

COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

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100 **MISSION STATEMENT**

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

County Forest 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 integration of sound forestry, wildlife, fisheries, endangered resources, water quality, soil, and recreational practices. Management will provide this variety of products and amenities for the future through the use of sustainable forest management practices.

105 **GOAL OF THE COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN
(Hereafter referred to as the “Plan”)**

To administer the County Forest program consistent with the mission statement and the purpose and direction of the County Forest Law as stated in s. 28.11, Wis. Stats., giving consideration to input from citizens and groups. The purpose of the County Forest Law being:

“ ... to provide the basis for a permanent program of county forests and to enable and encourage the planned development and management of the County Forests for optimum production of forest products together with recreational opportunities, wildlife, watershed protection and stabilization of stream flow, giving full recognition to the concept of multiple use to assure maximum public benefits; to protect the public rights, interests and investments in such lands; and to compensate

the counties for the public uses, benefits and privileges these lands provide; all in a manner which will provide a reasonable revenue to the towns in which such lands lie.”

This County Forest plan will complement, and should be a part of local comprehensive planning efforts. There are similarities in the considerations of both plans although the County Forest plan is of smaller scale and focused by s. 28.11, Wis. Stats. In an effort to ensure that the values of the Florence County Forest are fully recognized, protected and infused into local planning, the Florence County Forestry and Parks Administrator will provide a copy of the plan and information to other local planning efforts.

110 CHAPTER 100 OBJECTIVE

1. To recognize the authority of the County and State in the administration and development of operating policies on the Florence County Forest.
2. To provide the reader of the plan with background information regarding the County Forest.

115 STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The County Forest Law (s . 28.10 and 28.11 Wis. Stats.) provides the authority to establish, develop, and manage a permanent County Forest Program. (For the full text of the County Forest Law refer to Chapter 900 (905.1).

120 COUNTY AUTHORITY

The County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan is the official County Forest authority. The Forestry & Parks Committee of the County Board (*hereafter referred to as the “committee”*) enforces the regulations governing the use of the County Forest.

120.1 ORDINANCES

The county ordinances that apply to the administration and management of the Florence County Forest can be found in Chapter 900 - 22.

125 HISTORY

125.1 STATEWIDE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

An opinion of the Attorney General with reference to the Forest Crop Law stated that the counties would be exempt from the owner's share of annual tax. The Legislature of 1929 specifically provided that counties were exempt from paying the "acreage share" required of private owners. The legislature of 1931 amended the County Forest Reserve Law of 1929. It provided for the payment of acreage aids to Towns for County Forest land and an additional annual State payment of \$.10 /acre to the Counties for all land within county forests entered under the Forest Crop Law. Counties were required to spend this aid money solely for the development of the county forest. In return for this aid, the state originally collected a seventy-five percent severance tax on the products cut on county forests. This was reduced to fifty percent in 1937 and then to twenty percent of gross sales in 1963.

In 1963, several major revisions were made to the County Forest Law. The most notable change was the creation of a permanent program of forests that would be managed in accordance with a 10 Year Comprehensive Land Use Plan developed by the county, with the assistance of the Department of Natural Resources. The severance tax on harvested forest products still remains at 20% of the stumpage value, although no severance tax is collected if counties do not have a loan balance. A number of grants, loans and shared revenue payments are currently available to counties to help offset any losses in taxes due to public ownership. The acreage share payment to towns is currently \$.30/acre. In addition, towns with county forestland receive a minimum of 10% of the stumpage revenue from their respective County Forest each year. Stumpage revenues have in the state have exceeded \$18,000,000 annually.

Twenty-nine counties in Wisconsin now own approximately two and one third million acres entered under the County Forest Law.

125.2 COUNTY FOREST PROGRAM HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

At one time, much of Wisconsin was covered with magnificent stands of pine, hemlock, and hardwoods on the highlands, and cedar, spruce, and balsam on its lowlands. From 1860 to about 1910, these forests provided raw material for a thriving lumber industry. The need to supply lumber for a growing nation, and the lack of sound forest management, resulted in overharvest of the forests and degradation of the landscape. Immigrants rushed to these newly cleared lands, hungry for a place to farm and build their lives. But in just a few years, the soil productivity declined, catastrophic fires occurred, and many people were forced to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The land was left exhausted and tax delinquent. The Wisconsin County Forest program originated with the taking of these tax delinquent lands.

