



2019 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.

A YEAR IN GROWTH

By Jon Steigerwaldt

WYFP Executive Committee member and representative of the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society

2019 marked a year of transition, growth, and strengthening for the WYFP. Adding myself, Jon Steigerwaldt, to the executive committee brought back the full strength of the committee to guide day-to-day operations. Adding new partners broadened the reach and expertise of the partnership, while also strengthening it. The work with partners to re-sign and submit an updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signified partner commitment to the WYFP mission and the importance we all place on delivering transformative changes to young forest habitat.

Lumberjack RC&D and Wisconsin Bird Conservation Partnership (previously Initiative) brought the total number of partners to fourteen. The diversity of partners and their ability to dovetail efforts to reach new audiences and strengthen

common bonds will serve the partnership well in the years to come. The addition of new partners also emphasizes the continued need for young forest habitat and holds hope for the future that we can collectively make a difference.



Hockey legend Wayne Gretzky is credited with saying that: “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.” WYFP partners, public lands managers, and private property owners have to adopt a similar philosophy and learn to adapt to the ever-changing natural resources concerns of today, folding those considerations into maintaining the long view of conservation. Looking to the future of the partnership, the need is now, to continue the hard work and develop an adaptable plan for the partnership to move it into the future of habitat impact.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

American Bird Conservancy (ABC)

Louisiana-Pacific Corporation (LPC)

Lumberjack RC&D Council

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)



*“There is immense power when a group
of people with similar interests gets
together to work toward the same goals.”*

- Idowu Koyenikan



Top photo: Arni Stinnissen
Bottom photo: Bryant Park

HABITAT IMPACT

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership uses partner resources to provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners to encourage young forest habitat. Alongside partners in the public sector encouraging best management practices, WYFP can achieve a landscape-scale conservation approach to deliver young forest habitat across Wisconsin.

2,100

Landowners contacted

14,240

Since 2014

151

Site Visits

556

Since 2014

85

Contracts

522

Since 2014

1,285

Acres of directly improved
young forest habitat

6,071

Since 2014

82

Management plans written

865

Since 2014

7,948

Acres of improved habitat due to
management plans

79,055

Since 2014

11,050

Acres of improved young forest habitat as part of our
County, State, and Federal management actions

97,665

Since 2014

PRIVATE LANDOWNER OUTREACH

Private landowners play a vital role in the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership's ability to achieve landscape-scale conservation. Letters are mailed to individuals to encourage them to contact the WYFP to learn more about ways to improve wildlife habitat on their land.

2,083 Landowners mailed to

4 New counties: Marinette, Oconto, Florence, and Forest

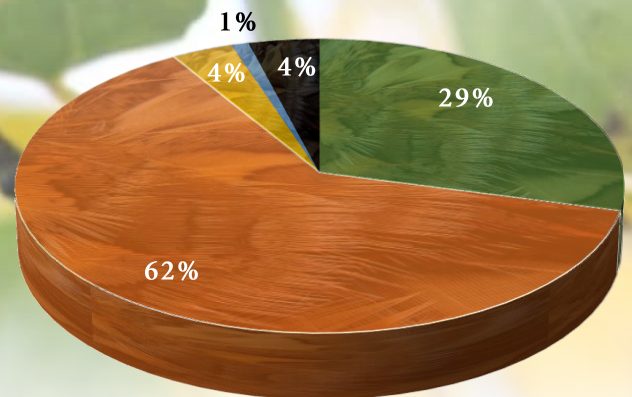
52 Mailing respondents

1.27% Response rate

ACRES BY PLAN TYPE IN 2019

Unengaged landowners without management plans were referred most often to a DNR Forester for a site visit. Landowners already with management plans make good candidates for cost-share programs.

- No Plan
- Managed Forest Law/partial MFL
- Deer Management Assistance Program
- Own plan/with logger
- Unknown



Referrals

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership connects interested landowners to programs and resources that can benefit them, regardless of habitat type.

59 Natural Resources Conservation Service

29 DNR Forestry

23 WI Forest Landowner Grant Program

16 Deer Management Assistance Program

9 Managed Forest Law Program

6 DNR Wildlife Biologist

5 USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

147

Referrals in 2019

481

Since 2014

WORKSHOPS

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER CONSERVATION

To share the beauty of the golden-winged warbler and the wildlife-abundant young forest habitat, the WYFP and the American Bird Conservancy hosted a field trip for the Natural Resources Foundation of WI. On June 8th, 2019, twelve individuals gathered at the Northern Highlands Forest to enjoy a hike through the young forest demonstration area with Randee Smith (WYFP), Callie Bertsch (ABC), Carly Lapin and Skyler Vold (Ecologists with WI DNR).

