

Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership meeting at DNR in Rhinelander, WI 12/17/13

A meeting was held to establish a landscape scale approach for creating young forest habitat on suitable lands across private and public lands of Wisconsin using a joint venture like process. The meeting was facilitated by Amber Roth with Young Forest Initiative and Golden-Winged Warbler Initiative at Michigan Tech, with assistance from Jeremy Holtz and Adrian Wydeven of WDNR, Dan Eklund with Chequamegon-Nicolet NF (CNNF), and Mike Stinebrink with NRCS. The hope of the meeting was to establish a cooperating partnership for advancing young forest conservation.

Groups and representatives present included:

Rick Horton, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) (by phone); has used matching funds for habitat projects, especially forest openings management and oak regeneration.

Jessica J. (USFWS) (by phone), representing Gary VanVreede

Scott Walters (WDNR) (by phone), concerned about encouraging young forest for upland game birds.

Amber Roth, Upper Great Lakes Young Forest Initiative and Michigan Tech University; coordinating YF projects in WI & MI

Jeremy Holtz, WDNR who has been implementing young forest conservation in northcentral WI.

Adrian Wydeven, WDNR as a forest wildlife specialist is encouraging young forest conservation across the state in suitable areas.

Pat Ruble, Wildlife Management Institute (WMI); interesting in advancing the woodcock management plan through young forest management.

Gary Zimmer, Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS); has for decades promoted young forest management and has many projects going through the Drummer Fund improving habitat and lately involved in alder management with Fecon machine.

Dan Eklund and Matt St. Pierre, (USFS CNNF), interested in promoting young forest habitat on National Forest land and adjacent private and other public lands.

Andrew Rothman, American Bird Conservation (ABC), is especially interested in promotion habitat for Golden-winged Warbler (GWW) throughout its range and especially in Great Lakes region.

Kevin Shepherd, consulting forester, promoting young forest habitat in Minnesota.

Renaë Poole, master student working as a private land coordinator

Jeff Larkin, ABC and Indiana University of PA, is promoting young forest habitat in PA with a conservation coordinator and 3 consulting foresters, especially trained at BMPs for GWW.

Greg Rebman, (NRCS), interested in promoting young forest management as part of NRCS forest habitat conservation.

Bill Horvath, (WVOA), interested in getting more WVOA involved in young forest management and pointed out work being done with New Page.

Doug Fendry, Pheasants Forever (PF), wants to have PF work on habitat projects in N WI near where local chapters are located. PF is able to hire foresters and wildlife biologists.

Tom Krapf (NRCS), looking for opportunities to improve wildlife habitat, and hopes new WHIP money will be available to assist in funding.

Michael Stinebrink & Tom Melnarik (NRCS), indicates funding is available and interested in good projects.

Kurt Waterstradt, (USFWS), sees young forest conservation as an important part of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and expects Gary Vanvree in Green Bay to be the UFWS lead for their agency.

Eric Holm, Price County Forestry and County Forest Association, indicated strong county support for young forest management and listed work being done in Price County, including alder management in cooperation with RGS.

Key individuals not present, Bob Nack (Big Game Section WM in DNR) and Brad Hutnik (Forestry in DNR), Drew Feldkerchner (Natural Heritage Conservation in DNR) Lou George (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation), and forest industry.

General discussion:

Amber Roth gave a broad overview of the Great Lakes Young Forest Initiative. Recent accomplishments in recent years include establishing a network of demonstration areas on public lands in woodcock and Golden-winged Warbler focal areas, training foresters in young forest best management practices for imperiled wildlife species, and landowner and general public outreach events and workshops.

General definition given to young forest was aspen <20 yrs, alder <10 yrs., & stem density of shrubs, seedlings (< 1" dbh) and saplings (1-4.9" dbh) at 450 stems/ acre. Additional considerations include, < 30 ft²/ acre of basal area of trees > 4.5" dbh; and would include, old fields, post-harvest timber, and wetlands; and minimum stand size would be 5 acres.

Thus far GWW, Woodcock, and ruffed grouse have been focal species with landowners. The goals are to improve quantity on private land and quality on public land. Focal areas were

especially designed in areas where potential woodcock and GWW habitat overlap. Areas not considered for young forest management include: areas with erosion problems, vernal pools and ephemeral wetland, high quality hardwoods, where management would negatively impact T & E species, and high quality old growth forest.

