

2024 ANNUAL WORK PLAN



RUSK COUNTY FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

GOVERNING COMMITTEE

LAND AND FORESTRY

Phil Schneider – Chairperson

Terry DuSell – Vice Chair

Jerry Biller

John Kalepp

Philip Unterschuetz

FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

Jerrad Macholl-Administrator

Dane Gravesen-Assistant Administrator

Mike Zimmer-Parks Manager

Roy Zubrod -Forester

Jake Moore – Forester

Alex Stauber – Forest Technician

Heidi Woldhuis-Office Manager

WI-DNR LIAISON FORESTER

Derek Jochimsen

Following is the annual Rusk County Forest work plan for the calendar year 2024. The plan gives direction and meaning to the proposed County Forest budget, further defines and supplements the County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and emphasizes the current needs of the County Forest program. This plan is needed to comply with Wis. Statute 28.11(5) and Chapter NR47.75 of the Wisconsin Administrative Rules for the administration of the County Forest Administrator Grant program.

REFERENCES

1. Annual Integrated Planning Meeting held on September 19, 2023
2. Rusk County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2021-2035)



THE RUSK COUNTY FOREST MISSION STATEMENT

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

RCF 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 managed for environmental needs including watershed protection, protection of rare plant and animal communities, and maintenance of plant and animal diversity, these same resources must also be managed and provide for sociological needs, including provisions for recreational opportunities and the production of raw materials for wood-using industries.

Management must balance local needs with broader state, national, and global concerns through the integration of sound forestry, wildlife, fisheries, endangered resources, water quality, soil, and recreational practices. Management will provide a variety of products and amenities for the future through the use of sustainable forest management practices.



RUSK COUNTY FOREST

The Rusk County Forest is 89,252.70 acres in size and includes acreage in twelve townships throughout the county. The following list shows the acreage of forest land by its type classification:

Property Forest Type Acreage				
Forest Type	Forest Type Description	Stands	Acres	Percent of Forested Acres
A	ASPEN	439	22,313	28 %
C	WHITE CEDAR	4	36	0 %
FB	BALSAM FIR	1	6	0 %
H	HEMLOCK	6	150	0 %
MR	RED MAPLE	12	551	1 %
NH	NORTHERN HARDWOODS	527	38,629	49 %
O	OAK	154	11,571	15 %
PR	RED PINE	28	345	0 %
PW	WHITE PINE	9	689	1 %
SB	BLACK SPRUCE	17	1,056	1 %
SH	SWAMP HARDWOODS	86	2,364	3 %
SW	WHITE SPRUCE	19	193	0 %
T	TAMARACK	41	980	1 %
Total:		1,343	78,883	99 %

Non-Forest Type Acreage				
Type	Type Description	Stands	Acres	Percent of Non-Forested Acres
BK	BRACKEN GRASSLANDS	1	21	0 %
CSG	COOL SEASON GRASS	4	16	0 %
G	UPLAND GRASS - *OLD CODE, RECODE	11	56	1 %
GG	TRUE GRASSES - *OLD CODE, RECODE	17	85	1 %
GH	HERBACEOUS VEGETATION - *OLD CODE, RECODE	6	35	0 %
IA	PARKING AREA	2	2	0 %
K	MARSH - *OLD CODE, RECODE	31	1,188	12 %
KB	MUSKEG - BOG	12	312	3 %
KEV	EMERGENT VEGETATION - *OLD CODE, RECODE	7	132	1 %
KG	LOWLAND GRASS - *OLD CODE, RECODE	14	593	6 %
L	WATER	4	520	5 %
LB	LOWLAND BRUSH - *OLD CODE, RECODE	49	1,170	12 %
LBA	LOWLAND BRUSH - ALDER - *OLD CODE, RECODE	43	3,295	34 %
LM	MINOR LAKE	53	1,162	12 %
LMS	MINOR STREAM	2	29	0 %
R	RECREATIONAL	1	16	0 %
ROW	RIGHT OF WAY	70	639	7 %
UB	UPLAND BRUSH - *OLD CODE, RECODE	18	150	2 %
WSA	WETLAND SHRUB - ALDER	2	128	1 %
Z	ROCK OUTCROPS	4	21	0 %
Total:		351	9,570	97 %

The following list shows current and future anticipated forest stand conditions:

