



## **Regional State Forest Management Plans** **Frequently Asked Questions about the** **draft plans and public review period**

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### **What is the purpose of Regional State Forest Management Plans?**

These plans will help the DNR sustainably manage the 4 million acres of state forest lands within Michigan's four ecoregions (Southern Lower Peninsula, Northern Lower Peninsula, Eastern Upper Peninsula and Western Upper Peninsula). Specifically, the plans will provide long-term, landscape-level direction for resource managers that will guide their decisions about activities and treatments on state forest lands. The plans describe resource conditions, resource management practices, levels of timber production, ecosystem health and protection, vegetative management, wildlife and fisheries management, recreational opportunities, and soil and water protection.

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### **Why is this initiative important to the DNR?**

These plans will provide landscape-level direction for the sustainable management of Michigan's state forest land. The goal is to better bridge the planning gap between the 2008 Michigan State Forest Management Plan and the compartment review process that determines forest treatments, while ensuring quality wildlife habitat and ample recreation opportunities that meet the needs of current and future generations.

The plans will help to guide the DNR in its pursuit of two partnering missions: wise use of natural resources and protection of those resources, all for the common good.

### **Why are there three Regional State Forest Management Plans?**

There are four ecological regions (ecoregions) in Michigan, which are based upon criteria such as landform, soils and climate. The state forest is primarily located in the three northern ecoregions (northern Lower Peninsula, eastern Upper Peninsula and western Upper Peninsula), with a small amount located in the southern Lower Peninsula. There is one plan for each of the three northern ecoregions; state forest land in the southern ecoregion is included in the northern Lower Peninsula plan.

### **What is a management area?**

The state forest within each ecoregion is divided into roughly 30 management areas (MAs) – groupings of existing forest compartments that range in size from approximately 17,000 to 105,000 acres. Each MA's boundaries are based on common attributes, like landform and habitat type; proximity to other public ownerships; and proximity to population centers, transportation and wood product markets. The content of Section 4 for each Regional State Forest Management Plan is organized by MAs. Each MA section in each regional management plan will contain the following information:

- A summary of use and management;
- An introduction, including a 10-year projection of harvest acres;
- Management direction for forest cover types, including a description of the current condition, desired future condition, 10-year vegetation management objectives and long-term management issues;
- Fish, wildlife, plant and natural community management issues;
- Forest health management issues;
- Fire management issues;
- Access issues; and
- Other region-specific issues, such as oil and gas development.

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### **How do Regional State Forest Management Plans complement other DNR plans?**

The scope of flora, fauna, watersheds and ecosystems managed by the Department of Natural Resources is so broad that one over-arching plan could never meet each area's needs. Instead, the DNR has over the years developed a comprehensive package of specific, yet integrated, management plans for state forest lands. These Regional State Forest Management Plans have been written to apply concepts and objectives from strategic plans (such as the 2008 Michigan State Forest Management Plan), but on the scale of a state forest management area. The plans are not intended to replace species-specific plans (such as the Strategy for Kirtland's Warbler Habitat Management) or recreation plans (such as the 2008 Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan), but rather to function in unison with them.

### **How are Regional State Forest Management Plans related to forest certification?**

Principle 7 of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification standard and Objective 1 of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification standard require the development and maintenance of a forest management plan. The Regional State Forest Management Plans were written to allow the DNR to meet the requirements of sustainable forest management as defined in the SFI and FSC certification standards.

### **What is sustainable forest management and how is this concept reflected in the Regional State Forest Management Plans?**

Sustainable forest management means managing our forests to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This is achieved by integrating the growing, nurturing and harvesting of trees for products with the conservation of land, air, and water quality, wildlife habitat and aesthetics.

In practice, the sustainability of Michigan state forest timber management is based on a continually updated forest inventory that uses a modified area control method and the balancing of age classes rather than volume control. Area regulation is an indirect method of controlling the amount of timber to be annually harvested on the basis of a balanced number of acres in each of several age classes (up to a set rotation age) of stocked trees, in order to meet management objectives and as a means of ensuring sustained yields over time. For the state forest system, area control is used for management of even-aged stands in the aspen, jack pine and

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some oak forest types. Management of uneven-aged stands such as northern hardwoods is based on a basal area/stocking approach, and a combination of basal area and age class is used in management of red and white pine stands. Most lowland cover types have traditionally been managed as even-aged stands using the area control method, but a portion of the swamp hardwood and mixed swamp conifer cover types are now being managed as uneven-aged stands using the basal area/stocking approach.

