

Forest Stewardship

Planning Your Forest's Future

Many people plan for the important things in life, such as choosing a career, buying a house, taking a trip, and retiring. Their plans consist of written and unwritten objectives, some of which are more specific than others. Planning helps people to focus their ideas so they can reach their goals sooner than they could without planning. If you are a forest landowner, you should have a plan that organizes your personal objectives into a comprehensive strategy for attaining what you want from your woods. You should have a forest stewardship plan.



Why is it important to have a forest stewardship plan?

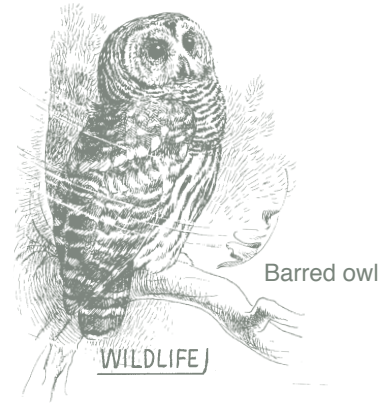
Your forest can offer many benefits, including financial, environmental, aesthetic, and recreational resources. Do you know what mix of benefits is best for you? How do you achieve the best combination? A forest stewardship plan will help you answer these and other questions by identifying what you want now and in the future and by plotting a strategy for meeting those objectives.

Consider for a moment another kind of plan, one for a trip that you have always wanted to take. Suppose your dream destination is Alaska. Do you go by car, plane, boat, or a combination? Where do you stay? What activities are available and what is it all going to cost? You could investigate all of the possibilities yourself or have a professional travel agency plan your trip. Both approaches will get you to Alaska, but the results could be different. You could pick the cheapest way to get there, but this might be the most uncomfortable way to travel. You can spend your time reviewing travel brochures and motel guides to figure out what to see and where to stay. Depending on

your experience and luck, you might satisfy all your trip objectives. But you also might encounter unanticipated travel costs or overbooked accommodations. Attractions you wanted to visit might be too crowded or even closed.

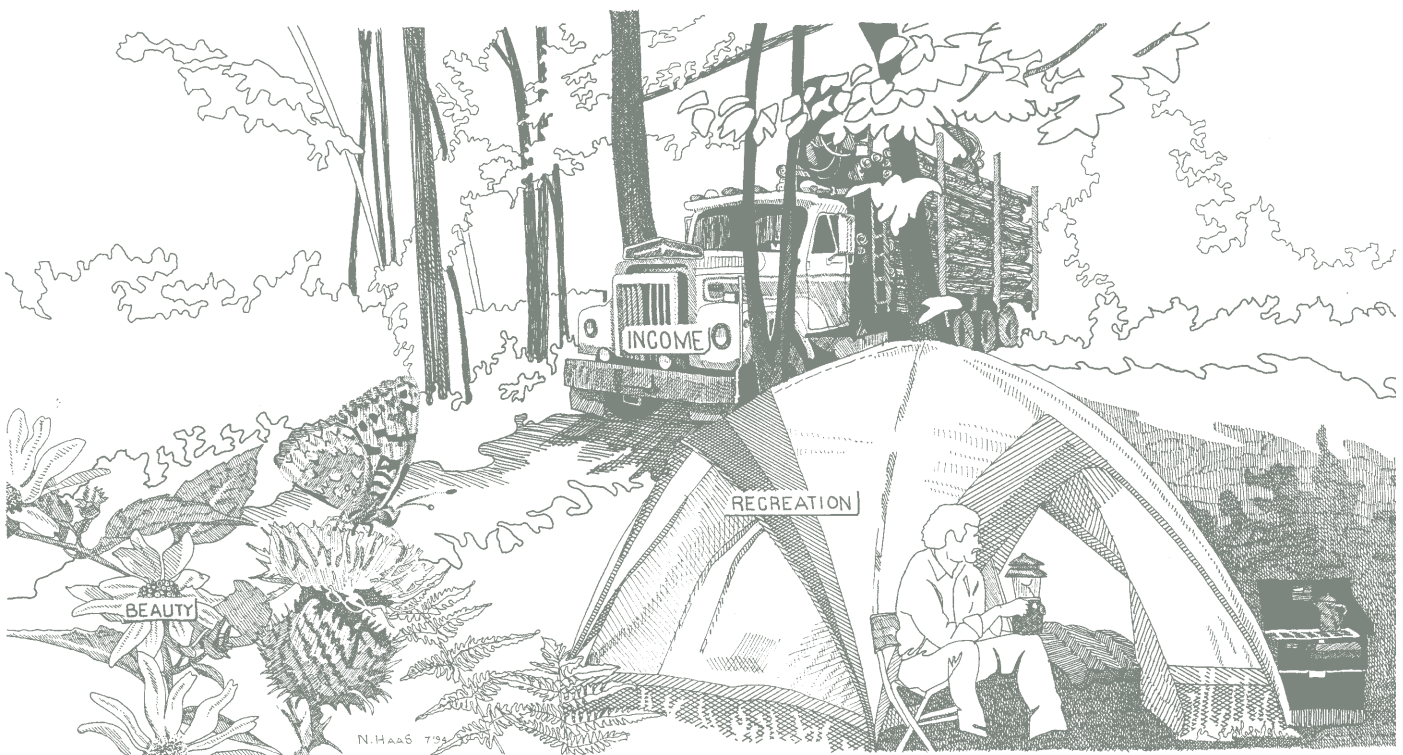
If you let a travel agency do the work (write your plan), they will want to know why you are making the trip (overall goals), what you want to do along the way (immediate objectives), and what you would like to accomplish in the end (long-term objectives). The agent will develop several alternatives, all designed with your wishes in mind, and will outline a complete itinerary that you can follow. Based on the agent's experience and knowledge, the travel package will be focused on meeting your needs and will minimize the chance of unpleasant outcomes, making your trip more rewarding.

