

Forest Management Plan Introduction

Welcome to the Montana Tree Farm System forest management plan assistance page. The forest management plan template forms on this page are posted here to assist you with developing a management plan for your property. There are two forms, the Management Plan Template and Stand Analysis Form that have been designed to “walk” you through the steps for writing a certifiable forest management plan. The third form is simply a list of recommendations that you might want to read through to help you think about things that might be incorporated into your management plan.

Management Plan Template

This template, when filled out and approved by a Forest Stewardship Advisor or Tree Farm Inspector is accepted as a complete forest management plan that can be certified as an official Tree Farm Plan that is accepted in the United States and Europe as a certified sustainable forestry management plan and thus allows all of the wood harvested from your property that follows the plan as written to be labeled sustainably harvested wood. Many mills give preference to this kind of wood. In addition, this plan as accepted by the Montana Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) and Conservation as well as the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as a forest conservation plan, which is a primary requirement for receiving state or federal cost share dollars. Please read through the template, and if you feel comfortable filling it out yourself please contact either the Montana Tree Farm Program, Montana State University Extension Forestry Program or DNRC service forestry bureau to have your plan reviewed and certified. If you would like help with your plan there are several options. The first is to enroll in a MSU Extension Forestry Stewardship class, which is a three day course that teaches you how to assess your forest, gives an overview of basic forest management principles and then helps you fill out the forest management plan. Second, you can contact a state DNRC service forester and seek their assistance, although they have a limit on how much time they can spend assisting you. Often they are able to provide you with much basic information and help to complete a plan. Third, you can contact the Montana Tree Farm Program and a Tree Farm Inspector may be able to spend a day with you helping you develop your plan. Finally, you can hire a forestry consultant to help you inventory and develop a forest management plan for you.

The Forest Stewardship class has a nominal fee associated with it to cover the costs of the instructional materials you will receive with the class. 99% of those who have participated in this class have given it very high ratings. If you are interested in your forest, want to learn more about it, and want to figure out what is best for it based on your own desires and knowledge, this course is highly recommended. If you have smaller acreages of 5-20 acres using a Tree Farm Inspector or DNRC Service Forester should enable you to develop you forest management plan. These services are complimentary though when and how much time they can spend with you also depends on the current work load of these individuals. If you have large acreages, complex forest conditions, or want to harvest trees within a short time frame you may want to contact either a professional consulting forester, who will work for you on an hourly or percentage wood volume harvested basis, or a procurement forester for one of the sawmills in your state. Many of the later participate in the Stewardship or Tree Farm program and can help you develop a management plan as well as a harvesting plan if you have timber to

sell. None of the services mentioned is endorsed to be better than the other. Which one or combination you choose to use will depend on your forest and your individual needs. All are represented by skilled professional foresters.

Stand Analysis Form

This form was developed as a supplemental to the management plan template to help you inventory your forest and its major functioning components. It is not needed for you to complete your management plan, but may help you delve into further detail about your forest, especially if you have multiple different forest conditions on your property where each “stand” of trees has unique species and age structures. If you have a basic knowledge of tree species, and can use a calculator and measuring tape you should be able to use this form as a checklist to help you get an idea of what is in each forested stand and what you might want to conserve or improve. Participating in the Stewardship class will certainly help you use this form, though if you are a self learner this form should also work for you.

Forest Management Plan Considerations

Experience is often the best teacher and this form has a list of things to consider for each part of your management plan. The list has been compiled by experienced foresters who over time have had to deal with the issues listed on multiple occasions and therefore want to bring them to your attention. They may or may not be relevant to your property so feel free to use them or ignore these items as you find appropriate.

Summary

Forests are wonderful and constantly changing populations of trees, shrubs, forbs, grasses, animals and microbes. They provide us with clean water and wonderful recreational opportunities as well as wood, the ultimate renewable resource that provides building material, paper, a variety of useful chemicals, and a source of heat for our homes. Managing for these multiple values requires knowledge and a certain amount of artistry that develops from the practice of doing and a love of forests. Learning more about how they function also tends to improve the appreciation you may have for their complexity, and conservation practices you may use to enhance the things you value in them. Some forests may be best left alone while others can benefit from some management practices, especially when natural disasters threaten them. Montana forests have a long history of coping with disturbances such as wildfires and bark beetles, though this also results in landscapes that are devoid of forests for prolonged periods. These cycles can be modified for human and wildlife benefit by appropriate management practices that can create forests that still function naturally within these cycles, but that also have trees that are more resilient to large landscape disturbance processes and thus help conserve forested landscapes. In Montana, forest management has actually resulted in a larger percentage of the landscape with forest on it than any time in the past 2000 years.

We hope you find this information useful,
Sincerely,

Montana State University Extension Forestry
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Montana Tree Farm System