The goal was to spot the golden-winged warbler (GWWA). For many participants, this was going to be their first time witnessing this little masked bird. Being immersed in this rich habitat was the perfect opportunity to teach about the conservation efforts to reestablish young forest habitat to benefit declining populations of GWWA.

The morning chorus and darting figures through the thick trees brought the group to a stand-still not more than 10 feet from the trailhead. Binoculars raised and ears peeled, this group of

novice birders were surrounded by Canada warblers, mourning warblers, chestnut-sided warblers, and rose-breasted grosbeaks. Even a male ruby-throated hummingbird perched on a snag for the duration of the hike. Further along the trail, the distinct *bee-buzz-buzz* could be heard from a male GWWA singing his heart out to defend his territory, much to the delight of the participants. With the first GWWA under our belt, management techniques could then be discussed as participants strolled through various ages and habitats found throughout the demonstration site. A resting spot along the Wisconsin River provided a unique opportunity to see and discuss DNR habitat work for wood

turtles. Once the group moved to the mid-succession forest, it became eerily quiet with an occasional ovenbird and black-and-white warbler singing in the distance. It was quickly decided to head back to the young forest habitat where two additional GWWA were observed before the field trip wrapped up.

Article by Callie Bertsch—ABC

"I just wanted to say that the guides for this trip were just great. Their skill sets were ideal-knowledgeable, friendly, helpful, enthusiastic. Being in my mid-sixties and a bit cynical, I was very pleased to find such engaged and engaging young people leading an NRF trip.

And of course, the appearance of the golden-winged warblers made the day! Mosquitoes were relatively docile too, but I don't think you can claim credit for that."

- Pleased Participant

WORKSHOPS

GROUSE CAMP 2019

The Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society wanted to create a unique experience to introduce newcomers to the upland hunting culture. The thought of traveling to the unknown, taking a crash-course on pursuing the most challenging upland game birds in existence, and doing so amongst a collective of complete strangers either invokes excitement in a person or completely terrifies them.

With 120 attendees from 17 states and 54 volunteers from 17 RGS/AWS chapters, Grouse Camp was bound to be a success! Morning seminars were designed to give the new upland

hunters the confidence needed to explore the thousands of acres of public land in search of the king of gamebirds, the ruffed grouse.

Many returned empty-handed after hours of hunting, while a few of the fortunate were carrying ruffed grouse or American woodcock. Either way, everyone returned to camp with a smile and a story to tell regarding fine dog work, birds pointed, shots taken, and the occasional bird harvested.

Grouse Camp 2020 is already on the calendar! Check out the Events page on RGS's website.

Article by Sean Curran—RGS



“Whether it’s grouse camp, fishing camp, or deer camp, when you’re at camp all the other worldly distractions fade away. You’re in the moment, amongst friends.”



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership's partners provide staff that play an essential role in the operation of the partnership. The field staff meet with private landowners on their property to discuss their goals and offer recommendations to improve habitat for wildlife and other focuses. Below are some stories and photos from WYFP field staff site visits.

While working with a landowner in Washburn County, Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) Forest Wildlife Specialist Jared Elm developed a plan to implement young forest habitat. The landowner had recently heard a segment on Wisconsin Public Radio about woodcock and the importance of young forest habitat and had an application in for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Enrolled in Managed Forest Law (MFL), the landowner was beginning the timber sale process with some trepidation. However, his hesitation settled after completing some upland alder shearing on abandoned hay fields. The landowner stated, "I was nervous at first, but now understand that wildlife need all kinds of habitat and many that rely on this type of work are declining." Educational opportunities like this is another reason why getting out on the site and connecting with a landowner is so important.



Grouse Tracks



"My most memorable site visit was when I met a landowner during deer season," says WYFP Coordinator Randee Smith. "Little did I know, I was going to experience deer camp for the first time!"

Randee showed up to the landowner's property and was greeted by family and friends of all ages. Some of them already harvested a deer from the 275-acre MFL land. The landowners are big deer hunters, but also interested in improving habitat for ruffed grouse and woodcock.



Four of the landowners went out with Randee into the young aspen to determine if the 25-acre patch was a candidate to use shearing to break it up into different age classes. Startling up four grouse in the short walk proved this aspen was good grouse habitat and could benefit from shearing!

This group of landowners received funding from the USFWS Partners Program for alder and aspen shearing. They were so ecstatic with how the shearing turned out that they went on to

do more on their own. "It is always refreshing to see landowners who are enthusiastic about their land and wildlife," says Randee.

Callie Bertsch, Forest Coordinator with the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), says “My favorite site visits are when we get to see a landowner go through several phases from initial site visit, to planning, to certification, and then finally monitoring.”

