		

VII. Recreation Facilities

A.	Totogatic Park		
	1. Total Gross Revenue - \$81,118.76		(\$112,447.00 in 2012)
	2. Registered campsites – 5370		(5,370 in 2012)
	3. Shower revenue from bathhouse - \$1,484.11		(1,621.81 in 2012)
	4. Firewood revenue – \$3,778.00		(3,729.00 in 2012)
	5. Boat Launch Fee - \$1,161.23		
	6. Ice, Day Use, Dump Station, etc. - \$1,480.42		
	7. Reservation system – 41% revenue collected through reservation system (68% of sites are reservable)		
B.	Sawmill Park		
	1. Revenue - \$6,777.00		(\$5,900.00 in 2012)
	2. Registered campsites – 583		(583 in 2012)

3. Reservation system - 4% revenue collected through reservation system

C. Harmon / Dugan Equestrian Trailheads

1. Revenue – \$1,591.00 (\$2,453.00 in 2012)
2. Registered campsites – 168 (168 in 2012)

D. Leisure Lake Youth Camp

1. Revenue - \$5,750.00 (\$5,650.00 in 2012)
2. Number of Groups = 26
3. Approximately 60% were youth groups

WASHBURN COUNTY FOREST: ANNUAL REPORT OF ACCOUNTS 2013

I. RECEIPT AND EXPENDITURE SUMMARY OF C.F.L.D. AND FORESTRY AID

A. Money received by County:

Gross timber sale receipts	\$1,941,527.35
Damages and other misc. income	\$ 0.00
Gathering permits (firewood, boughs, Christmas trees)	\$ 1,331.00
TOTAL FOREST PRODUCTS REVENUE	\$1,942,858.35

Forestry Aid Loan from State	\$ 74,151.09
Fund Balance Applied	\$.00
Sustainable Forestry Grant	\$ 52,860.20
County Forest Administrator Grant (inc. WCFA dues reimb.)	\$ 46,939.05
Labor Reimbursement – Snowmobile/ATV Grants	\$ 12,994.01**
TOTAL FORESTRY REVENUE ACCOUNTS	\$2,129,802.70

B. Expenditures by County:

Forestry Aid fund #56930	\$120,245.90
County Forest Land Development (56100)	\$516,271.20
10% statutory timber sale revenue to towns	\$194,152.74
5% additional timber sale revenue allocated by County	\$ 97,076.37

C. Net Revenue to County **\$1,202,056.49***

*Other recreation program costs not included in this figure. *May not reflect actual audit figure due to adjustments.*

** Offsets recreation program expenditures.

II. Other Accounts:

	<u>Receipts</u>	<u>Expenditures</u>
A. <u>County Recreation Program (parks)</u>	\$ 96,780.00	\$151,379.83*
B. <u>Fish and Game Projects</u>	\$ 16,512.52	\$ 29,065.37**
C. <u>Habitat Development</u>	\$ 19,736.56	\$ 22,703.44
D. <u>Snow Trails</u>	\$204,538.58	\$201,203.93
E. <u>Land Acquisition</u>	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
F. <u>County Forest Roads</u>	\$ 29,494.51	\$ 23,529.23
G. <u>ATV Trails</u>	\$216,538.58	\$204,334.06

*expenditure data includes funds allocated from special project accounts / non-lapsing funds (ATC monies). *Also, wages and fringe of Parks staff are included in expenditures. Actual workload in parks is about 50%, balance spent in other areas.*

