

2022

# Annual Report



# WISCONSIN YOUNG FOREST PARTNERSHIP

## VISION

Sustainable wildlife populations through  
landscape-scale conservation.

## MISSION

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership seeks to achieve landscape-scale conservation in Wisconsin for high priority species by **collaborating with like-minded partners**, *promoting and creating young forest habitat through active forest management*, and providing technical and financial assistance to private forestland owners.

# OPPORTUNITIES AND TEAMWORK

For those who don't know me, Allan Braun, I'm the newest member of WYFP's Executive Committee. I'm a native Wisconsinite, born and raised in the eastern part of the state and educated in forestry at UW-Stevens Point. The first part of my career was with the US Forest Service, mostly in other parts of the country, but also with a stint working out of the Park Falls office of the Chequamegon-



Nicolet National Forest. I'm glad to be back in Wisconsin and currently serve as the state forester for NRCS. I'm greatly enjoying working on the private lands side of conservation.

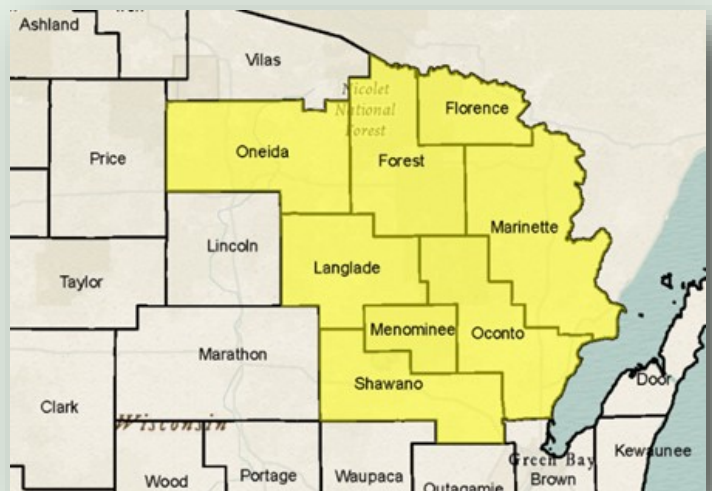
In my brief time in the WYFP Steering Committee, I've been impressed by the number of partners working together to implement meaningful conservation on private lands. From my experiences in other parts of the country, and speaking with fellow NRCS state foresters, we have a lot to be proud of with our efforts in young forest habitat. Many other parts of the country do not have the social buy-in for young forest management that we tend to have in Wisconsin. I think this speaks well to the efforts of the partnership, as well as the pragmatic and open-minded nature of many Wisconsin landowners.

Of course, the nature of young forest habitat is that it does not last long. It's important to continue our strong efforts to maintain current levels of habitat by expanding outreach to more landowners. NRCS staff is already stretched thin doing conservation planning

and implementing cost-share programs, so outreach isn't an area of focus. This is why we rely on partners to inform landowners of our opportunities and send them to our field offices. By working together, we can reach more people than any one of us can alone.

Outreach is going to become even more important to NRCS in the coming years as some new funding opportunities arise. One is in NE WI with the Joint Chiefs' program which will directly impact young forest habitat with increased cost-share funding in the next two years to implement forestry and wildlife projects in the counties below. Another opportunity is increased cost-share funding statewide through the Inflation Reduction Act. While this funding won't directly support young forest habitat, it can support supplemental practices, like tree and shrub planting, that will result in carbon storage.

To achieve the goals of these programs, NRCS needs help from partners like WYFP to help get the word out and increase the number of landowners coming into our field offices. I know you'll help us with these efforts, just as we all help each other achieve our goals. Together we can get more young forest habitat on the ground and great conservation done!



*Counties that are involved in the Joint Chiefs' program.*

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Aldo Leopold Foundation (ALF)  
American Bird Conservancy (ABC)  
Louisiana-Pacific Corporation (LPC)  
Lumberjack RC&D Council  
My Wisconsin Woods (MWW)  
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)  
Pheasants Forever  
Ruffed Grouse Society/  
    American Woodcock Society (RGS)  
The Forestland Group, LLC  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
U.S. Forest Service (USFS)  
Wisconsin Bird Conservation Partnership (WBCP)  
Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA)  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)  
Wisconsin Society of American Foresters (WSAF)  
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation (WWF)





"You need to be aware of what others are doing, applaud their efforts, acknowledge their successes, and encourage them in their pursuits. When we all help one another, everybody wins." – Jim Stovall



# HABITAT IMPACT

*With the partnership's expansion, this report now represents partner's accomplishments from **across the state**.*