One landowner stands out in particular to Callie because of his strong desire to be involved and active in the process. Some examples of him going above and beyond include him imitating the sound of an American bittern to be identified, attending WYFP’s iNaturalist training, allowing monitoring on his property (5 male woodcock were dancing in one 20 acre area!), and hosting WYFP members on his site to show off the one year post harvest progress.



He also had a stewardship plan written for him by the DNR, so Callie’s site visit included DNR, RGS, and ABC all at once. This just goes to show how important these dedicated landowners are to the collaboration of these organizations! After his management plan, he went through NRCS EQIP to get several practices funded including timber management and alder shearing for early successional habitat.



“The personal relationship we develop with a landowner is the best part. It allows for open dialogue, education for both of us, and increased opportunities to get good habitat and conservation on the ground,” says Callie. “I recently saw him again as he was in the office signing up for more programs.”

Photos by Carissa Freeh—PF Biologist



RGS Forest Wildlife Specialist Dan Hoff visited with a Shawano County landowner named Jim. “We discussed Northern Hardwoods management, the importance of yarding areas for whitetail deer, snag retention and timber marking/thinning protocols as well as the MFL program.” Jim already has a forest management plan, but is now looking at enrolling in MFL and is applying for the Conservation Stewardship Program with NRCS.

RESEARCH

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership and its collaborators conduct research to ensure implemented habitat management practices are providing anticipated benefits to woodcock, golden-winged warblers and other young forest species.

LANDSCAPE AND MICROHABITAT INFLUENCES ON OCCUPANCY AND ABUNDANCE OF GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS IN MANAGED HABITATS

To evaluate golden-winged warbler (GWWA) response to forestry-based habitat restoration, a multiple year study was conducted between University of Maine, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Cornell University.

They assessed the response of the GWWA to best management practice implementation across a large portion of its breeding range and factors across multiple spatial scales (i.e., micro-habitat and local landscape) that drive the species use of restoration sites. Point counts and vegetation surveys were conducted in central Appalachian Mountains (457 locations) and western Great Lakes (215 locations).

GWWA response to habitat creation in both regions varied with latitude, longitude, elevation, percent mixed forest, and site age. Future habitat restoration efforts for this species should avoid

landscapes with > 10% mixed forests and forests where GWWA are not locally present.

“Number of growing seasons since management” was the most important micro-habitat (within stand) variable when predicting GWWA occupancy and abundance. As such, managers and biologists should not rush to judge management success.

This study provides early evidence that conservation partnerships like NRCS’s Working Lands for Wildlife and Regional Conservation Partnerships Programs have the potential for success, even where a focal species may be rare. These findings and many more are currently in various stages of publication in peer-reviewed journals. Citations will be shared when available.

Article by Darin J. McNeil and Jeff Larkin





EVALUATING AMERICAN WOODCOCK BODY CONDITION AS AN INDICATOR OF POST-MIGRATION HABITAT QUALITY

The 2019 field season wrapped up this two-year project in which plasma samples were collected from a total of 68 individual male woodcock.



The project had two objectives:

1. Relate body condition as measured by the two plasma metabolites to habitat surrounding singing sites.

Collected habitat variables pertaining to landcover types, topography characteristics, and landscape metrics are used in models to predict body condition. Interpreting model results is still under way, but will give insight into which habitat variable has the most influence on body condition.

2. Validate a handheld meter for measuring triglyceride concentration in the field.

If the meter was found to be able to accurately measure triglycerides in the field, it would eliminate the risks and difficulties associated with handling plasma samples. The meter was found to be precise in its results but was not accurate in relation to results completed in the laboratory.

Chris Roelandt, the graduate student conducting this research, is finishing writing his thesis with an expected defense at the end of April. Chris says, “There are countless individuals that I need to thank for assistance with this project, including WYFP for identifying sampling locations, WI DNR for providing GIS data, and all volunteers that kept me sane during the long field season.”



Information and photos provided by Christopher Roelandt



2019 HIGHLIGHTS

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership and its partners participate in the exciting events below to help promote and advocate for young forest habitat.

RENEWING WYFP MOU

In September, the Memorandum of Understanding between WYFP partners expired after a successful five years. Signatures were collected from 14 of the 17 partners committing to another five years of collaboration to promote and create young forest.

ABC APPLIES FOR RCPP

With the existing five-year Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) set to expire in 2020, American Bird Conservancy (ABC) has applied for another five-year agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The RCPP is unique in that it promotes voluntary, incentive-based conservation practices on private and tribal lands by leveraging both financial and technical assistance. RCPP awards will be announced in March 2020.