**expenditure includes matching grant funds allocated from parks expenditures.

III. Fund Balances on non-lapsing accounts as of 12/31/13 *subject to final reconciliation and audit

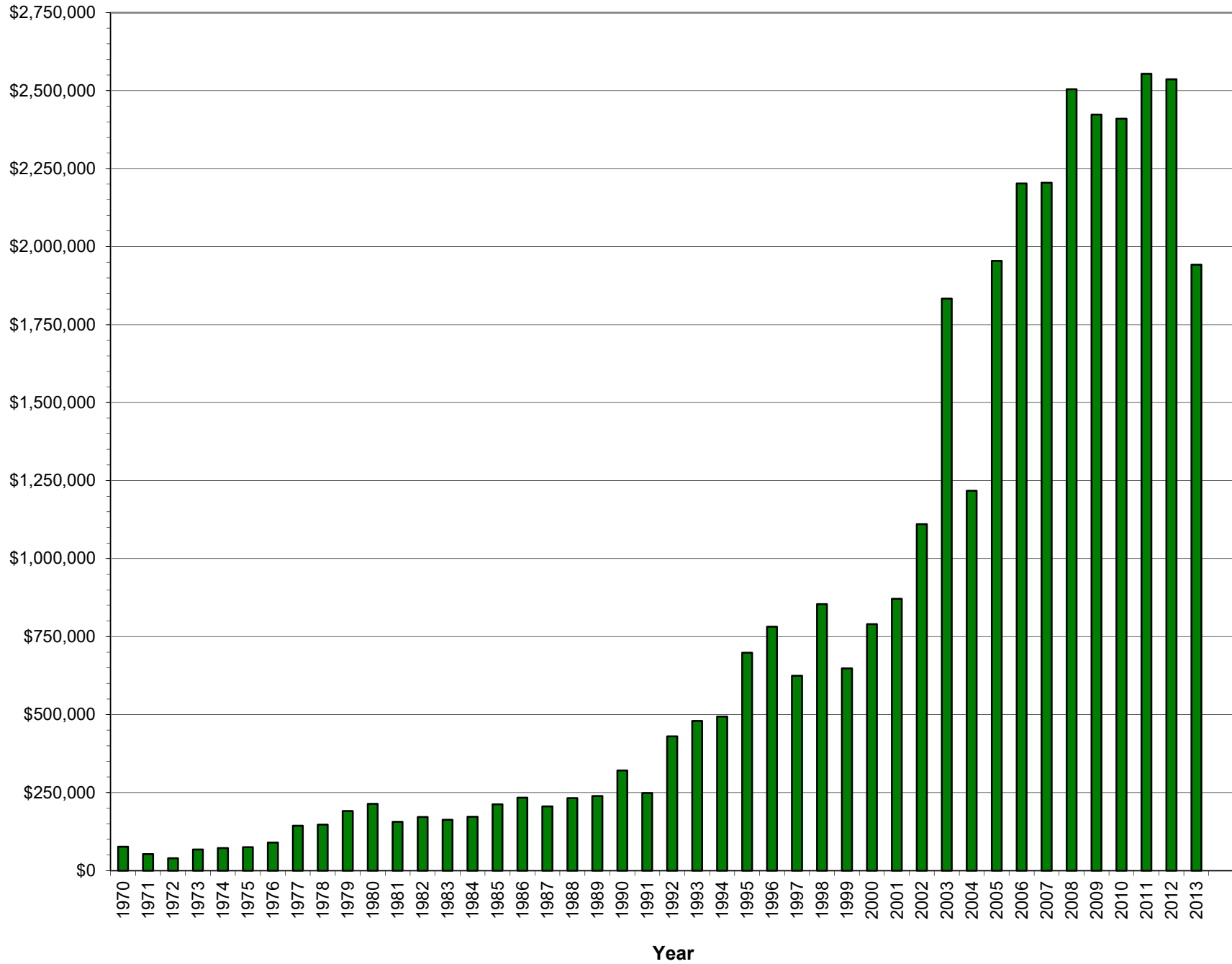
A. Forestry Aid (State loan funds)	\$ 24,085
B. Wildlife Habitat (State grant funds)	\$ 5,756
C. County Forest Roads (State grant fund)	\$ 67,169
D. Land Acquisition	\$ 49,533
E. ATC Recreational Development Fund	\$ 64,358
F. Enbridge Recreational Development Fund	\$ 38,152

IV.	<u>Money received by Towns:</u>		
	State payment (\$.30/acre on 148,998.79 acres)		\$ 44,699.64
	10% timber sale revenue (statutory requirement)		\$ 194,152.70
	5% timber sale revenue (additional paid by Washburn County)		\$ 97,076.37
	TOTAL		\$ 335,928.71