Balancing age classes for a forest type is a long-term management objective that can only be achieved over time (typically 50-80 years). During this period, harvest levels in any given year of entry can be higher or lower than the desired long-term area-regulated harvest level as unbalanced age classes (resulting from past over- or under-harvesting) are amended through additional harvest prescriptions. Application of the modified area control method to the effective base of timberland in the state forest ensures that harvest levels are sustainable and comply with forest certification standard requirements.

The concept of area control is applied for each management area in the Regional State Forest Management Plan, and is quantified by the calculation of projected harvest level (in acres) for the following decade for the major and minor cover types within each management area (MA). The projected harvest acres for each MA are also summed for the entire state forest within each region.

### **Will the Regional State Forest Management Plans affect current timber harvest levels?**

Over the next 10 years, timber harvest levels are expected to be slightly higher than current production. The acreage of aspen habitat is not anticipated to appreciably change, while the acreage of oak habitat in many areas should continue to transition to mixed pine-oak cover types.

The Department of Natural Resources is committed to ensuring a consistent, sustainable supply of timber products. Each plan will outline objectives to achieve desired future conditions, often to balance the groupings of trees based on their varying ages (or age-class distribution) for a specific cover type (e.g., aspen), which may take up to many decades to achieve. Because of this uncertainty, harvest levels can vary greatly from year to year. For example, there could be:

- Increased current harvest levels when there are more acres in older age classes;
- Decreased current harvest levels when there are more acres in younger age classes; or

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- More or less the same harvest levels where the age class distribution is relatively balanced (an even distribution of acres across all age classes).

### **Will the Regional State Forest Management Plans affect the amount of wildlife habitat?**

The plans' management objectives seek to balance the age classes for many forest types in each management area (MA); these include forest types – like aspen and oak – that provide vital wildlife habitat. It's important to note that many of the forest types now found on state forest lands are a direct result of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century lumbering era and the past century of recovery. This led to a predominance of natural early successional forest types like aspen and jack pine. Other species (like red pine) were planted in the 1930s and 1950s in large areas of the state forest where natural regeneration wasn't consistently happening.

The DNR plans to apply the principles of the Kotar habitat classification system to maintain tree species on sites where they're best suited to grow. On some sites, this could mean converting from one forest type to another. For example, some red pine was historically planted on sites that are in fact better suited to growing hardwoods. As that pine is harvested, the DNR may choose to regenerate these areas in naturally occurring hardwoods. Other sites better suited to growing pine may currently be growing very poor quality aspen. Following the next aspen harvest on those sites, the DNR may determine it makes better sense to grow pine in these areas.

Overall, the plans do not specify a significant change in the total number of acres for aspen in state forest lands. Conversely, the acres of pure oak stands are expected to gradually decline in the state forest, but oak will remain a major component of many stands, particularly as mixed pine and oak. This approach will provide a more consistent number of acres and habitat conditions in each age class.

### **How were Regional State Forest Management Plans developed?**

Recognizing the need for a landscape-level approach to state forest management, the DNR in 2007 approved the concept and organization of these plans. DNR planning and field staff then developed the boundaries of proposed management areas (MAs) in 2008 and, from August 2008 through May 2009, put the proposed concept and boundaries out for public review. Since then, the DNR planners and ecologists (with input from field foresters and biologists) fully developed the content for each MA and assembled drafts of complete plans for public review and, ultimately, DNR implementation.

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### **How will the Regional State Forest Management Plans be used in the compartment review process?**

The DNR manages the state forest under a 10-year cycle of annual compartment reviews. Each year, DNR personnel evaluate one-tenth of the state forest. The inventory provides key decision-making information for foresters and wildlife, fisheries and other resource managers. The age, health, quality and quantity of trees and other vegetation are assessed to enable DNR staff to make informed decisions. Timber management, wildlife and fisheries habitat, minerals, archeological sites, recreational use, wildfire potential and social concerns are just some of the topics taken into consideration during this review.

