

2023

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.



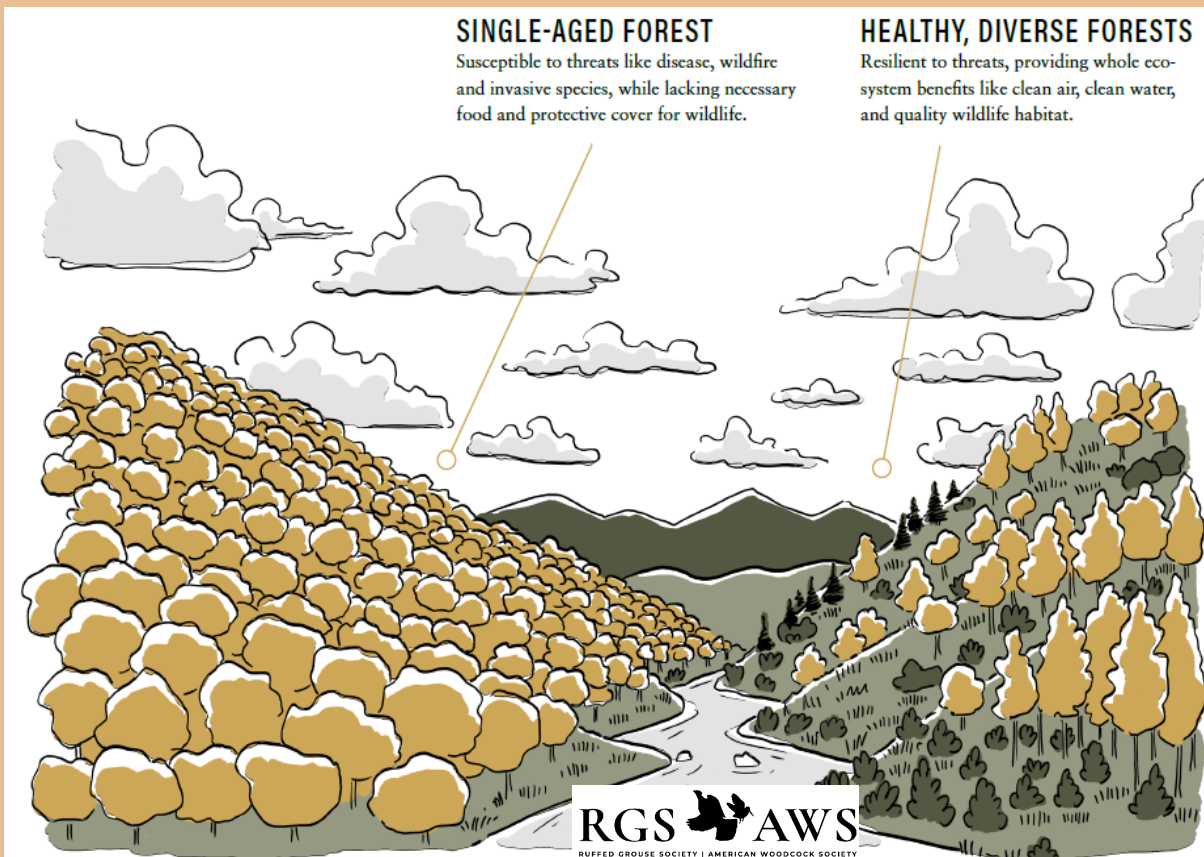
THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

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)

THE BIGGER-PICTURE

A healthy forest is a fully functioning ecosystem. It sequesters carbon, filters water, cleans the air, and provides homes for wildlife.

Current research shows the link between loss of forest diversity and wildlife declines. Grouse and woodcock are the bellwethers and their declines mirror trends for dozens of forest wildlife. Whip-poor-will, wood thrush, numerous warblers and migratory birds, moose, snowshoe hare; the list goes on and on.



As each organization chips away at a few acres here and there, the amount of work that lays ahead may seem daunting. It's important to zoom out and look at the collective, not just the individual parts.

This is why the effort of the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership is so important. Working together from public lands to private lands, partners are able to impact large acreage across the Wisconsin landscape. The impact is even greater than what can be quantitatively shown in this report. Creating more dynamic forests benefit the wildlife we all care so much about, but we also benefit as a community and have the opportunity to leave the forests healthier for future generations.