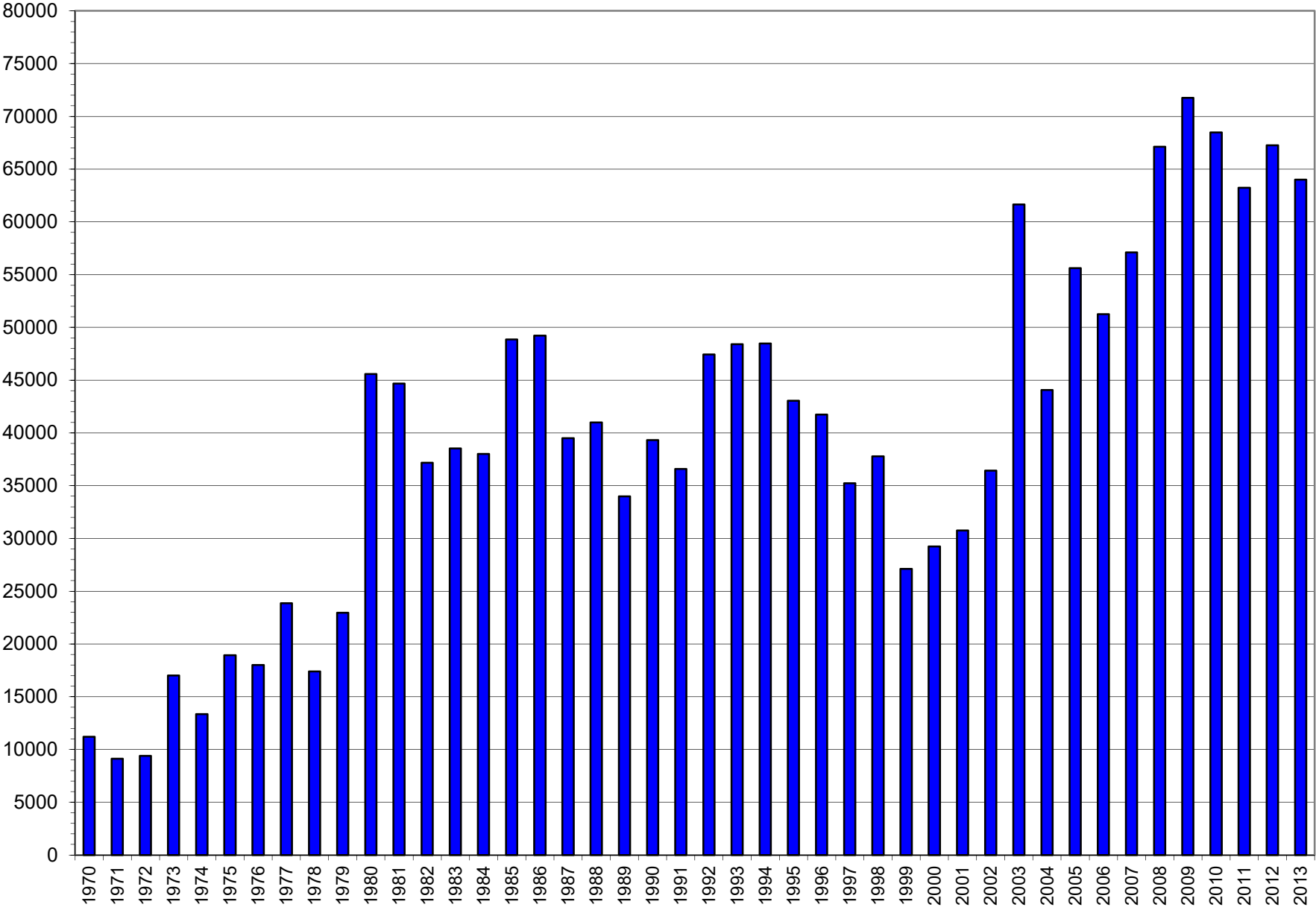
Total monies received by Towns – 2013 (paid in 2014):

Barronett	\$9,807.68 (5,020 ac)	Frog Creek	\$68,533.45 (35,078 ac)
Bass Lake	\$6,120.89 (3,133 ac)	Gull Lake	\$27,608.96 (14,431 ac)
Beaverbrook	\$5,829.82 (2,984 ac)	Madge	\$6,933.85 (3,549 ac)
Birchwood	\$38,823.63 (19,872 ac)	Minong	\$15,683.94 (8,003 ac)
Brooklyn	\$11,260.68 (5,764 ac)	Sarona	\$4,133.47 (2,116 ac)
Casey	\$16,735.34 (8,566 ac)	Springbrook	\$14,604.43 (7,475 ac)
Chicog	\$17,931.21 (9,178 ac)	Stinnett	\$28,194.18 (14,431 ac)
Crystal	\$7,011.90 (3,549 ac)	Stone Lake	\$12,015.67 (6,150 ac)