A travel package is simply a plan prepared by a competent professional who understands your objectives, knows the available resources, evaluates the alternatives, and recommends the best options for achieving your overall goals. Your forester (or another appropriate natural resources professional) is your forest travel agent, and your forest stewardship plan is your itinerary. Together they help you meet your objectives.



What is forest stewardship?

Forest stewardship is the wise care and use of forest resources to ensure their health and productivity for years to come. Forest stewardship entails looking after your woodlands responsibly and taking action in a manner that recognizes both your rights and the rights of others, as well as the potential impact of activities on various natural resources. Stewardship is an ethic that challenges people to look beyond their immediate personal needs and leave a living forest legacy for future generations. Decisions you make today will affect the environmental, aesthetic, and financial potential of your own and neighboring forestland.



What is a forest stewardship plan?

A forest stewardship plan is your road map to responsible forestry. It is a guide that tells you what your resources are, what condition they are in, and what can be done to help you achieve your goals. It considers your short- and long-term objectives; analyzes the capabilities, limitations, and unique features of your land; looks at how your land fits into the surrounding landscape; and evaluates a wide range of the environmental and financial benefits and consequences of various activities.

A forest stewardship plan differs from a traditional forest management plan, which you might already have. Traditional plans usually emphasize commercially important forest resources, especially timber. Although practicing sustainable commercial forestry is worthwhile, most landowners want more from their forests. In addition to timber and wood products, a forest stewardship plan should consider other resources and aspects of long-term forest care and use, such as soil and water quality, riparian and wetland values, wildlife and fish habitat, outdoor recreation and aesthetics, maintenance of biological diversity (the different varieties and variations of plants and animals), and threatened or endangered species. If you are interested in all of the benefits your forest has to offer, you will need a multidimensional plan.

A forest stewardship plan will describe your forest's present condition, list recommendations, and describe the desired forest condition, or how the forest should look in the future. The plan will consider the types and sizes of trees, wildlife habitat, transportation layout, recreational opportunities, and financial returns.



Wood frog

The written plan is straightforward and easy to follow, but the issues with which it deals are complex, considering the number of resources and potential conflicts involved, as well as the values you possess that direct your own goals. Although a natural resources professional will write the plan, the most important part of this process is you.

The five basic steps in developing a forest stewardship plan are:

1. Seek professional assistance.
2. Determine what you value about your land and your objectives and goals.
3. Inventory and evaluate resources.
4. Formulate a ten-year schedule of actions or deliberate inaction.
5. Review your plan.