Forest Structure - Past, Present, Future			
Timber Text	Acres Past (1977)	Acres Present (2023)	Acres Future
ASPEN	27,627	22,426	22,741
BALSAM FIR	0	6	9
BLACK SPRUCE	826	1,056	1,056
FIR SPRUCE - *OLD CODE, RECODE	1,181	0	0
HEMLOCK	173	151	151
NORTHERN HARDWOODS	37,379	38,451	42,923
OAK	3,814	11,696	7,680
RED MAPLE	0	552	95
RED PINE	838	342	305
SWAMP CONIFER-*OLD CODE, RECODE	26	0	0
SWAMP HARDWOODS	2,521	2,393	2,349
TAMARACK	822	1,025	1,025
WHITE BIRCH	1,080	0	0
WHITE CEDAR	95	36	33
WHITE PINE	0	693	590
WHITE SPRUCE	0	192	94
Total :	76,382	79,019	79,051
BRACKEN GRASSLANDS	0	21	0
COOL SEASON GRASS	0	30	0
EMERGENT VEGETATION - *OLD CODE, RECODE	0	129	129
EMERGENT WETLAND	0	197	0
HERBACEOUS VEGETATION - *OLD CODE, RECODE	189	31	31
LOWLAND BRUSH - *OLD CODE, RECODE	1,179	1,178	1,178
LOWLAND BRUSH - ALDER - *OLD CODE, RECODE	3,278	3,051	3,051
LOWLAND GRASS - *OLD CODE, RECODE	0	306	306
MARSH - *OLD CODE, RECODE	3,094	1,186	1,186
MINOR LAKE	0	1,135	1,120
MINOR STREAM	0	74	0
MUSKEG - BOG	0	314	223
PARKING AREA	0	2	2
RECREATIONAL	0	16	16
RIGHT OF WAY	0	639	583
ROCK OUTCROPS	0	21	21
TRUE GRASSES - *OLD CODE, RECODE	746	84	76
UPLAND BRUSH - *OLD CODE, RECODE	1,285	151	127
UPLAND GRASS - *OLD CODE, RECODE	147	44	44
WATER	0	543	522
WETLAND SHRUB - ALDER	0	359	117
Total :	9,918	9,511	8,732

TIMBER SALE ADMINISTRATION

Timber sale administration is a vital part of effective forest management. The Forestry Department is responsible for the establishment, sale, contract compliance, closeout, and all record keeping on County Forest timber sales. Most RCF sales are sold as combination mill scale for pulp products and woods scale for logs. We will continue to operate the RCF with a full-time Forest Administrator, an Assistant Forest Administrator, two Foresters, a Parks Manager, a Forest Technician, and an Office Manager.

ANNUAL DNR TIME STANDARDS

Each year, the WI-DNR provides Rusk County a certain number of technical assistance hours to use on the County Forest. Every five years, these ‘time standards’ are set and then become the minimum hours the DNR will provide the County during each DNR fiscal year (July 1-June 30). The Forest Administrator meets with various DNR staff during the Annual Integrated Planning Meeting and part of the discussion revolves around the availability of DNR staff and resources for the upcoming year. Currently, the DNR provides a minimum of 2129 hours per year of assistance which represents a small decline from previous revisions. Historically, the DNR has met or exceeded the ‘time standards’ each year. These hours are needed by Rusk County to address the ever-increasing workload on the County Forest.

TIMBER SALE PLANNING AND ESTABLISHMENT

Timber harvests that are properly designed and implemented are vital to maintaining a healthy and vigorous forest. There are many social, environmental, and economic benefits derived from a managed harvest program. Professional implementation of proper forest management and harvest techniques is essential. The timber harvest goal is to produce a sustained yield of forest products using harvest techniques that are suited to the regeneration and growth needs of each forest type. The goal is to develop a regulated harvest in which the same number of acres or the same volume of wood could be harvested each year in perpetuity. Compartment reconnaissance information will be used as a guide to determine stands where timber harvests are needed.

The goal for 2024 will be to establish and market the following number of acres per timber type. These acreage goals are based on the long-term average harvest and will vary from year to year. These acreage goals do not include salvage sales that may occur due to unforeseen circumstances such as insect and disease outbreaks, weather phenomena, and wildland fires.

Long Term Harvest Goals		
Forest Type	15 Year Total (acres)	15 Year Average (acres)
ASPEN	9,435	
BALSAM FIR	6	0
HEMLOCK	59	4
RED MAPLE	285	19
NORTHERN HARDWOODS	28,652	1,910
OAK	7,442	496
RED PINE	231	15
WHITE PINE	164	11
BLACK SPRUCE	822	55
SWAMP HARDWOODS	1,372	91
WHITE SPRUCE	38	3
TAMARACK	671	45
Total:	49,177	3,278

Information about specific timber sale establishment plans may be obtained by contacting the Rusk County Forestry Department directly.

FOREST RECONNAISSANCE

The goal for the RCF is to have all recon less than 20 years old. Currently, 99.81% of all forest reconnaissance is less than 20 years old in the County Forest. Forest reconnaissance is done following the completion of a timber sale and when a stand is physically entered and subsequently re-scheduled for a later harvest date.