ABC's new application will expand beyond creating young forest for woodcock and golden-winged warblers by also creating habitat to benefit the Kirtland's warbler in jack pine ecosystems and sharp-tailed grouse in open grasslands, which are two species of concern that are dependent on specialized habitat. As with the original RCPP, ABC would not be successful in WI without critical support of key partners from WYFP.

WYFP IS ON FACEBOOK

In March, WYFP created a Facebook page to share young forest news, research, and events. Follow us at www.facebook.com/WIYoungForest.

ST. CROIX FORESTRY CONFERENCE

WYFP coordinator, Randee Smith, represented WYFP with a booth during the two-day St. Croix Forestry Conference in March. There were 120 professionals in attendance from three states that gathered to discuss hot topics in forestry.

DMAP WORKSHOP

The Deer Management Assistance Program hosts multiple workshops across the state to educate landowners. A workshop held in Stevens Point focused on financial assistance was a perfect opportunity for Smith to present to the 40 landowners about WYFP, host a booth with educational information, and create connections.

NEW ABC NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

ABC hired Pat Weber as their Natural Resources Specialist based out of Rhinelander. He will work with private forest landowners, NRCS, and other local partners to implement best management practices for focal bird species. With a strong passion for conservation, Pat will make a wonderful addition to the young forest team.

THE WISCONSIN COVERTS PROJECT

Coverts is a three-day woodland wildlife management program for private landowners to learn from professionals in the classroom and in the field.

Thirty-four landowners (representing 27 properties) participated in the August 15-18, 2019 WI Coverts Project workshop at Kemp station in Woodruff, WI. Attendees own or manage 3,502 acres. Participants strongly agreed that they can use what they've learned and that their level of knowledge about managing their woodlands for wildlife has increased.

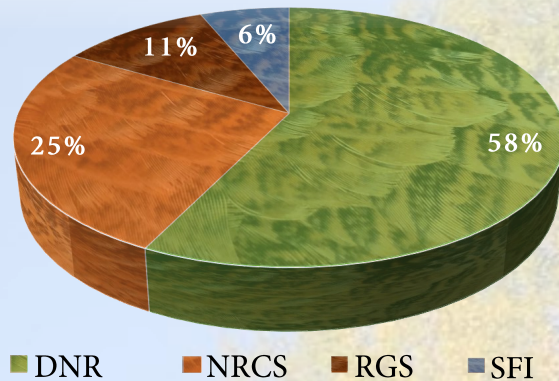


FINANCIAL

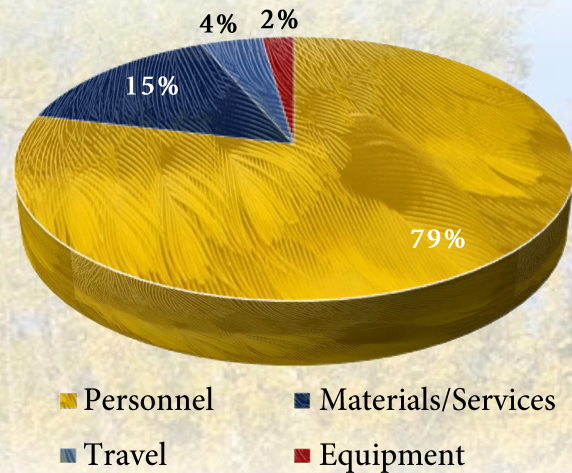
Thanks to the financial assistance from the WI DNR forestry and wildlife management departments and Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership has secured financial stability for the coordinator position until September 2021.

Below are revenue and expenses from 2019.

WYFP 2019 Revenue Sources



WYFP 2019 Expense Categories



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2020

With the help of partners, the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership anticipates a productive and exciting 2020!

COLLABORATION

2020 is going to be the year of collaboration! With so many organizations eager to engage private landowners, there has been some overlap in efforts. WYFP will work more closely with partners and non-partners to efficiently and effectively reach out to private landowners and assist them with cost-share programs.

BRANDING

With an updated MOU and new networking opportunities on the horizon, WYFP will be rolling out a new logo, website, and strategic management plan to guide the partnership into the future.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

WYFP promotes young forest by attending events to educate landowners and professionals. Some opportunities are already lined up like a ruffed grouse presentation to the Learning in Retirement group, a financial assistance workshop with DMAP, and more DNR forester trainings. In addition to the golden-winged warbler field trip for the Natural Resources Foundation, WYFP will also host a woodcock field trip to introduce participants to the wonders of a woodcock courtship display.

CREATING WILDLIFE HABITAT TOGETHER



To learn more, check out our website: www.WIYoungForest.org



us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/WIYoungForest

For more information, please contact:

Randee Smith—WYFP Coordinator

Phone: (715) 966-5160

Email: WIYoungForest@gmail.com

315 S. Oneida Ave, Suite 206, Rhinelander, WI 54501