**20,228** LANDOWNERS  
CONTACTED

**2,134** SITE VISITS

**143** YOUNG FOREST CONTRACTS

**2,105** ACRES OF IMPROVED  
YOUNG FOREST HABITAT

**302** MANAGEMENT PLANS WRITTEN

**18,924** ACRES OF IMPROVED  
HABITAT FROM PLANS

**24,254** ACRES OF YOUNG FOREST FROM  
COUNTY, STATE, & FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

# PRIVATE LANDS OUTREACH

*The partnership collaborates with partners to target private landowners to provide technical and financial assistance to improve habitat.*

In the beginning of 2022, My Wisconsin Woods (MWW) and DNR Forestry continued their quarterly mailings to private landowners to encourage them to have a site visit with the integrated foresters. Foresters had the option to refer landowners to WYFP after a site visit if the landowner expressed interest in learning more about cost-share funding opportunities, particularly with NRCS EQIP. This referral process occurred in 17 counties that WYFP selected as targeted areas of interest. Once a landowner was referred, WYFP would learn about their property goals and suggest a program or resource to help them achieve that goal. Since these landowners were unengaged on their property prior to reaching out for a forester site visit, the first step is often getting a forest management plan in place. The foresters would assist the landowner if the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP) was a good fit for the landowner. Otherwise, WYFP would work with its partnering staff (ABC, RGS/AWS, NRCS) to assist the landowner in applying for NRCS EQIP.

Mailings were completed by the second half of the year. DNR Forestry began the transition into a new strategic direction where the focus on acquiring unengaged landowners shifted to cultivating the relationships with landowners who recently received walk-throughs. The goal was to encourage landowners to actively manage their forest. This focus goes hand in hand with what WYFP encourages landowners to do. Collectively, WYFP, DNR, and MWW will continue working with landowners and begin planning the best way to conduct outreach going forward to meet everyone's goals and deliverables.



## REFERRALS

*The partnership connects interested landowners to programs and resources that helps them reach their property goals.*

**19** to Natural Resources Conservation Service

**7** to WDNR Forestry

**4** to USFWS Partners Program

**4** to Managed Forest Law Program

**2** to WDNR Wildlife

**2** to WI Forest Landowner Grant Program

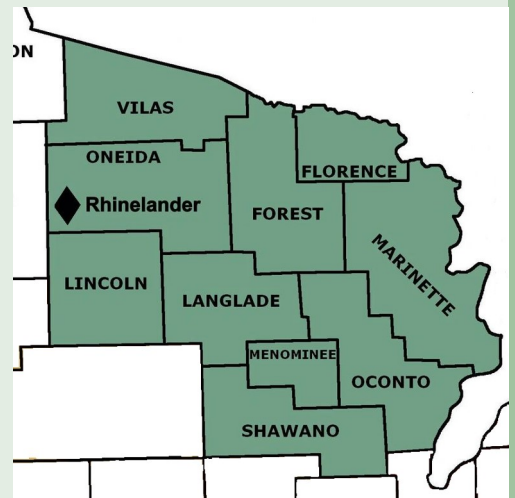
**38** Referrals in 2022

**713** since 2014

# NEW GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

## USFS LANDSCAPE SCALE RESTORATION GRANT FIGHTING INVASIVES AND CREATING HEALTHIER FORESTS

Lumberjack RC&D, which is WYFP's fiscal sponsor, is proud to have been awarded a Landscape Scale Restoration grant from the U.S. Forest Service. The goal is to restore forest lands by working with private landowners to help improve the health of their forests. This may include removing invasive species, planting native species, enhancing wildlife habitat, and much more. The focus is in the nine Lumberjack counties in NE WI shown to the right. Lumberjack is working with WYFP, the WI Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP), and Timberland Invasives Partnership (TIP) to conduct outreach to private landowners and using boots on the ground to continue the fight on invasive species. The LSR grant will provide funds for 3 years to conduct outreach (like the billboards shown below), equipment and personnel time to treat invasive species, and conduct field tours of demonstration sites. These groups look forward to the next couple years to spread the word on healthy forests.



## JOINT CHIEFS' PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTS FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN NE WISCONSIN

The Northeast Wisconsin Forestry and Wildlife Partnership project has been developed through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP) to address wildfire threats, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The JCLRP enables the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Forest Service to collaborate with agricultural producers and forest landowners focused on conservation and restoration efforts. These conservation efforts aim to achieve several landscape-level outcomes, including increasing habitat for species such as golden-winged warblers, brook trout, and monarch butterflies, reductions in storm-caused fuel loads and fire risks, improving water quality and aquatic habitat, and promoting forest health through oak wilt prevention, emerald ash borer mitigation and planting resilient tree species. The project area is centered on the Lakewood-Laona Ranger District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF), and includes portions of the Eagle River-Florence Ranger District, private and Tribal lands in Florence, Forest, Langlade, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto, Oneida, and Shawano counties.