125.3 FLORENCE COUNTY FOREST HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

The logging industry has been a dominant factor in the economy of Florence County since the days of early settlement. Several logging companies operated extensively in the area. The larger companies had cut over their holdings by the early 1900's and began to curtail operations. Millions of feet of timber had been harvested during the preceding half century, leaving vast cut over areas. The lumbering firms disposed of these cutover barrens as best they could. Most of these lands were sold to speculating land companies, some sold outright to individuals, and the remainder was left to go tax delinquent. Following the "agricultural depression" of 1921, the land boom bubble had burst and the land companies were letting their less desirable lands go tax delinquent in order to retain more desirable holdings.

By the late 1920's, the tax structure in Florence County was in serious difficulty. Florence County was reluctant to take tax deeds on tax delinquent lands, due, in part, to the magnitude of the job, and partially to the political influence of the land companies.

During this same period, the "Great Depression" struck the nation and the situation worsened. Early in the 1930's the County Board realized that some form of action had to be taken, and the tax delinquent lands were acquired by the county in the ten-year period of 1930-1940 in staggering amounts.

Three legislative acts in Wisconsin, during this period, had an important bearing on the future of Florence County:

1. Counties were authorized to create County Forests in 1927.
2. In 1928, Legislative approval was given for the establishment of National Forests.

3. In 1927, the private Forest Crop Law was also passed.

In 1927, the State Legislature passed the Forest Crop Law, authorizing counties to create county forests. In 1928, legislative approval was given for the establishment of National Forests. In 1927, the private Forest Crop Law was also passed. The Florence County Board approved of a Federal Acquisition unit in the western part of the county, in 1934. The County sold this land for the purpose of timber production. This purchase unit, along with others in adjacent counties, was officially designated as the Nicolet National Forest. The first large acquisition, which involved thousands of acres of land, was made in 1935. This unit, to date, has reached approximately 85,000 acres in Florence County. Goodman Lumber Company was also operating in Florence County during the early 1900's and the company, then known as Sawyer Goodman, was also acquiring hardwood lands that were generally considered of little value. They established a large lumber mill in Goodman Wisconsin. As early as 1931, a considerable acreage was entered under the Private Forest Crop Law and aimed toward a sustained yield operation. This acquisition block grew to approximately 42,989 acres in Florence County. Goodman Lumber Company sold in 1957 to the Calumet and Hecla Corporation. Then in 1968 Calumet and Hecla was purchased by Universal Oil Products, which turned the company over to Lake Superior Land Company, a subsidiary of Universal Oil. Lake Superior Land then sold the Goodman mill to Louisiana Pacific and retained the timberlands. Lake Superior Land then leased the timber rights to Louisiana Pacific for 15 years. During this lease period Louisiana Pacific closed the mill and in 1982 sold the mill to Goodman Forest Industries who took over the cutting rights, of the Goodman Timber lands, until 1987. At that time Lake Superior Land hired their own logging crews and began to harvest their lands and sell the cut products on the open market. In 1995 Champion International Corporation purchased the timber from Lake Superior Land. In 2000 International Paper purchased the Champion International Paper Mill in Quinnesec and their timberlands. In 2005, this land again was on the market to be sold. This is by far the largest private timberland owned in Florence County.

Following the adoption of the County Forest Ordinance and the County Zoning Ordinance in 1935, the County Board approved the establishment of a County Forest to be made up largely of County owned lands in the Townships of Fence, Fern, Commonwealth, and Homestead. The Board approved the first entry of 26,841 acres in the same year.

The early phases of development of the County Forest consisted largely of investment in the

planting of open areas; much of the early planting was done by hand, using W.P.A. labor. The first machine planting on the county forest was done in 1957. The first timber sale was established in 1941; and with the exception of 1943, sales have been made annually to date.

125.4 WISCONSIN COUNTY FORESTS ASSOCIATION

Florence County is a member of the Wisconsin County Forests Association, Inc. (WCFA).

This Association was incorporated on May 15, 1968 under Chapter 181 of the Wisconsin Statutes, without stock and not for profit. The WCFA Board of Directors is composed of ten delegates elected from the County Forestry Committees who are members of the Association.

