

COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

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CHAPTER 100

BACKGROUND

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100 MISSION STATEMENT

The Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department mission is to adaptively manage our park and forest lands for natural resource sustainability while providing healthy recreational opportunities and unique experiences making Marathon County the perfect place to live, work and play. The mission of the Marathon County Forest is to manage, conserve and protect natural resources on a sustainable basis for present and future generations. These resources, such as those provided by the County Forest, are the base for addressing the ecological and socioeconomic needs of society.

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 and maintenance of biotic diversity, these same resources must also be managed and provide for sociological needs, including the production of raw materials for wood-using industries that provide a wide variety of products fulfilling consumer demands, and provisions for recreational opportunities.

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.”

110 COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

MARATHON COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN POLICY

This plan shall incorporate or reference all official County Forest policies, pertinent county regulations, planning documents and the needs and actions for the period 2021 through 2035.

This plan is the authority for management on county forest lands enrolled under Wisconsin County Forest Law s. 28.11. This plan may be encompassed within required local planning efforts.

110.1 MANAGEMENT PLANNING OBJECTIVES

Management planning shall be used to establish objectives, policies, procedures, rules and regulations, and to promote an efficient and orderly program of development and management of the County Forest in the interest of:

1. Determining needs and priorities.
2. Achieving goals set forth in the mission statement of this plan.
3. Satisfying the statutory requirements of s. 28.11, Wis. Stats.
4. Satisfying requirements for participation in various state and federal aid programs.
5. Providing broad long-term and detailed short-term guidelines for actions.

110.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

Section 28.11, Wis. Stats., places the responsibility for the plan development on the Committee with technical assistance from the Department and other agencies. The County Forest Administrator will take the lead at the committee’s request. During development of the plan public participation should be utilized to provide for public participation throughout the planning process. Public participation and inputs into the plan should consider s. 28.11, Wis. Stats., which governs the County Forest program and provides the sideboards to which this plan must adhere.

Marathon County’s public participation process includes the following:

MARATHON COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN 2021 - 2035
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

<u>STAGE OF PROCESS</u>	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>	<u>TOOLS/TECHNIQUES</u>
Identification of Issues	Consult	On-Line/Mailed General Survey
Draft Development	Inform	Website
All Draft Chapters	Involve/ Collaborate	Forest Citizens’ Advisory Subcommittee Forestry/Recreation Committee Environmental Resources Committee Park Commission (Chapter 900-2000)
Preliminary Draft Completion	Inform/Consult	Public Listening Session at F/R Committee 30 Day Public Comment Period

110.3 APPROVAL OF THE PLAN

Comments received should be given consideration during plan development. The Committee will then present the plan to the County Board for their approval. Following County Board approval, the plan will then be forwarded to the Department for approval of the plan by the DNR required by s. 28.11(5)(a), Wis. Stats.

110.4 DISTRIBUTION OF THE PLAN

Each member of the County Board will have access to a copy of the plan at the time of initial review and approval. Updated official copies will be maintained by the Forest Administrator and available electronically.

Plan and future amendments will be: Electronic versions of the plan or plan amendments or electronic links to the documents will be distributed to the following:

1. Department of Natural Resources - Liaison and County Forest Specialist.
2. Executive Director- Wisconsin County Forests Association.

110.5 UPDATING THE PLAN

Necessary changes in policy and procedure will be incorporated into the plan by amendment as required. Amendments to the plan will require approval by both the County Board and the Department of Natural Resources as stated in s. 28.11(5)(a), Wis. Stats. Changes to official County Forest Blocking map require County Board approval. The annual county board approved work plan, budget, and annual accomplishment report are appended to the plan and do not require official DNR approval. In addition, changes to Chapters 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000 do not require a plan amendment or official DNR approval, with the exception of the official County Forest Blocking map.

110.6 COORDINATION WITH OTHER PLANNING

The development of this plan and any future amendments to this plan will include considerations, and if warranted, participation in other local and regional planning efforts. It is expected these other plans will also consider and mesh their efforts with the County forest plan. Coordination between the County Strategic, Comprehensive and County Outdoor Recreation (CORP) and other is essential for effective land management.