Proposed treatments, which may include timber harvesting, replanting and other management activities, are designed to ensure the sustainability of all forest resources. These suggested treatments will be guided by current and desired future conditions, as well as the goals and objectives contained in Regional State Forest Management Plans.

### **Will the Regional State Forest Management Plans affect public access to or use of state forest lands?**

All state forest lands will remain open to public use as outlined by current and future land use orders. In fact, the Regional State Forest Management Plans are designed to further enhance every resident's and visitor's natural resources experience. State forest lands are a major part of the recreation equation and will continue to offer the best in hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, birding and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

It's important to note that legal or contractual obligations or other restrictions on use (due to previous designations or to the funds with which the land was purchased) will continue to apply. This means that:

- Existing lease and land use agreements for oil, gas and mineral extraction or other uses will remain in effect;
- Existing timber sale contracts will remain in effect for their specified time periods;
- Legal treaty rights of tribes will not be changed by these plans; and
- State forest lands that were purchased for the purposes of wildlife habitat (e.g., Game and Fish Fund purchases) will continue to be managed for that purpose.

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### **Do the Regional State Forest Management Plans have any impact on private property?**

No. These plans have been prepared for and apply only to DNR-managed state forest lands. The Regional State Forest Management Plans do not apply to private land that may be adjacent to or surrounded by state forest land, and will not affect any previously existing legal or other formal commitments a landowner has made in regard to his or her property. However, private landowners may find it helpful to learn about and use aspects of the management plans for state forest lands, in order to achieve similar results. These regional management plans do not require or restrict any specific actions by private landowners. Additionally, do not convey public access to private non-DNR lands, subject to existing legal or contractual obligations.

### **What is the process for monitoring and updating the Regional State Forest Management Plans?**

The concepts and actions outlined are part of a 10-year plan, one that will be expertly reviewed along the way – ensuring sound forest treatments in all management units. The plans will be updated when:

- Results of DNR field management reviews and monitoring indicate that the management direction or desired future conditions are no longer valid or have been reached for a specific ecological, social or economic value; or
- An audit suggests changes are needed.

Suggested changes will go through a DNR chain of command for evaluation. The DNR will – depending on the scope or impact of any proposed change – seek public review of proposed changes before implementing any revisions to the Regional State Forest Management Plans or any other affected DNR-administered plans.

### **How do I submit comment on the draft Regional State Forest Management Plans?**

Visit [www.michigan.gov/regionalforestplans](http://www.michigan.gov/regionalforestplans) to review the draft plans. Comments may be submitted by email to [forestplancomments@michigan.gov](mailto:forestplancomments@michigan.gov) or by mail to DNR Forest Resources Division, Forest Planning and Operations Section, P.O. Box 30452, Lansing, MI 48909-7952. The deadline for submission of comments regarding proposed Regional State Forest Management Plans is Jan. 2, 2013.

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### **What if I still have questions?**

If you have questions regarding specific plans prior to submitting your feedback, contact DNR Forest Resources Division (FRD) inventory planning specialists and/or Wildlife Division (WLD) ecologists by email at [forestplancomments@michigan.gov](mailto:forestplancomments@michigan.gov) or by calling one of the following region-specific staff members:

- **Northern Lower Peninsula**
  - Tom Haxby (FRD planning specialist), 231-775-9727
  - Keith Kintigh (WLD ecologist), 989-732-3541
- **Eastern Upper Peninsula**
  - Kristen Matson (FRD planning specialist), 906-293-5131
  - Sherry MacKinnon (WLD ecologist), 906-293-5131
- **Western Upper Peninsula**
  - John Hamel (FRD planning specialist), 906-228-6561
  - Mark MacKay (WLD ecologist), 269-685-6851

You may also contact the FRD forest certification planner at 517-373-1275 or [forestplancomments@michigan.gov](mailto:forestplancomments@michigan.gov).

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