Gross Timber Sale Revenue

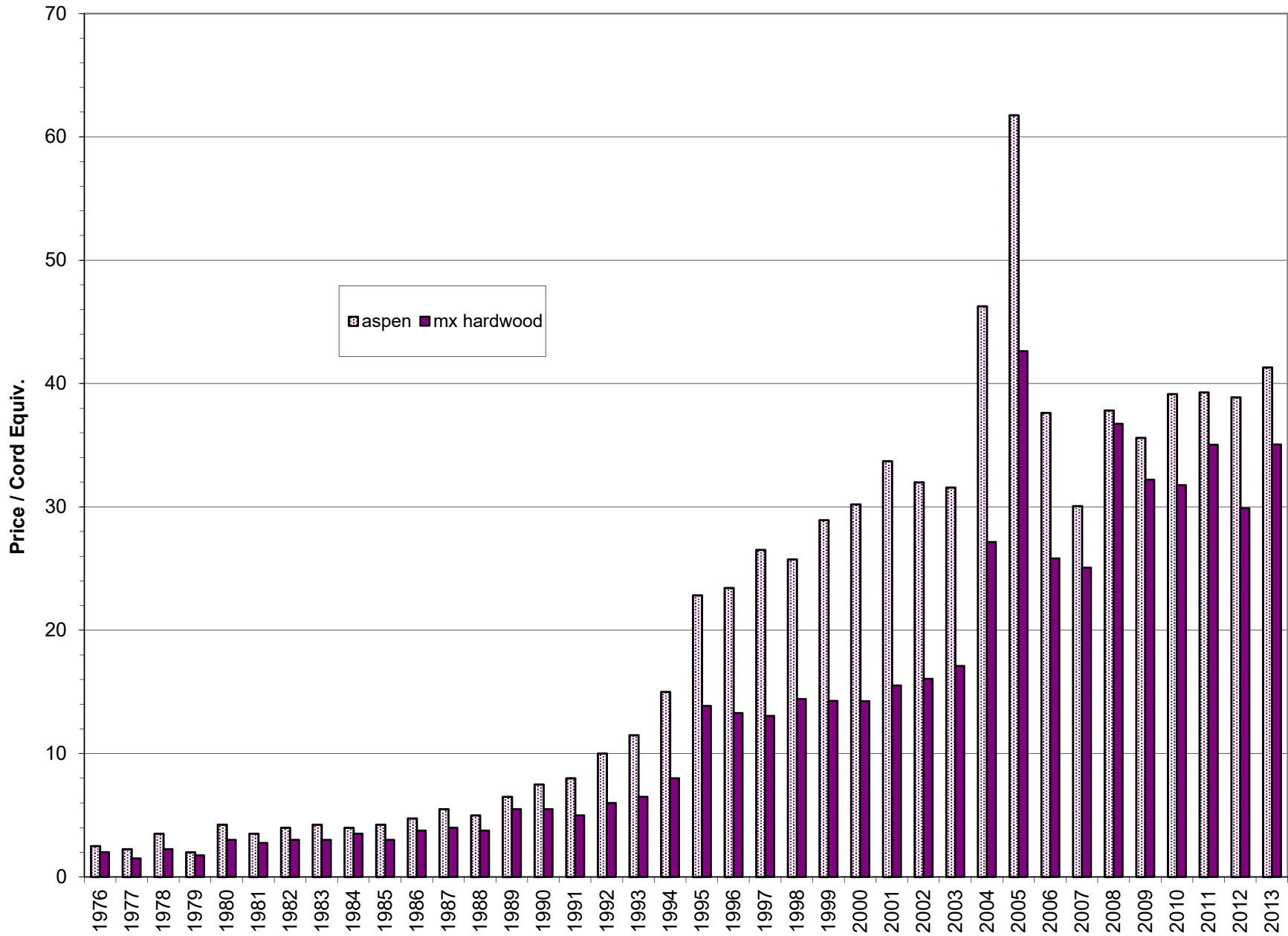


Total Cords Removed



Year

Aspen & Mixed Hardwood Average Stumpage Price



Red Pine & Jack Pine Average Stumpage Price