Chipmunk

Seeking professional assistance

The first step in developing a stewardship plan is to contact your local Bureau of Forestry service forester. He or she will assist you in gathering background information about your property and will explain all of the benefits and requirements of the Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program. Some of the benefits include receiving resource information, education, and technical assistance to care for your forest wisely; public recognition that you are a forest steward; and the opportunity to participate in available cost-sharing programs, including one that covers much of the cost of writing your forest stewardship plan. (For more information, see *Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship 1: Our Link to the Past—Our Legacy for the Future.*)

Determining your objectives and goals

After explaining the requirements of the stewardship program, the service forester or a trained forest stewardship volunteer will help you complete a questionnaire about past management of your land and your current interests, abilities, and commitment to managing your property. The questionnaire is designed to help you seriously consider why you own forestland and what your objectives are. Why do you own your forest? The list of possibilities is long and might include the following:

- The forest has been in the family for years and you want to continue the tradition.
- You like the beauty of the woods.
- You enjoy the feeling of peace you get from walking through the woods.
- You like watching or hunting animals in your woods.
- You are looking for income now or in the future (e.g., for retirement or college education).

Your long-term objectives should reflect your reasons for owning the land. Some objectives might conflict, while others are mutually achievable. You also will be asked what kinds of activities you will allow on your property. Are you willing to conduct a timber sale, or will you keep the trees and market other products, such as maple syrup? Will you allow public recreation on your land? Will hunting be allowed? What trade-offs are you willing to make to reach certain goals? If you have never considered your forest values and goals before, answering the questionnaire will help you focus your thoughts. What do you want your forest to produce? What do you want your forest to look like? What would you like to leave behind? The service forester and natural resources professional(s) need to know these types of things to develop the best recommendations for the stewardship plan.

After reviewing your values, goals, and objectives, the service forester will suggest the type of natural resources professional you should contact to write your plan. You are free to hire any natural resources professional you choose, including someone already working with you, but if you want to apply for cost-share assistance to pay for the plan's development, you must hire someone from the Stewardship Resource Professional Registry. The service forester will provide a copy of the registry. You can hire more than one consultant from the registry.

If you are enrolled in the Tree Farm® or another forest management program, your forest management plan might be a suitable stewardship plan. The service forester will review your existing plan and determine whether it meets the criteria of the stewardship plan or if modifications are needed.

Once you have hired your natural resources professional(s), it is a good idea for everyone involved in writing your plan to visit any portion of the property that has special meaning for you, such as sites with massive trees or trees with unusual branching patterns, nesting/denning sites, a secluded cove, or existing desirable or undesirable views. Discuss what you want to accomplish, such as protecting the area, creating a view, or letting an open area grow over.

Resource inventory and evaluation

You need to supply the natural resources professional(s) you hire with a topographic map (U.S. Geological Survey map) or plat map with your land and its boundaries clearly marked. It also is quite helpful if you have aerial photographs of your property. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) office in your county often has aerial photos for you to view and order. Service foresters also have aerial photos for each county.

A stewardship unit is a term we selected to encourage landowners to consider their current needs and future opportunities as they work with their forests. It is similar to a forest stand that considers tree age, size, and species composition, but it may involve other values and may not be solely defined by a set of forest boundaries. A stewardship unit could involve wildlife species, scenic views, or personal values.

Using the maps and aerial photos provided, the natural resources professional(s) will delineate stewardship units that reflect vegetation types, land-use history, and unique features. The natural resources professional(s) will then systematically walk through each unit noting (inventorying) the type and condition of the resources.

What exactly gets inventoried?

Here are some examples of resources noted:

- Vegetation: types and sizes of trees, woody shrubs, herbaceous plants
- Landscape features: soils, amount of rocks, slope
- Wildlife: species present, what they eat, where they nest
- Water: streams, seeps, temporary ponds

Similar information will be collected in each stewardship unit, but by knowing what your objectives are, the natural resources professional(s) can evaluate the data in the context of your goals.

At this time, the service forester also will check the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) to see whether any threatened or endangered species are recorded for your property. If a species of concern could be present on your property, a field check might be required and management recommendations will be provided. These will be incorporated into the stewardship plan. The presence of a species of concern probably will not preclude any available activities, but it will require some consideration to ensure that



White-tailed deer

the species is protected for you and others to enjoy.

The resource information is evaluated and forms the basis of the recommendations. These are the best steps the natural resources professional(s) can suggest to meet your goals with your available resources.

Formulating a ten-year schedule

Because you probably will not be able to achieve all your goals right away, you need a step-by-step schedule, starting with a ten-year outlook. This is an action-oriented schedule of projects to meet your goals. The projects will depend on your goals and your resources. They might include restoring an eroded streambank to improve water quality and fish habitat; leaving an old pasture to grow up and provide habitat for songbirds; or harvesting timber to

increase the health and vigor of your forest, generate cash, and improve habitat for certain wildlife species.