This corporation provides a forum for consideration of issues and policy that are common to all of the county committees responsible for their respective County Forest programs, including those programs encompassed under s.28.11 and Chapter 77, Wis. Stats. WCFA also provides leadership and counsel to County Forest administrators and forestry committees through regular meetings and active committees on legislative and recreational issues.

130 DESCRIPTION OF FOREST

130.1 NATURAL FEATURES

130.1.1 Topography

The Florence County Forest, located in the Northeastern part of the state, lies primarily within the southern extension of the Canadian Precambrian Shield physiographic region(s) of Wisconsin. The topography of the forest and surrounding area has glacial origin. The glaciers eroded hilltops and filled valleys, thus reducing relief. Elevations range from 1038' to 1526' across Florence County. The terrain ranges from rolling to hilly in the western region of the forest to level to moderately rolling in the Eastern part of the forest.

130.1.2 Geology and Soils

Florence County Lies within the Southern extension of the Canadian Precambrian shield. Outcrops are widely distributed and locally numerous in the eastern part of the county. Although there is evidence that sandstones of Cambrian age covered the county millions of

years ago they have long since been removed by erosion. Locally altered and enriched parts of iron-bearing formations near Florence were mined for Iron ore. The iron ore was of moderate iron content, and relatively high phosphorus content. The great variety of minerals in the sandy soils of the county is derived from the wide range of metamorphosed sedimentary and igneous rocks.

The soils of Florence County have been derived largely from the weathering of the glacial drift deposits and show a great variation within relatively short distances, which is characteristic of glaciated areas. Since the glacial period, the soils have been modified by water action, wind, and the accumulation and incorporation of organic material.

Soil types are not generally found in extensive continuous areas of any one-soil classification, but are scattered in smaller groupings. A broad grouping is possible based on similar characteristics.

The eastern one-quarter of the county has soils formed from sandy deposits over glacial drift, largely outwash sand. These soil types are Vilas and Pence. The county forest has primarily Vilas and Hibbing, Ubyly soils on the upland sites, and these range from imperfectly drained sands, muck, and peat on the lowland sites. Soils formed from calcareous, reddish-brown clay loam and silty clay loam glacial drift, largely till, with local sandy coverings lie mostly in the east central part of the county. Associated soil type is Hibbing, Ubyly. Soils formed from silty to loamy deposits overlying reddish-brown acid sandy loam to clay loam glacial drift, largely till lies throughout the county but is concentrated in the central part of the county, from the northern to the southern boundaries of the county. Associated soil types are Goodman, Wakefield, and Iron River, Pence soils. The western one-third of the county has a majority of soils formed from silty or loamy deposits over outwash sand and gravel. These soil types are Stambaugh and Pence. A generalized soil map may be found in chapter 900-3. Detailed soils information is found in the soil survey for Florence County.

130.1.3 Geography

Florence County is the second smallest county in Wisconsin with a land area of approximately 316,956.78 acres, plus another 8,470 acres of water included in lakes and streams. Approximately 80 percent of the land in the county is classified as forestland. The County Forest, which contains approximately 36,351 acres, is the seventeenth largest

County Forest in the state.

130.1.4 Biological Communities

Wisconsin's County Forests are part of a larger landscape and are managed not as sole entities but part of a larger ecoregion. The National Hierarchical Framework of Ecological Units (NHFEU) categorizes Wisconsin into two provinces, the Laurentian Mixed Forest (212) forming the northern half of the State and the Eastern Broadleaf Forest (222). Within each province are sections, subsections and land type associations that further group land into areas with similar geology, soil types, surface water features, wetlands and historic and potential plant communities. The Florence County Forest is encompassed within the Laurentian Mixed Forest province including subsections Northeast Sands and North Central Forest. Land type Associations (LTA's) within the subsections include: Spread Eagle Barrens, Homestead Moraines, Aurora Moraines, and Fern Moraines. LTA's, having common ecological characteristics, allow land managers to better plan for future vegetative communities, wildlife species to feature, and compatible recreation uses.

