

WASHBURN COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

CHAPTER 100 – BACKGROUND

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Approved by Washburn County Board of Supervisors October 19, 2021

No Revisions

100 MISSION STATEMENT – WASHBURN COUNTY FOREST

The mission of the Washburn County Forest is to manage, conserve, and protect natural resources on a sustainable basis for present and future generations. Natural resources, such as those provided by the Washburn County Forest, are the base for addressing the ecological and socioeconomic needs of society.

County Forest resources should be protected from natural catastrophes such as fire, insect and disease outbreaks, and from human threats such as encroachment, over-utilization, environmental degradation and excessive development. While managing for environmental needs, including watershed protection, protection and maintenance of biotic diversity, these same resources must be managed to provide for sociological needs, including the production of raw materials for wood-using industries that provide a wide variety of products fulfilling consumer demands and for recreational opportunities.

**105 GOAL OF THE COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN
(Hereafter referred to as the “Plan”)**

To administer the Washburn County Forest program consistent with the mission statement and the purpose and direction of the County Forest Law as stated in s. 28.11, Wis. Stats., giving consideration to input from citizens and groups. The purpose of the County Forest Law being:

“...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.”

110 WASHBURN COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN POLICY

The plan will also incorporate or reference all county forest policies, pertinent county regulations, planning documents and the needs and actions for the planning period 2021-2035.

This Plan is the authority for management on county forest lands enrolled under Wisconsin County Forest Law s. 28.11. This plan may be encompassed within required local planning efforts, but no other local planning efforts will supersede the authority of this Plan.

110.1 MANAGEMENT PLANNING OBJECTIVES

Management planning shall be used to establish objectives, policies, procedures, rules and regulations, and to promote an efficient and orderly program for development and management of the County Forest in the interest of:

1. Determining needs and priorities
2. Achieving goals set forth in the mission statement of this plan.
3. Satisfying the statutory requirements of s. 28.11, Wis. Stats.
4. Satisfying the requirements for participation in various state and federal aid programs.
5. Providing broad long-term and detailed short-term guidelines for actions.

110.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

Section 28.11, Wis. Stats., places the responsibility for the plan development on the Forestry, Parks and Recreation Committee with technical assistance from the Department of Natural Resources and other agencies. The County Forest Administrator will take the lead at the Committee's request. Public participation will be solicited and utilized during the development of the Plan. Public participation and inputs into the Plan should consider s. 28.11 Wis. Stats., which governs the County Forest program and provides the sideboards to which this Plan must adhere.

The Washburn County Forestry Department will develop the first draft of individual chapters and present them to the Forestry, Parks and Recreation Committee for review. After approval of the draft by Committee, they will be posted on the Washburn County webpage for a 30 day review period by the public. Interested citizens may submit comment directly to the Forestry Department of consideration.

Washburn County may consider an open house to solicit public comment and may also consider developing stakeholder ad hoc committees to help develop plan language if controversial topics arise.

110.3 APPROVAL OF THE PLAN

Comments received will be given consideration during plan development. The Committee will present the draft plan to the Washburn County Board of Supervisors for approval. Following approval, the plan will then be forwarded to the Department of Natural Resources for any approvals required by 28.11 Wis. Stats.

110.4 DISTRIBUTION OF THE PLAN

Each member of the Washburn County Board of Supervisors will have access to a copy of the Plan at the time of initial review and approval. Updated official copies will be maintained by the Forest Administrator electronically.

A copy of the Plan and future amendments will be distributed to the following, either as electronic versions of the Plan, or Plan amendments, or as electronic links to the documents:

1. Department of Natural Resources County Forest Liaison
2. Department of Natural Resources County Forest & Public Lands Specialist
3. Executive Director – Wisconsin County Forest Association

Additional copies will be distributed upon request.

110.5 UPDATING THE PLAN

Necessary changes in policy and procedure will be incorporated into the plan by amendment as required. Amendments to the Plan will require approval by both the County Board (requires 2/3 majority) and the Department of Natural Resources. Changes to official County Forest Blocking map require county Board approval. The annual county board approved work plan, budget, and annual accomplishment report are appended to the Plan and do not require official DNR approval. In addition, changes to Chapters 1000, 2000, 3000 and 4000 do not require a plan amendment or official DNR approval, with the exception of the official County Forest Blocking Boundary map.

110.6 COORDINATION WITH OTHER PLANNING

The development of this plan, and any future amendments, will include considerations, and if warranted, participation in other local and regional planning efforts. It is expected that other local and regional planning efforts will also consider and mesh their efforts with this Plan.