RECON Status

	Total Acres	Forested Acres	Acres of Recon by age and % of Total Acres*											
			< 5 years		5-10 years		11-15 years		16-20 years		21-30 years		>30 years	
			(acres)	(%)	(acres)	(%)	(acres)	(%)	(acres)	(%)	(acres)	(%)	(acres)	(%)
	88,530	79,019	33,563	37.91	18,125	20.47	27,780	31.38	8,751	9.88	171	0.19	0	0.00
Total:	88,530	79,019	33,563	37.91	18,125	20.47	27,780	31.38	8,751	9.88	171	0.19	0	0

FOREST PROTECTION

Rusk County Forestry Department will continue to cooperate with the WI-Department of Natural Resources:

1. Continue annual meetings to evaluate County Forest operations
2. Support fire suppression efforts when needed
3. Monitor insect, disease and invasive issues, and take appropriate action when necessary



COUNTY FOREST ROADS

RCF receives state aid money for the maintenance of 23.12 miles of primary roads. These roads are maintained as needed. Plans for 2024 include brushing, grading, culvert replacement, ditching and hauling additional gravel to sustain current traffic levels.

The County Forest has many miles of secondary forest roads that have been built primarily by logging contractors in conjunction with timber sales. These roads are now serving a wide range of uses including the hauling of forest

products, snowmobile trails, horse trails, ski trails, ATV/UTV trails, and hunter/walking trails. Some of the logging roads in environmentally sensitive areas are restricted to motorized use which can lead to erosion, degradation of water quality, and other environmental concerns. These roads are either seeded or allowed to naturally revegetate. Rusk County will continue to protect sensitive areas and address the systemic degradation of water resources as identified by the DNR by managing off-road vehicle use through the newly created Public Trails Ad-Hoc Committee and the Forestry Committee.

LAND ACQUISITION

Lands within the County Forest boundaries or areas of special or unique values may be recommended to the County Board for acquisition as they become available and upon a determination by the County Forest Administrator and the Land & Forestry Committee that ownership of those lands would be beneficial to the citizens of Rusk County. Land Acquisition Funds, and/or State Stewardship Funds will be used.

SURVEYING

We will continue our property line maintenance and establishment. Surveys are generally needed to prevent trespass, eliminate encroachments, or clarify boundaries in order to continue forest management activities.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Snowmobile trails will be maintained by the local snowmobile clubs. The administration of the 318.7 mile snowmobile program will be done by the Forestry Department.

The existing 32.0 miles of ATV/UTV trails will be maintained through ATV clubs with oversight and administration of this program from the Forestry Department. Funding has been secured to develop an additional 12+ miles of ATV/UTV trail in the Blue Hills. Construction on these projects is currently underway and will continue as planned.

The Forest Technician with the assistance of the summer interns will be used to maintain the over twenty public lake accesses. Some cost-sharing State Funds may be available for the repair of existing boat landings.

Continued improvements in all campgrounds will be conducted by the Parks Manager, Forest Technician, and summer interns. The County will also continue to fund the Conservation Patrol Officer position.

Improvements within our parks, campgrounds, and recreation areas will be explored as opportunities arise. Currently, the Rusk County Forest supports organized ATV/UTV, snowmobile, skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking trails (including the nationally designated Ice Age Trail).

WILDLIFE HABITAT PROJECTS

Rusk County Forest will continue to develop and implement projects in cooperation with WI-DNR wildlife personnel. 15+ miles of game trails will be mowed and approximately 40 acres of wildlife openings will be maintained.

MISCELLANEOUS

- A. Issue firewood cutting and miscellaneous gathering permits.
- B. Respond to public inquiries and issues as they arise.
- C. Increase signage in the Forest to identify boundaries, roads, and natural features.
- D. Provide education classes for students and adults and work with other departments for natural resource education opportunities.
- E. Attend all Wisconsin County Forest Association meetings and continue technical training sessions to aid in the management of the County Forest.
- F. Forest Certification: Rusk County will continue its commitment to remain compliant with Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification standards, including taking part in a full recertification audit in the summer of 2024 and making changes as necessary to comply with corrective actions.
- G. Investigate and address easement, land trade requests, and encroachments as they arise.
- H. Carbon Credits: Rusk County will continue its involvement with the American Carbon Registry.



GRANTS & FUNDING

County Forest Administration Grant

Rusk County receives this grant annually. The grant pays 50% of the administrator's salary and up to 50% of benefits so long as benefits don't exceed 40% of the salary.

Wildlife Habitat Grant

Rusk County receives this grant annually. The grant pays \$0.05 per County Forest acre to be used for wildlife habitat development on the County Forest.

County Forest Road Aid

Pays \$351.00 per mile of County Forest Road for maintenance and improvement projects.

County Forest Sustainable Forestry Grant

Funds short-term, unanticipated sustainable forestry projects. Funding is awarded on a competitive basis.

Rusk County Funds

The Forestry Department begins each year with a *negative levy amount*. The department's revenue covers all of its expenses (and more) through timber sales, grant funding, and miscellaneous revenues.