HABITAT IMPACT

Below are the combined partner accomplishments in Wisconsin. These numbers most likely are a low representation of the true impact.

8,041 LANDOWNERS CONTACTED

1,390 SITE VISITS

81 YOUNG FOREST CONTRACTS

828 ACRES OF IMPROVED
YOUNG FOREST HABITAT

235 MANAGEMENT PLANS WRITTEN

12,589 ACRES OF IMPROVED
HABITAT FROM PLANS

23,370 ACRES OF YOUNG FOREST
FROM COUNTY, STATE, &
FEDERAL ACTIVITIES



PRIVATE LANDS OUTREACH

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

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership strives to assist private landowners and create a beneficial impact on our forested landscape. It is important to meet the landowner where they are at in the process of management—from the very beginning educating them on the importance of managing their forest to the end product of providing funding to implement conservation practices.

LSR GRANT

Work with private lands comes with a nature ebb and flow as grants change over, focus on priority regions shift, and new cooperative opportunities arise. In 2023, the Landscape Scale Restoration Grant that was received by Lumberjack RC&D was an important grant to focus efforts on. WYFP collaboratively worked with Lumberjack, the WI Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP), and Timberland Invasives Partnership (TIP) to create a website as a landing page for the public about the work being conducted under this grant. These groups wanted to educate those landowners at the beginning of the process about forestry, wildlife, and invasive species. Those ready to take action to stop invasives or learn how to get a forest management plan could reach out to the corresponding coordinator to receive assistance. Billboards were put up in the spring and fall of 2023 with various concise messages about forestry, wildlife, being a good land steward, and invasive species. These billboards then directed viewers to the website to learn more. You can view the website at: www.yourforests.com.

MAILINGS

My Wisconsin Woods (MWW) continued to work with WDNR Forestry in 2023 to conduct mailings to 4,429 private landowners encouraging them to sign up for a forester walk-through on their property. WDNR conducted 1,112 walk-throughs in 2023 in result from these mailings, landowner word of mouth, and other referrals. These walk-throughs provide the landowner with an opportunity to get their property/trees evaluated, any of their questions answered, and learn about programs or resources that can assist them. Having this face to face time helps establish a relationship and hopefully makes the landowner more comfortable to reach out for further assistance as they implement practices on their property.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

WYFP continues to educate on young forest habitat and the wildlife that depends on it. One such article, focused on young forest habitat and gave a brief overview of the mission of WYFP, was placed in the Marinette county's March edition of the Northwoods Journal educating thousands of residents. Another article was published in the Great Lakes Timbers Professional Association magazine to discuss young forest and WYFP. Between various partners like the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Bird Conservancy, there were at least 35 outreach pieces created for young forest habitat education!

NEW GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

RGS & AWS SIGNS \$50,000 CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET NATIONAL FOREST STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT

Through this non-timber, short-form stewardship agreement, the U.S. Forest Service is providing RGS & AWS with Bipartisan Infrastructure funding of \$50,000 to evaluate and assess no-bid timber sale payment units on the Great Divide Ranger District of the Chequamegon National Forest. RGS & AWS will add matching funds of \$12,585.

Using this funding, RGS & AWS will complete the assessment of Forest Service timber sales that have gone no-bid. RGS & AWS will do this with the help of a consulting forestry company and develop an implementation plan to present to the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. That implementation plan will include acres to be treated commercially, acres to be treated non-commercially, and the recommendations for road maintenance/rehabilitation to move non-commercial acres towards being commercially treated.

"This is a major step forward for our forest conservation program in Wisconsin. This agreement represents a small dollar amount, but the 1,230 acres of work represents big acreage potential. The project will begin this fall with RGS & AWS conducting assessments of 1,230 acres of Forest Service timber sales that have previously gone no-bid. After RGS & AWS concludes our assessments, we will develop a joint plan with the Forest Service to move these sales towards being bid out and sold commercially to logging contractors. This is everything good that can come out of shared stewardship," said Jon Steigerwaldt, RGS & AWS Great Lakes/Upper Midwest Forest Conservation Director.