Some of the conservation priorities identified by the Partnership for Fiscal Year 2023 include:

- Forest Management Plans
- Trout Stream Crossing Improvement
- Wildfire Hazard Reduction/Storm Damage Cleanup
- Oak Wilt and Emerald Ash Borer Mitigation

Private landowners can apply for funding through the NRCS service centers where they will determine which funding pool would be best.



# RESEARCH

## **GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS**

Researchers at the University of Maine completed their second field season deploying NanoTags on golden-winged warblers (GWWA) throughout Oneida County. In addition to detecting and resighting individuals that were tagged and banded in 2021, NanoTags were deployed on 44 additional GWWA in northern Wisconsin. This collaborative project has expanded in the last year, with a total of ten research teams collectively deploying 180 NanoTags on male and female GWWA throughout their breeding range in spring 2022.

The two Motus towers erected to maximize GWWA detections in the Rhinelander area were successful in picking up both breeding and migrating individuals, as well as other tagged species outside of the University of Maine's study, such as a Virginia rail, a blackpoll warbler, and an American redstart tagged just months prior in western Jamaica. Return rates for the 35 GWWA tagged in 2021 were fairly high, with 27% of tagged males returning, 10% of tagged females returning, and 34% of control males returning. To boost potential detections, the University of Maine partnered with conservation flying organization LightHawk to take to the sky with telemetry equipment fixed to the struts of a small plane. By flying in transects around Oneida County, graduate student Emily Filiberti was successful in detecting 24 tagged birds from both the 2021 and 2022 cohort. Efforts will be made to reencounter this new cohort of birds for Filiberti's last field season in spring 2023.



# WORKSHOPS

## **THREE LAKES MIDDLE SCHOOL FIELD TRIP**

“If you’re lucky enough to be in the woods, you’re lucky enough.”

If that saying holds true (which we know it does), then these group of sophomores were the luckiest kids in Three Lakes High School. On May 5th they spent the entire day on a field trip with Mr. Statz at their new school forest property on County A. This was the first official school field trip out on the new parcel, and it couldn’t have been a more beautiful day for it!

Mr. Statz is one of the high school science teachers. He organized this field trip with Randee Smith (WYFP Coordinator) and Stefan Nelson (RGS Forest Wildlife Specialist). They split the students into 2 groups to conduct activities with both professionals. Randee lead the students through a simplified version of bird point count surveys and ruffed grouse drumming surveys. Stefan discussed what young forest habitat was and why it is so important for the life cycle of ruffed grouse as they strolled through a young aspen stand.

The sophomores walked at least a couple miles, sat in silence just listening to the woods, and learned about biology and forestry. Oh, and an added bonus to have some fun bird dogs tag along as well! For some of these students, it was their first experience hearing ruffed grouse drum. Many of them said they’d heard the sounds before but never knew what it was. Back at school, they digitally mapped out the drumming surveys and made an estimate of the grouse population in the area. Now that is hands-on science if you ever saw it!



# WORKSHOPS

## **PURDUE UNIVERSITY FIELD TRIP**

In early June, wildlife undergraduates from Purdue University's Natural Resources Summer Camp traveled from Iron River, MI to Rhinelander, WI to get an in depth field tour with Stefan Nelson (RGS & AWS Forest Wildlife Specialist), Randee Smith (WYFP Coordinator), Jarred Brooke (Purdue Extension Wildlife Specialist), and Jon Steigerwaldt (RGS & AWS Upper Midwest Forest Conservation Director). The group sat for an introductory presentation on ruffed grouse from Jon to start the day. They then headed into the Nicolet College's forest to get a better gauge of what a mature forest looks like before traveling to the UWSP Treehaven location to get a tour of the ruffed grouse demonstration area.

During the tour, they visited the prescribed burned area, the forest opening area, and of course focused heavily on the mosaic of young forest habitat. Along the way, the professionals highlighted the unique ecological requirements of ruffed grouse and talked about forestry, forest products markets, and habitat management. A special moment happened when they stopped to discuss brood cover... a mature drummer decided to start drumming (in the middle of the summer mind you), allowing students to not only take management knowledge back to Indiana for the rest of their careers, but the special memory of hearing one of these magnificent birds that are endangered in their state.



# 2022 HIGHLIGHTS

## BRINGING BACK FOREST FEST

Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership is partnering with Trees For Tomorrow to help bring back Forest Fest, which is Trees For Tomorrow's largest one-day public education event attracting more than 1,200 people to Eagle River. WYFP coordinator, Randee Smith, serves on the Forest Fest Reimagination Committee and has been working with event staff and other community partners to help ensure the event meets the mission of Trees For Tomorrow and its many partners, including WYFP and Lumberjack RC&D. Forest Fest attendees of all ages learn about the heritage and legacy of Wisconsin's timber industry, current management techniques and equipment used through demonstrations, exhibits and hands-on activities. The last Forest Fest was held in 2019 with the next Forest Fest scheduled for July 2024.