Each project will weigh the environmental consequences. As with every choice, there are positive and negative impacts. If you take a trip to Alaska, you might not have the resources to go to Florida that year. If you choose to harvest only small trees on your property to maintain a component of big trees for aesthetic reasons, you probably will not have those wildlife species on your property that live in brushy areas (a negative consequence if you want a variety of wildlife). The effect of each project on the surrounding landscape also will be considered. The natural resources professional(s) should note or explain the pros and cons of each recommendation to you.

You will have to agree with the recommendations. If you do not like them, say so. This is your land, and your goals and values determine what will happen. Give specific

reasons why you do not think a particular suggestion will work or meet your objectives. Tell the resource professional(s) your concerns because the plan can be modified to benefit both you and the forest. After all, this is your plan and you are paying to have it done to your satisfaction. However, no recommendations will violate sound resource management practices or stewardship principles. Detailed prescriptions and project outlines can be developed for each project when you are ready to work on it.

Once you have agreed to the plan and both you and the natural resources professional(s) have signed it, the natural resources professional(s) will send the plan to the service forester to review and determine whether it follows stewardship guidelines. Since the plan contains recommendations and activities that you intend to carry out, it should not collect dust after it is approved.

TEN-YEAR ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

The following example is a shortened version of an activity schedule based on a landowner's objectives to improve wildlife habitat, provide occasional income, and improve access.

YEAR	MANAGEMENT UNIT	ACTIVITY	WORK DONE BY LANDOWNER
2000	All	Design and lay out recreation trails, roads, and stream crossings.	
	3	Stabilize eroding shorelines of stream and revegetate banks.	
2001	1	Pre-commercially thin selected crop trees based on timber quality and mast production.	yes
	5	Create vista near cabin; plant opening with conservation wildlife mixture.	
2002	4	Girdle 5 trees per acre to create snags (dead trees) for wildlife.	yes
	5	Erect bluebird houses in vista and bat houses near cabin.	yes
2003	3	Commercially thin, leaving buffer strip along stream; create brush piles for wildlife from cut tree tops.	
	3	Smooth timber access road for use as hiking/snowmobiling trail; revegetate with shade-tolerant grass seed.	
2004	2	Kill all grapevines and barberry plants in anticipation of regeneration harvest in 2004.	yes
—			
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—			
2009	2	Regenerate unit using shelterwood method.	

Reviewing your plan

Just as road maps need to be updated periodically to be of any use, so does your stewardship plan. Each year, you should review your plan and the activities that are scheduled. You also need to monitor the success or failure of the recommendations. After you have completed several activities, you need to ask yourself, "Is it working? Are the woods what I expected?" Perhaps the plan recommended a timber sale to improve grouse habitat by encouraging aspen to sprout. If, a few years later, there are still no aspen seedlings, then timber harvesting did not help you meet your objective. But to find this out, you must inspect the site. If the planned activities do not work, you should revise the plan

with the help of the service forester or natural resources professional(s).

The monitoring process can be both formal and informal. After a regeneration cut, you (or a natural resources professional) can examine the regeneration and see what type of trees are becoming established, or whenever you walk in the woods, you can look for the results you expected to find. For example, are you seeing more songbirds, wildflowers, or other wildlife you want to inhabit your land?

Change is a constant in life, so the stewardship plan is flexible. Damage caused by an insect infestation or a sudden need for extra cash might require you to change the activity schedule. Contact the service forester to rearrange the activity schedule to meet your needs while adhering to stewardship principles.

Conclusion

Every landowner has different reasons and needs for owning woodland. Without a concise strategy, your forest resources might not meet your long-term needs. A forest stewardship plan will help you to have a rewarding experience caring for and using your forest resources. By deciding to be a forest steward, you will maintain or improve the condition of your woodland. Forest stewardship begins with you. Leave a legacy—forests for life!

Forest Stewardship brochures and bulletins can be obtained from Forest Resources Extension, The Pennsylvania State University, 7 Ferguson Building, University Park, PA 16802-4300; phone 814-863-0401.

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The Forest Stewardship Program is administered nationally by the USDA Forest Service and is directed in Pennsylvania by the DCNR Bureau of Forestry with assistance from a statewide steering committee. The Forest Stewardship Program assists forest landowners in better managing their forestlands by providing information, education, and technical assistance. For more information about program services and publications contact: The Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program, DCNR Bureau of Forestry, P.O. Box 8552, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8552. Phone: 800-235-WISE, or 717-787-2105.

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