115 FOREST RESOURCE PLANNING

The Forest, Parks and Recreation Committee will utilize procedure as set forth in the Department of Natural Resources Public Forest Lands Handbook no. 2460.5

Silvicultural guidance, supported by Wisconsin's forestry community and the Silvicultural Guidance Team may be referenced in forest management activities. WisFIRS (Wisconsin Forest Inventory and Reporting System) will be utilized as the primary tool for forest management planning decision. Additional resources, such as forest habitat type classification, soil surveys, and DNR's Best Management Practices for Water Quality guidelines may be utilized in management decisions.

115.1 FOREST CERTIFICATION GROUP ADMINISTRATION

As the certification group manager, the Department of Natural Resources will be responsible for overall administration of third-party certification efforts. The DNR County Forest Specialist will work in close cooperation with the Wisconsin County Forests Association in coordinating this effort. The group manager's responsibilities will include:

- Record keeping of certification
- Coordinating communication with the certification auditing firms
- Reporting and payment of fees
- Processing new entries and departures from the groups
- Internal compliance monitoring
- Dispute resolution

Detail on the certification group administration is maintained in the Public forest Lands Handbook.

115.2 FOREST CERTIFICATION

WASHBURN COUNTY'S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

Our county forests provide a vital contribution to the State and the world by providing economic, environmental and social benefits important to our quality of life. Washburn County believes that accomplishing such sustainable forestry requires a commitment and partnership from all the groups and individuals that benefit from these public lands.

Within the scope of the Wisconsin County Forest Law and the County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Washburn County will implement forestry practices that promote forest sustainability and multiple use of the forest. Management of the Forest will include the

sustainable harvest of forest products; and the protection of special sites, wildlife, plants, water quality and aesthetics.

Washburn County will work in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources and other natural resources groups and agencies in providing sustainable forestry information to those landowners and individuals impacting forest sustainability in Wisconsin. We will support research efforts to improve the health, productivity and management of forestlands, both internally and through cooperative efforts. In managing the Washburn County Forest, a spectrum of forestry practices will be employed to achieve our sustainable forestry objective. Both intensive and more extensive forest management techniques will be used to provide for wildlife, forest products, recreation, water quality, aesthetics and ecosystem maintenance. In keeping with this responsibility, Washburn County is committed to:

1. **Sustainable Forestry Principles** – Practicing forestry to meet the present needs of society without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their anticipated needs. In doing so, Washburn County will manage, grow, harvest and reforest while conserving air and water quality, soil, ecosystem diversity, wildlife, recreation and aesthetics.
2. **Responsible Practices** – To employ practices that are economically, environmentally and socially responsible in the management of the Forest and encourage other forest owners to do the same.
3. **Forest Health & Productivity** – To work cooperatively with the DNR and other agencies in protecting our forests from pests, diseases, wildfire and other damaging agents, in order to improve long-term productivity and forest health.
4. **Unique Sites** – To manage areas of special biological, geographical, cultural or historical significance, in such a way as to preserve their unique qualities.
5. **Legal Compliance** – To comply with applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations in the management of the Washburn County Forest.
6. **Monitoring and Continuous Improvement** – To continually seek improvement in the management of the Washburn County Forest and to monitor, assess and report performance towards the objective of sustainable forestry.

The County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan is the official County Forest authority. The Washburn County Forestry, Parks and Recreation Committee of the County Board enforces the regulations governing the use of the Washburn County Forest.

120.1 ORDINANCES

Chapter 50 of the Washburn County Municipal Code governs the administration and use of the Washburn County Forest. This ordinance can be found in Chapter 1000 and is available at the following link:

https://library.municode.com/wi/washburn_county/codes/code_of_ordinances

The following ordinances will also be considered during planning processes:

1. Washburn County Code
2. Zoning Ordinance
3. Shoreland Zoning
4. Non-metallic Mining Ordinance

125 HISTORY

125.1 STATEWIDE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1927, the State Legislature passed the Forest Crop Law, authorizing counties to create county forests. An opinion of the Attorney General with reference to the Forest Crop Law stated that the counties would be exempt from the owner's share of annual tax. In 1929 the law was amended to create the County Forest Reserve Law. In 1963, several major revisions were made, creating the County Forest Law s28.11. The most notable change was the creation of a permanent program of forests that would be managed in accordance with a 10 Year Comprehensive Land Use Plan developed by the county, with the assistance of the Department of Natural Resources. Several grants and loans were created and remain available to counties to compensate for public uses of these County Forest lands as stipulated in s28.11. To fulfill additional statutory obligations acreage share payments to towns are currently \$.30/acre, and towns with County Forest land receive a minimum of 10% of the stumpage revenue from their respective County Forest each year.

In 2020, thirty counties in Wisconsin owned approximately 2.4 million acres entered under the County Forest Law.