Stewardship agreements are one of the primary tools that RGS & AWS is utilizing to help the US Forest Service increase capacity for active forest management and achieve objectives in individual Forest Plans. A stewardship agreement allows RGS & AWS to assist the Forest Service by helping with timber sale establishment and administration. Because the habitat project is administered through a stewardship agreement, 100% of the forest product revenue stays local within the project area to help cover costs and pay for additional habitat treatments completed by service work contractors. Since 2020, RGS & AWS has established similar agreements on the Chippewa, Superior, Ottawa, Hiawatha and Huron-Manistee National Forests in the Great Lakes Region.

RGS & AWS promotes healthy forests, abundant wildlife, and conservation ethics, and envisions landscapes of diverse forests that provide homes for wildlife and opportunities for people to experience them. Ruffed grouse and American woodcock are bellwethers of forest condition; they can only persist in healthy, diverse forests. These same forests clean the air, filter water and support local communities.

RESEARCH

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS — THE FINAL SEASON

Researchers at the University of Maine finished their third and final season of NanoTagging and tracking golden-winged warblers in the Rhinelander area. No tags were deployed on a 2023 cohort, and efforts were primarily focused on reencountering previously tagged and marked individuals. Resight efforts included both ground and aerial telemetry, as well as visual confirmation. Overall, 40% of males NanoTagged in 2022 returned, 45% of control males (just color banded) returned, and 35% of NanoTagged females returned to Oneida County sites. At the completion of the field season, the two Motus stations that were erected at the UW Seed Potato Farm and the Rhinelander Experimental Forest were taken down. One station was loaned to researchers working in Green Bay, and another station was loaned to Kemp Natural Resources Station where it is currently up and running.

Emily Filiberti, the graduate student working on this project, successfully defended her thesis in March. By collaborating and working with researchers throughout the breeding range of golden-winged warblers, she found that females had substantially lower apparent annual survival and return rate estimates than males range wide. This suggests that females experience either increased mortality at some point during their full annual cycle or have a higher dispersal rate than males. She also found no difference in apparent annual survival and return rate estimates between the Great Lakes and Appalachian populations, despite the Appalachian population declining at a steeper rate than the Great Lakes population. This suggests factors other than adult annual survival are likely playing a larger role in the Appalachian population decline, such as reproductive success, juvenile survival, or dispersal. Filiberti's thesis will soon be available through the University of Maine, and a manuscript detailing the NanoTag project is currently in preparation for publication.



WORKSHOPS

Partner staff participated in at least 27 outreach events regarding young forest related topics!

ALDER SHEARING CONTRACTOR WORKSHOPS

When WYFP first started, there were very few business that had machines for shearing alder. RGS owned their own machine to complete shearing projects. As young forest habitat work gained momentum and cost-share funding these practices became more popular, more contractors jumped on board to provide this service to landowners.

WYFP oversees a list of contractors that is passed out to landowners who receive cost-share funding through NRCS and the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Over the years, there has been fluctuations with contractors coming and going.

To ensure that landowners were receiving adequate service and the correct type of habitat was being created, WYFP and the American Bird Conservancy decided to host a mandatory training for all contractors who wished to stay on the list.

Presenters from ABC, RGS, and NRCS covered:

- Alder and aspen shearing implementation requirements
- Golden-winged warbler, American woodcock, and ruffed grouse BMPs
- Understanding cost-share programs and working with landowners
- Equipment and insurance requirements and recommendations
- Using georeferenced maps

There was an in-person workshop held April 3rd and a virtual workshop held April 11th. The virtual workshop was recorded so that any new contractors wanting to join the list can watch. In the end, 22 contractors attended or watched the training to be on the contractor shearing list and have their business information shared with landowners across the state for this type of work.

It's incredible to know that the need to create habitat has also grown and supported businesses in the industry. Now, as an educated and united front, we are off to create more and better young forest habitat in Wisconsin!





2023 HIGHLIGHTS

WOODCOCK RESOURCE GUIDE

The Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Society put together an article discussing how to age and sex American woodcock. This article was featured in the RGS/AWS Covers magazine that is distributed to their members. To view the article, click [HERE](#).