A biological community is an assemblage of different plant and animal species, living together in a particular area, at a particular time in specific habitats. Communities are named for their dominant plant species. The following biological communities are found on the Florence County Forest:

Northern Forest: contains mixed deciduous and coniferous forests found in a distinct climatic zone that occurs north of the tension zone. Commonly found in the North Central Forest LTA in the Western portion(s) of the County Forest.

Oak Savannas: characterized by open grassland areas interspersed with trees, especially oaks. They are defined as having less than fifty percent of the ground covered with trees. The south central portions of the county forest.

Oak and Pine Barrens: typically occur on sandy soils and are dominated by grasses, low shrubs, small trees, and scattered large trees. Most commonly these are Pine Barrens in northern and southern Wisconsin and oak barrens in the southern and west central parts of

the state. LTA Spread Eagle Barrens in the eastern part of the county contains the barrens communities on the Florence County Forest. This portion of the County Forest was sold to the Wisconsin DNR in the early 2000's.

Wetlands: characterized by soils or substrate that is periodically saturated or covered by water. This community is common across the county forest.

Aquatic Communities: including springs, ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. Common to the county forest, and occurs all across the forest.

130.1.5 Vegetative Cover Types

Approximately 90 percent of the Florence County Forest land base is forested. Forested uplands are comprised of primarily mixed hardwood, aspen, oak, balsam fir, white pine, red pine, jack pine while fir-spruce, lowland hardwoods, tamarack, cedar occupy the forested lowlands. The remainder is classified as non-forested, including types such as roads, open water, wetlands, rights-of-way, grass openings, shrubs and bogs. The different cover types present on the Florence County Forest are detailed under "Forested Communities" in Chapter 800 (820.1).

The entire Florence County forest is located in the eastern one-half of the county. Chapter 900-4 contains maps showing the location of the County Forest.

130.1.6 Wildlife

The Florence County Forest is habitat for wildlife common to Northern Wisconsin. No formal survey has been conducted to identify or inventory the fauna occurring on the Forest. Numerous species of songbirds, waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and mammals frequent the forest. Each species, or interacting group of species, do best under different conditions, ranging from recently disturbed ground to mature forest. A diversity of plant communities is key to providing a niche for a variety of wildlife species. For example, two very popular wildlife species in the county are the ruffed grouse and white-tailed deer. The aspen forest type is recognized as key habitat for these species and is important in maintaining biological diversity across North America. Longer rotation forest

communities, such as unevenaged northern hardwood, similarly provide important habitat for other, less well-known species, such as pileated woodpeckers and northern goshawk.

Permanently sodded, grassy openings within the forest, many originating from old log landings, camps, old burns, or frost pockets are vital components of forest wildlife habitat. An effort is being made to maintain and improve the quality and, in some cases, the quantity of openings. In the winter months coniferous cover, young and mature aspen stands are a major factor for winter survival of white-tailed deer and ruffed grouse.

The county forest is home for a number of endangered, threatened, or rare wildlife. The Osprey, Timber Wolf,... are examples. Management of wildlife is an important component in managing the county forest. A wide variety of wildlife and diverse mosaics of timber types found on the Florence County Forest help to maintain diversity throughout the area.

130.1.7 Rare and Endangered Resources

A review of the Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) indicates the presence of a number of rare species, natural communities and unique natural features on the Florence County Forest. See Chapter 900-10 for a listing of threatened and endangered species in the Forest.

130.1.8 Water

Florence County has 8,470 acres involving 261 named lakes, 5 flowages and 393 miles of streams. Of this total, 302 miles are classified as trout streams.

Within the County Forest boundaries there is a variety of fishery resources. Approximately 7 named and 20 unnamed lakes have all or portions of their shoreline under county ownership. In addition, the county owns frontage on over 6 named trout streams totaling over 10 miles. A map of the surface water resources in Florence County can be found in the Florence County Recreational Map located in Chapter 900-40.

Florence County also has 92 streams and rivers, and 5 lakes which are classified as Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters some examples are:

- Johnson's Creek
- Deadman's Creek

- Popple River
- Pine River
- Lake Edith

Note: An entire listing of the outstanding and exceptional resource waters can be found in Wisconsin Admin. Code NR102.10 and 102.11.