115 FOREST RESOURCE PLANNING

The Committee will utilize procedure as set forth in the Department of Natural Resources Public

Forest Lands Handbook no. 2460.5. Silviculture Guidance, supported by Wisconsin's forestry community and Silvicultural Guidance Team may be referenced in forest management activities. WisFIRS will be utilized as the primary tool for forest management planning decisions. Additional resources such as forest habitat type classification, soil surveys, and DNR's Best Management Practices for Water Quality guidelines may be utilized in management decisions.

115.1 FOREST CERTIFICATION GROUP ADMINISTRATION

As the certification group manager, the Department of Natural Resources will be responsible for overall administration of third-party certification efforts. The DNR County Forest Specialist will work in close cooperation with the Wisconsin County Forests Association in coordinating this effort. The group manager's responsibilities will include:

- Record keeping of certification
- Coordinating communication with the certification auditing firms
- Reporting and payment of fees
- Processing new entries and departures from the groups
- Internal compliance monitoring
- Dispute resolution

Detail on the certification group administration is maintained in the Public Forest Lands Handbook.

115.2 FOREST CERTIFICATION COMMITMENT

Marathon County's Commitment to Sustainable Forestry

Our county forests provide a vital contribution to the State and the world by providing economic, environmental and social benefits important to our quality of life. Marathon County believes that accomplishing such sustainable forestry requires a commitment and partnership from all the groups and individuals that benefit from these public lands.

Marathon County's Commitment

Within the scope of the Wisconsin County Forest Law and the County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Marathon County will implement forestry practices that promote forest sustainability and multiple use of the forest. In the management of the Forest that will include the sustainable harvest of forest products, the protection of special sites, wildlife, plants, water quality and aesthetics.

All forestland owners have a responsibility to provide sound forest stewardship. Marathon County will work in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and other

natural resources groups / agencies in providing sustainable forestry information to those landowners and individuals impacting forest sustainability in Wisconsin. We will support research efforts to improve the health, productivity, and management of forestlands both internally and through cooperative efforts. In managing the Marathon County Forest a spectrum of forestry practices will be employed to achieve our sustainable forestry objective. Both intensive and more extensive forest management techniques will be used to provide for wildlife, forest products, recreation, aesthetics, water quality, aesthetics and ecosystem maintenance. In keeping with this responsibility Marathon County is committed to conforming to the standards of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative ®.

120 COUNTY AUTHORITY

The County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan is the official County Forest authority. The Forestry/Recreation Committee of the County Board 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 Marathon County Forest can be found in Chapter 1005.2. In addition, the following will be considered in planning process.

- County Forestry ordinance (General Code Chapter 16)
- Park and Recreation ordinance (General Code Chapter 19)
- Shoreland, Shoreland wetland and floodplain (General Code Chapter 22)
- All Terrain Vehicles (General Code Chapter 7)
- Non-Metallic Mining ordinance (General Code, Chapter 21)
- Snowmobile ordinance (General Code Chapter 7)
- Marathon County Comprehensive Plan (General Code Chapter 26)
- Forest Citizens' Advisory Subcommittee (General Code Chapter 16)

125 HISTORY

125.1 STATEWIDE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1927, the State Legislature passed the Forest Crop Law, authorizing counties to create county forests. 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. In 1929 the law was amended to create the County Forest Reserve Law. In 1963, several major revisions were made, creating the

County Forest Law s. 28.11. 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. Several grants and loans were created and remain available to counties to compensate for public uses of these county forest lands as stipulated in s. 28.11. To fulfill additional statutory obligations acreage share payments to towns are currently \$.63/acre, and towns with county forest land receive a minimum of 10% of the stumpage revenue from their respective County Forest each year.

In 2020, thirty counties in Wisconsin owned approximately 2.4 million acres entered under the County Forest Law.