FOREST MANAGEMENT FOR NEOTROPICAL MIGRANT BIRDS WORKSHOP

On May 16th, the Forest Management for Neotropical Migrant Birds workshop was hosted by UWSP Forestry Center for 22 professionals interested in integrating forestry and wildlife together. Randee Smith, WYFP coordinator, presented about habitat elements needed for neotropical migrant birds and focused in on the early successional elements. The morning field trip explored the ruffed grouse demonstration area at Treehaven highlighting the young forest work completed there. Pat Weber, from the American Bird Conservancy, focused his presentation on mid to late succession habitat and ways to benefit these birds. The afternoon tour explored the rest of the Treehaven property to provide examples of the active management conducted there.

WCFA SUMMER FIELD DAYS

The Wisconsin County Forest Association (WCFA) hosted a summer field day in Juneau County on June 21st. Pat Weber with ABC presented to the 80 attendees on the Kirtland's warbler and the important habitat work being done to conserve this declining species.

NATURAL RESOURCES CAREERS PANEL

Trees for Tomorrow hosted a careers panel for interns participating in a new program created in partnership with the USFS and UW Madison Extensions program. The goal was to showcase the great variety of careers in the field and give the students some insight into the importance of these jobs, the day-to-day tasks, and provide any helpful advice as they finish schooling. Randee Smith, WYFP coordinator, joined a wide variety of professionals from non-profits, state, and federal organizations that shared their wisdom to the interns and hopefully aided them in deciphering what career path they'd like to go on.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

WI PRIVATE LANDS MEETING

There once was a time that organizations in private lands work focused on their tasks and sometimes intermingled when their paths crossed. An ambitious group of professionals decided that getting the staff in private lands work together would be beneficial so organizations knew what each other were doing and to better assist landowners. The 2023 annual private lands meeting was held August 15-17 in Amherst Junction and consisted of organization updates, a field trip, and many networking opportunities. WYFP had representation at the meeting to connect with partners and non-partner organizations.

WDNR WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST TRAINING

Continuing education is important for all professionals. WDNR brought together some of their wildlife biologists to learn about program updates and habitat management. Randee Smith was invited to present about WYFP and BMPs for focal wildlife species like the golden-winged warbler and American woodcock.

BRINGING BACK FOREST FEST

From reimagined to implementation, Forest Fest in Eagle River, WI is being planned for 2024! Forest Fest will celebrate all things forestry with a focus on education to the public. This time, it will also be a fundraiser for Trees for Tomorrow to continue the K-12 outdoor education. WYFP and many of its partners are involved in the planning process or participating as an exhibitor.

SCHOOL FOREST FIELD TRIP

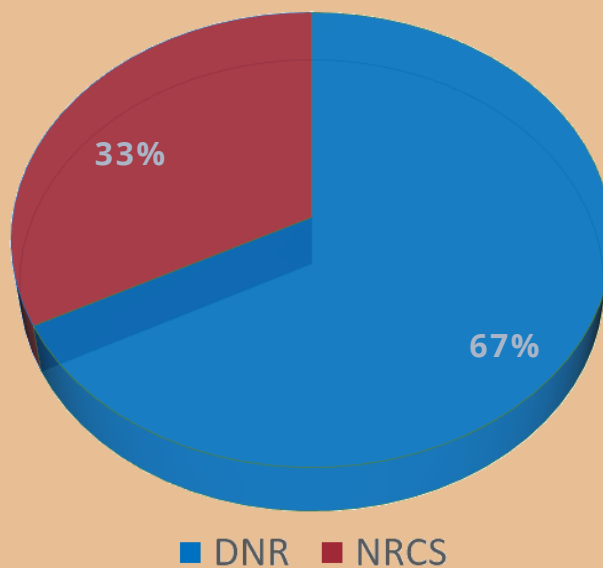
Randee Smith and RGS staff, Stefan Nelson, met the Three Lakes High School students out on their school forest on May 24th to get immersed into the forest for the day. Splitting the students into 2 groups, they conducted activities with both professionals. Randee lead the students through a simplified 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. Learning more about wildlife and these survey techniques gave the students a glimpse into the potential career opportunities in natural resources.



FINANCIAL

2023 started the final year of the three year contract that WYFP's fiscal sponsor, Lumberjack RC&D, has with DNR and NRCS. These contracts will be completed in 2024 and reevaluated for another potential contract. 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 2023 REVENUE SOURCES



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