125.2 WASHBURN COUNTY HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Washburn County has a long history of tax delinquent lands. Parcels were entered into either the Forest Crop Law or later into the County Forest Law and often pulled back out of the programs to be resold to private parties. In a number of cases, this process happened multiple times. The following historical information applies only to those lands currently entered into the County Forest Law.

The first entry into, what was at that time called the County Forest Reserve Law, occurred in 1930 when Washburn County enrolled 4,600 acres of lands taken tax deed during 1928 and 1929. These lands were scattered across multiple towns. There were several parcels in this entry that had previously been enrolled in the Forest Crop Law program in 1927, making these some of the first County Forest lands in Wisconsin.

Tax delinquent lands were returned to Washburn County throughout the late 1920's and 1930's and 95,415 acres were entered into the program throughout the 1930's. The largest single entry occurred when 40,772 acres were enrolled in 1933.

Throughout the 1940's approximately 30,000 acres were entered into the Law. These acquisitions were a mixture of tax deed and parcels acquired from the U.S. Government (listed as "swamp lands"), Mosinee Papers, Groton Realty and others. The private parcels may have been gifted, traded or purchase, most likely as an effort to consolidate blocking.

In the 1950's 13,444 acres were put into the program and again these were a mixture of tax deed and other private lands. Throughout this decade, records show a number of "foreclosure sales" as well. Entries began to slow down in the 1960's with only 2,157 acres of some tax deed and some private properties enrolled into the County Forest Law.

In more recent history, the County acquired and entered 3300 acres since 1979. Most recently, the following properties were added to the County Forest:

2003	Izaak Walton League	600 acres	Lake Protection Grant/Lawcon
2003	Bell Timber	80 acres	Lake Protection Grant
2014	Wash. Co Lakes & Rivers	120 acres	Donated to County
2015	Meteor Timber	822 acres	50% Stewardship grants
2019	Wolf Springs Forest	200 acres	50% Stewardship grants
2019	Bjelland Parcel	40 acres	50% Stewardship grants

Washburn County is a member of the Wisconsin County Forests Association, Inc. (WCFA). This Association was incorporated on May 5, 1968 under Chapter 181 of the Wisconsin Statutes, without stock and not for profit. The WCFA Board of directors is composed of fifteen delegates elected from County Forestry Committees who are member of the Association and two members at large.

WCFA provides a forum for consideration of issues and policy that are common to all of the county committees responsible for their respective County forest programs, including those programs encompassed under s. 28.11 and chapter 77, Wis. Stats. WCFA also provides leadership and counsel to County Forest Administrators and forestry committees through regular meetings and active committees on legislative and recreational issues. WCFA develops and implements a strategic plan. The organization's mission statement is as follows:

“Wisconsin County Forests Association provides leadership uniting the interest of the world's largest county forest program while ensuring long term forest health and sustainability.”

125.4 TRENDS

The values and uses of the Washburn County Forest contribute significantly to fulfilling many of society's ecological and socioeconomic needs now and in the future. Changing trends will impact the values and uses of the Forest in coming years.

- Wisconsin's forests are naturally changing due to forest succession. Much of the Washburn County Forest contains forest types that originated in the 1930's. Mid to late successional forests are gradually replacing early successional aspen, birch, oak and jack pine forests. The elimination of most forest fires from the landscape is a primary factor in the trend away from early successional species.
- Conflicts over timber management practices will likely increase as more individuals and groups demand greater involvement in forestry decisions. Practices such as clearcutting and even-aged management will likely be more controversial. Efforts to continue public education on the benefits of sound forestry will continue.
- Levy caps, freezes and other economic constraints will likely result in problems funding Washburn County operations. Revenues from timber operations are likely to be increasingly important to the finances of county government. There may also be initiatives to sell county forest lands for short term economic gain.

- Increasing knowledge and study of flora and fauna, and habitat needs is leading to a growing list of threatened and endangered species. While this may lead to improvements in forest management techniques, mitigating measures will impact and impede forestry and recreational management activities.
- Invasive exotic species pose an ever-increasing threat to County Forests. Oak wilt, garlic mustard, buckthorn, honeysuckle, Emerald Ash Borer and others have gained a foothold in Wisconsin's forests
- Demands for motorized recreational opportunities continues to grow. ATV's and especially UTV's continue to increase in size and horsepower, potentially resulting in increasing damages to the forest resource. It will become increasingly important to balance public demand with recreational opportunities that are environmentally manageable.
- Non-motorized recreational demands continue to grow. While these demands are generally less of an impact on the resource, there are few opportunities to fund trail systems with outside funding sources.
- Increasing extreme weather events and climate change impacts are likely to require more adaptive management techniques.

125.5 PROTECTING THE PUBLIC RESOURCE

As stated in State Statute 28.11 (1), the county forest program enables and encourages “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.”