125.2 MARATHON COUNTY FOREST PROGRAM HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

At one time, Marathon County was covered with magnificent stands of pine, hemlock, and hardwoods on the highlands, and cedar, spruce, and balsam on its lowlands. These forests provided raw material for a thriving lumbering industry from 1860 to about 1910. As a result of the clamor to conquer the wilderness, supply lumber for housing and factories, and without proper forest management, the forests were nearly completely destroyed. The logging slash was ideal for wildfires which essentially culminated with the Peshtigo fire in 1871, but fires continued into the 1930's. Immigrants rushed to these newly cleared lands hungry for a place to farm and build their lives. But in just a few years, the soils gave out and these people left to seek their fortunes elsewhere, leaving the land increasingly barren and tax delinquent. The Marathon County Forest originated with the taking of these tax delinquent lands.

Marathon County hired a Forest Ranger, Ralph Gunzel, to begin a management program with 160 acres of County Forest Land and nearly 20,000 acres of tax delinquent lands in 1946. Ranger Gunzel established a tree nursery, planted trees on County lands, gave conservation programs in the schools and communities countywide, organized fire crews and fought wild fires, expanded the amount of County Forest Lands, appraised and sold tax delinquent land, developed food patches for game animals, developed forest trails, encouraged responsible public use, checked hunting and fishing licenses, established commercial timber sales, and advocated sound management on County Forest Lands for sustainable production of forest crops including recreation, game, and timber.

By 1956, there were 24,477 acres of County Forests under management. During the first 10 years, 800,000 trees were planted on County lands, and 17 miles of fire lanes were built to protect these plantings from fire.

In 1956 alone, 280 acres were added to the County's forest program. Also in 1956, 2,100 acres of tax delinquent land were sold leaving 6,329 acres of delinquent lands on the tax rolls. By 1961, the last spruce and pine from the County nursery were planted on County Forest Land.

The Marathon County Board approved entry of County Forest Lands under the Forest Crop Law in 1967 and made an initial entry of 21,840 acres. As of December 1, 2023 there are 30,714 acres in the County Forest. Marathon County's Forest was the twenty-eighth County Forest to be entered under the County Forest Crop Law. Today there are 30 County Forests. Previous to entry, County Forest Lands had no comprehensive forest plan.

125.3 WISCONSIN COUNTY FORESTS ASSOCIATION

Marathon 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 fifteen delegates elected from County Forestry Committees who are members of the Association and two members at large.

WCFA 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. WCFA develops and implements a strategic plan. The organization's mission statement is as follows:

Wisconsin County Forests Association provides leadership uniting the interests of the world's largest county forest program while ensuring long term forest health and sustainability.

125.4 TRENDS

The values and uses of the Marathon 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.

- 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. The county forest system currently has 15% of the State's public land base and 24% of the aspen resource.

- Conflict over timber management practices will likely continue to 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.
- Marathon 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. This is complicated by increasing public pressure to reduce timber harvests on county forests.
- 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.
- Invasive exotic species pose an ever-increasing threat to the County Forest. Spongy moth, Asian long-horned beetle, garlic mustard, buckthorn, honeysuckle have all gained a foothold in Wisconsin's forests. Refer to Chapter 600 (610) for specifics on this subject.
- 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.
- Greater demands are being placed on the County Forest by people using it to fulfill their recreational pursuits. The popularity of trails for various uses has led to competition for available resources especially at Nine Mile Forest. Balancing competing uses will require the user groups to compromise and share trails to prevent conflicts.
- Lands open to public use continue to decline in Marathon County. Industrial Forest Crop Law Lands once open to public hunting are slowly being sold and subdivided, most often no longer available to the public. When considering the Managed Forest Law, most private landowners elect to enter their lands as "closed to the public" which does not provide for public recreational use. Acquisition of lands to increase County Forest ownership will be important to replace these lands that were once open to the public.

125.5 PROTECTING THE PUBLIC RESOURCE

As stated in State Statute 28.11(1), the county forest program enables and encourages “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.”