130.2 CULTURAL FACTORS

130.2.1 Recreation

Forest-based recreation has expanded rapidly in recent years in Florence County. Recreational opportunities with developed facilities include parks, beaches, campgrounds, waysides, boat landings, canoe campsites, and snowmobile, all-terrain vehicle, hunter/walking, cross country ski trails, rifle range, and ski Hill. The county forest also provides tremendous opportunities for informal recreational pursuits not requiring developments. These include hunting, fishing, berry and mushroom picking, bird watching, hiking, mountain biking, and sightseeing etc.

130.2.2 Economy

Forest products and spin-off industries derived from the recreational opportunities on the Florence County Forest and the forest products it produces are vitally important to Florence County's economic well being. Forest industry is the #2 ranked employer in the County. Recreation is ranked #1. The quality of life in many counties is heavily dependent on the traditional resources the County Forest provides.

130.2.3 Roads & Access

All Florence County Forest lands are open for public use and for foot travel. In addition to the town and county roads that access the forest, the county also maintains 34.95 miles of County Forest roads. A number of gated or bermed special use trails and roads are also available. Access management remains an issue of importance to various user groups on the Forest. Both motorized and non-motorized recreations are provided for within the Forest. See Chapter 700 for detailed discussion on Forest access.

130.2.4 Education and Research

Education and research continue to be critical components in making decisions that affect our natural resources. As public needs and demands of our forest and its products increase, we must be prepared to assure that sound decisions result. To this end, Florence County encourages and supports research efforts that relate to the forest, and educational opportunities that will promote a better understanding of forest communities and management.

130.2.5 Trends

The values and uses of the Florence County Forest contribute significantly to fulfilling many of society's ecological and socioeconomic needs now and in the future. Changing trends will impact the values and uses of the Forest in coming years.

a. Greater demands are being placed on the Forest by people using it to fulfill their recreational pursuits. The popularity of trails for various uses may lead to user conflicts. In particular, a dramatic increase in the number of all terrain vehicles (ATV's) has caused conflicts on the County Forest. Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized may occur and will require attention as they arise.

b. Demands for timber products are predicted to increase. Increasing forest fragmentation may make it more difficult to access private stumpage.

c. Wisconsin's forests are naturally changing due to forest succession. Most of the County Forest acreage statewide is a result of regeneration or planting from the early to mid 1900's. Mid to late successional northern hardwood forests are replacing the early successional aspen-birch, oak and jack pine forests of the 1940's through the 1970's. The aspen cover type is key habitat for many of the state's premier game species including deer, ruffed grouse, snowshoe hare and woodcock. A declining harvest and a movement away from even-aged species on Wisconsin's National and State forests may place the responsibility of maintaining aspen, birch and jack pine types on the county forests. The county forest system currently has 15% of the State's public land base and 24% of the aspen resource.

d. Conflict over timber management practices may increase as more individuals and groups demand greater involvement in forestry decisions. Practices

such as clearcutting and even-aged management will continue to be controversial. Efforts to educate the public on the merits of these sound forest management techniques will continue.

e. Florence County may experience funding problems, as municipalities are being required to provide more services with less money. Potential losses of revenue from decreased shared revenues and resistance to tax increases may make county timber revenues increasingly important to the finances of county governments. Increasing public pressure to reduce timber harvests on county forests complicates this.

f. Increasing knowledge about a wider variety of species and their habitat needs is leading to a growing list of threatened and endangered species. This could lead to improvements in managing the forest and mitigating impacts to these species. Mitigating measures have the potential to impede recreational and forest management activities. Refer to Chapter 800 (840) for specifics on this subject.

g. Invasive exotic species pose an ever-increasing threat to the County Forest. Gypsy moth, Asian long-horned beetle, garlic mustard, buckthorn, honeysuckle have all gained a foothold in Wisconsin's forests. Refer to Chapter 800 (830.4) for specifics on this subject.

h. The Forest is considered to be an outdoor classroom serving all age groups. It consists of diverse communities with a large variety of plant and animal life giving ample opportunity for study and observation.

130.3 COUNTY FOREST OWNERSHIP

The County Forest is composed of 87 management compartments ranging in size from 100 acres to nearly 920 acres. Within the county forest boundaries approximately 75 percent of the land is county owned with most of the remaining 25 percent in small private holdings. A map of these compartments can be found in Chapter 900-4