Extensive discussion was held on role of oak management. In general the group seemed to agree with focuses on aspen & alder at this time, but also include oak when opportunities arose. Table WI-6 from *Wisconsin Forests 2009* was handed out that showed aspen/ birch at 19.0% of the state forest cover, with 43% over 40 years and 16% over 60 years old. Because of the critical need and limited window of opportunity to actively manage we agreed to focus especially on aspen and try to improve age class distribution.

Table WI-6.—Area of forest land, in thousand acres, by forest-type group and stand-age class, Wisconsin, 2009

Forest-type group	Non stocked	Stand-age class (years)											All classes
		1-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100	101-120	121-140	141-160	161-180	181-200	201+	
White / red / jack pine group	--	269.2	461.6	476.8	188.3	64.9	48.1	17.3	12.8	5.6	5.8	5.4	1,565.7
Spruce / fir group	--	79.3	203.8	394.8	437.7	207.8	76.9	18.3	5.5	4.8	--	--	1,429.0
Other eastern softwoods group	--	--	6.4	8.6	2.5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	17.5
Exotic softwoods group	--	7.6	10.3	6.9	2.3	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	27.0
Oak / pine group	--	103.5	117.7	203.3	133.1	22.9	8.5	--	3.0	--	--	--	592.1
Oak / hickory group	--	321.9	340.9	1,152.2	1,528.6	672.6	152.5	31.8	18.1	3.0	--	--	4,221.6
Elm / ash / cottonwood group	--	123.4	307.8	543.2	446.0	224.0	47.3	14.3	--	--	--	--	1,706.1
Maple / beech / birch group	--	141.5	274.1	927.9	1,590.5	687.3	90.5	32.9	10.1	2.5	--	--	3,757.3
Aspen / birch group	--	851.0	951.6	865.9	439.5	74.6	5.9	--	--	--	--	--	3,188.6
Other hardwoods group	--	30.8	17.1	16.1	5.9	--	2.4	--	--	--	--	--	72.4
Exotic hardwoods group	--	2.1	2.7	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	4.8
Nonstocked	171.1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	171.1
All forest-type groups	171.1	1,930.4	2,894.0	4,595.7	4,774.4	1,954.1	432.1	114.7	49.6	15.9	5.8	5.4	16,743.1

All table cells without observations in the inventory sample are indicated by --. Table value of 0.0 indicates the acres round to less than 0.1 thousand acres. Columns and rows may not add to their totals due to rounding.

Bill Horvath pointed out that landowner's most common complaint was lack of technical assistance. He indicated that DMAP has much potential to get such assistance to landowners.

Jeremy Holtz discussed his experience with a pilot effort to encourage young forest management on private lands in 6 north central WI counties. He discussed challenges in encouraging landowners not involved on any forest management programs. He had only limited success with workshops and not much interest in DVDs. Onsite visits were most effective, but difficult to serve enough landowners. There were also challenges obtaining grants (especially for brush work), and get equipment to sites, and getting the habitat manipulations completed. He indicated the need for help from partners, and having foresters at hand to be able to set forest management plans and set up timber sales.

Tom Krapf discussed the need to make sure some kind of forest plans were in place before timber harvest could occur, but that TSP (Technical Services Providers) could be made available through NRCS.

[Updated info since December, courtesy of Michael Steinbrink: the now-obsolete [as of last week's passage of the Farm Bill] Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract appendix requires that participants "develop and implement all practices identified in a forest management plan for all forestland" that is included in the contract. Wisconsin guidance has been that, "A forest management plan must be developed prior to practice implementation." Additionally, NRCS is responsible for certification of Technical Service Providers (TSP's), including foresters. A TSP forester must write the forest management plan, if financial assistance is going to be provided, through EQIP, for the development of the plan. [And, the landowner must have applied and been approved for an EQIP contract, prior to the development

of the plan.] However, other plans that meet the *NRCS definition of a forest management plan, such as MFL plans, may be used as the justification for EQIP financial assistance towards the implementation of conservation practices that are included in plan. So, for example, a forester hired by the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership may write plans, which may then be used as justification for conducting Forest Stand Improvement, Brush Management or some other conservation practice, using EQIP financial assistance. But, the landowner would not be eligible for EQIP financial assistance to offset the cost of the development of the forest management plan, unless the landowner first applied for EQIP and the plan is written by a TSP.

Greg Rebman indicated that TSPs could develop forest plans so that landowners could be eligible for EQIP funds. Forest management plans*, including MFL plans, may also be used to demonstrate that a conservation practice is needed to address a resource concern, per EQIP rules. * Forest management plan means a site-specific plan that is prepared by a professional resource manager, in consultation with the participant, and is approved by the State Conservationist. Forest management plans may include a forest stewardship plan, as specified in section 5 of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 2103a); another practice plan approved by the State Forester; or another plan determined appropriate by the State Conservationist. The plan is intended to comply with Federal, State, tribal, and local laws, regulations, and permit requirements.