## GWWA ON FUTURE PROTECTED LAND

Smith conducted GWWA surveys in the Upper Peninsula of MI for a nonprofit group called the American Songbird Management and Recovery. ASMAR seeks to protect, restore and create native songbird habitat. They were interested in purchasing a couple parcels of land and were curious if GWWA were already present and if there were opportunities to enhance the habitat. Smith spent 3 days in June surveying and did find GWWA present! Knowing they are on the land will help ASMAR obtain grants to purchase the land and enhance the habitat for the GWWA.

## FOREST HEALTH WORKSHOP

December 20th, Smith presented about young forest and wildlife during a forest health workshop hosted by the Wild Rivers Invasive Species Coalition. Other topics included invasive species ID and management, forest pest updates, cost-share program opportunities, and a MI forest health update. The workshop had a great turnout with 43 forest landowners and timber professionals attending from both WI and MI.

## GROW NORTH SUSTAINABLE PRIVATE LANDS ROUND TABLE

Smith was invited to represent wildlife on the private lands roundtable on May 18th. She was able to provide community leaders and other local groups insight on what type of landowners seek assistance from WYFP, barriers they have, and suggestions to overcome those barriers.

## NRF GWWA FIELD TRIP

May 11th Smith hosted a Natural Resources Foundation birding field trip with Pat Weber and Linnea Rowse from ABC. Members came to the Northwoods to learn about GWWA conservation and young forest habitat. The group hiked through the Treehaven ruffed grouse demonstration area and observed a variety of bird species, including the GWWA, to the delight of the participants.

## DNR'S NEW WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Aaron McCullough has spent the last 17 years working in Marinette and Oconto on northern forest, barrens, and coastal wetland management. He is excited to be the wildlife biologist for northern Marinette county where he will continue to build on his already long-standing relationships with state/county staff and local conservation partners.



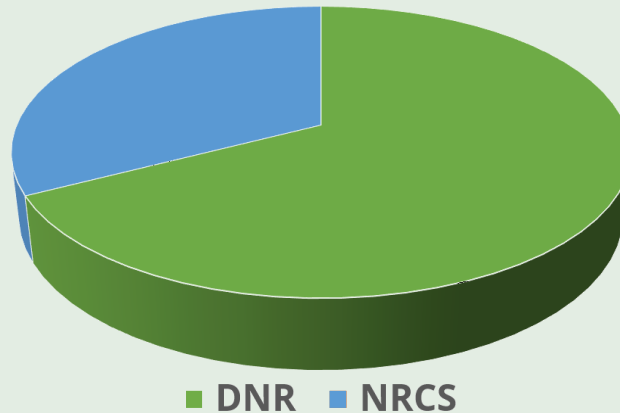
Grant Gagliardi is the new wildlife biologist for Marquette and Green Lake counties. He has experience working in the DNR through his summer internship during college, as an LTE in Shawano, and LTE in Columbia. Prior to this position, he was at Pheasants Forever as a Wetland Easement Biologist where he helped with public outreach, private land consultations, and enrolling interested landowners in the federal government's Wetland Reserve Easement program.



# FINANCIAL

2022 started the second year of the three year contract that WYFP's fiscal sponsor, Lumberjack RC&D, has with DNR and NRCS. The funds support the WYFP coordinator position and operational costs. WYFP is grateful for such wonderful partners to keep the partnership running smoothly to benefit wildlife conservation and the landowners that are such a vital part of our efforts.

## WYFP 2022 Revenue Sources



## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2023

### LANDOWNER OUTREACH

Outreach efforts may look a little differently moving forward as WDNR Forestry transitions into a new strategic direction where the focus on acquiring unengaged landowners shifted to cultivating the relationships with landowners who recently received walk-throughs. WYFP will continue to work with My Wisconsin Woods and WDNR to figure out who their target audience is, what that messaging will be, and how we can use the existing Private Forest Landowners Database to assist in those efforts.

The Lumberjack's LSR grant and the Joint Chiefs program will influence the direction of outreach as well. There will be opportunities to try outreach approaches other than direct mail and to select a different target audiences.

### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Between students, landowners, and professionals, there is never a shortage of opportunities to educate about active forest management and wildlife. WYFP and its partners are known as experts in these fields and embrace events, webinars, workshops, trainings, and anything else that may come their way.



# CREATING WILDLIFE HABITAT TOGETHER



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