Dan Eklund, suggest the 2 critical needs were enough bodies to do the work, and collective program to stitch limited funds together.

Gary Zimmer indicated a lot of good work is already occurring between RGS and USFWS but more need to be done. RGS has had good success training consulting foresters and can expand in that effort.

Jeff Larkin talked about efforts in PA where in recent years they had 80 contacted and effected >4,000 acres. He indicated that the situation in PA 3 years was similar to what he is seeing in WI and it was exciting to see the interest in the room.

Discussion was held on kind of help needed. Consulting foresters specially trained in BMPs for GWW and woodcock habitat was brought up several times. The need for more contractors to do alder grinding was also expressed. A conservation coordinator who kept track of all landowner contacts and arranged habitat work as done in PA was indicated as an important position.

Tom Krapf indicated he would try to get funding for the young forest conservation through the Great Lakes Initiative.

Discussion was held on viability of aspen market in the future. Products still produced or with some future include toilet paper, siding, fiber, clothing, and biomass. The Sagola, MI Louisiana Pacific mill uses 40 acres of aspen per day. Every aspen sale area is sold in Price County and about 1,000 acres are sold annually.

Discussion was held on what to call our group. While it has some appeal to use the term joint venture, most felt more comfortable to use the term Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership.

Andrew Rothman indicated the scope of the partnership should including a. staffing (consulting foresters & coordinator), b. outreach, c. plans, and d. implementation (funds).

Further discussion was held on positions and work to be done by conservation coordinators and consultant foresters. There was some discussion of possibly creating a conservation coordinator within DNR that possible would also work with DMAP. Several individuals indicated importance of keeping deer habitat management in the mix to encourage landowners.

In summary, these were the identified young forest implementation gaps:

1. Staff capacity
 - a. Coordinator—track landowners, application process, ombudsperson statewide
 - i. Who has oversight/supervisor?
 - ii. Create/maintain/translate toolkit—NRCS GIS
 - iii. Tracking accomplishments—WMI Habitat Tracker?
 - iv. 50% position from NRCS?
 - b. Forester/Plan Writer—well versed in partner programs and BMPs
 - c. Contacts for various areas
2. Plan writing costs?—to be determined
3. Outreach
 - a. Training for non-staff foresters/consultants—follow-up to 1-hr programs
 - b. Materials for landowners and workshop participants
 - c. Marketing--\$30K (e.g. mailings)
4. Implementation costs
 - a. Non-commercial work such as alder shearing--\$alot
5. Mapping—GIS for private lands?

The group agreed to try to meet again in late January 2014. The grant dispersals in RGS and other groups are generally done early in the year, and to apply for grants would require work early in the year. The hope would be at the next meeting to discuss more details of the budgetary process as well as provide opportunity for individuals unable to attend this meeting to also attend and provide input.

Discussion was held on individuals and groups that needed to be represented or contacted. Important groups needed for support included, Great Lakes Timber Producers, Governors Council of Forestry, tribal foresters, DNR Forestry and DNR Natural Heritage Conservation.

Other Potential Partners:

- Forest industry—GLTPA? SFI?
- RMEF—Lou George
- WDNR-NHC, Forestry (involved but not on SC)
- WEDP
- Governor's Council of Forestry
- TNC—Matt Dallman
- The Conservation Fund
- Tribal forests—GLIFWC, WI Tribal CAC

- WI Assn of Consulting Foresters?
- Conservation Congress—Rob Bohmann
- Wisconsin Wildlife Federation—George Meyer

At the end of the meeting all organizations were asked to provide a paragraph indicating their organizations interest in the Young Forest Partnership, and the resources they had available toward the effort.

Partner Action Items:

- Send responses to Amber:
 - 1) 1 paragraph on your organization's contribution potential
 - a. Position funds, grant writing, office/phone/computer, travel, implementation \$\$, outreach\$\$, match\$\$
 - 2) Do you want a representative on the Steering Committee? If so, who is your representative?
 - 3) What are grant opportunities we should apply to?
 - 4) Send suggestions for reps for new partners (see list)
- Kurt Waterstradt—MOU development
- Next meeting:
 - 1) Date—Doodle poll
 - 2) Review responses
 - 3) NFWF Conservation Partners proposal opp.—Deadline?
 - 4) Identify other grant opportunities