

POLK COUNTY FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

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100 **MISSION STATEMENT**

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

PCF 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 a 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.”

Each state agency, whenever it administers a law under which a local governmental unit prepares a plan, is encouraged to design its planning requirements in a manner that makes it practical for local governmental units to incorporate these plans into local comprehensive plans prepared under s. 66.1001 Wis. Stats (i.e. “Smart Growth” planning) s. 1.13(3) Wis. Stats. This County Forest plan may complement, and might be made part of local comprehensive planning efforts (e.g. Smart growth). 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 Polk County Forest are fully recognized, protected and infused into local planning, the County Forest administrator will keep in contact with local planning efforts at the County and Township level.

110 **CHAPTER 100 OBJECTIVE**

1. To recognize the authority of the County and State in the administration and development of operating policies on the Polk 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 28.11 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.

120 COUNTY AUTHORITY

The County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan is the official County Forest authority. The Property, Forestry, and Recreational 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 Polk County Forest can be found in Chapter 900.

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. 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 forest land receive a minimum of 10% of the stumpage revenue from their respective County Forest each year. In Polk County, Towns with county forest land receive 30% of the stumpage revenue. Stumpage revenues exceed \$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 soils gave out, 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 POLK COUNTY FOREST HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

Polk County made its first resolution to enter non-revenue (tax delinquent) forest lands under the Forest Crop program on November 19, 1935. The majority of this land was cutover and /or burned over forestland but some former crop or pasture land was included. The first County Forest ordinance was passed on November 13, 1936. The first state aid payment was received for the year 1937. In the same year county appropriations from the

general fund began to operate the County Forest.

In the first three years expenditures were:

1937	Hazard reduction	\$260.00
1938	Timber stand improvement	\$ 10.00
	Hazard reduction	\$144.36
	Truck trails	\$126.18
	Fire protection	\$ 20.72
	Administration	\$ 16.30
1939	Planting	\$415.00
	Hazard reduction	\$363.11
	Fire protection	\$ 4.74

A couple of firsts:

The first plantation was 33 acres of burned and cutover land planted in 1939 with 38,327 2-0 Jack Pine by hand in scalps. Part of the area had been planted by the Polk County Normal School every year since 1933. These School plantings failed due to poor species choice, no site prep, and no training.

The first timber sale record is from 1945 when 3700 cords of burned over jack pine was sold for \$1.60 per cord to Louis Suennen of Wausaukee.

125.4 WISCONSIN COUNTY FORESTS ASSOCIATION

Polk 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

130.1.1.1 Topography

Polk County has a diverse landscape ranging from broad, nearly level outwash plains to rough glacial moraines.

The moraines are rough and broken, having abrupt hills and short, steep ridges interspersed with depressions, many which have no outlets. This terrain is typical of northeast Polk County which includes a large unit of the Polk County Forest in Lorain and McKinley Townships.

The northwest corner of the county, which includes the largest unit of the county forest, is part of a large outwash plain, which extends into Burnett, Douglas and Bayfield Counties.

130.1.2 Geology and Soils

The soils of Polk County have been derived largely from the weathering of the glacial drift deposits and show a great variation within relatively short distances. Since the glacial period, the soils have been modified by water action, wind, and the accumulation and incorporation of organic material. The most extensive soil types on the county forest are the Omega sands located in Sterling Township, and the rolling Rosholt, Cromwell and Menahga soils in Lorain and McKinley Townships. The county forest lies primarily on upland sites but includes imperfectly drained loams, muck, and peat on lowland sites. Detailed soils information is found in the Soil Survey for Polk County.

130.1.3 Geography

Polk County has a total area of 619,520 acres including 23,000 acres of lakes and streams. Approximately 244,000 acres (39%) are forested. The County Forest includes 17,148.75 acres. The Polk County Forest is the 24th largest County Forest in the state. Chapter 900 includes a map of the county forest boundaries and the current ownership.

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 landtype associations that further group land into areas with similar geology, soil types, surface water features, wetlands, and historic and potential plant communities. The Polk County Forest is encompassed within the Laurentian Mixed Forest province including subsections known as the Upper Wisconsin/Michigan Moraines and the Bayfield Barrens. Landtype Associations (LTA's) within the subsections include: the Grantsburg Dunes and the Lake St. Croix 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 Polk 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 Lake St. Croix Moraine LTA in the Northeast portion(s) 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. The balance of these components continually changes due to natural processes and human events. This is the native community of most of Sterling Township. The Grantsburg Dunes LTA in the Northwest part of the forest, contains the barrens communities on the Polk County Forest.

Wetlands: Characterized by soils or substrate that is periodically saturated or covered by water. This community is common across the Lake St. Croix Moraine LTA(s) throughout the forest.

Aquatic Communities: Including springs, ponds, lakes, streams and rivers.

130.1.5 Vegetative Cover Types

Approximately 94 percent of the Polk County Forest land base is forested. Forested uplands are comprised of primarily mixed hardwood, aspen, oak, jack pine and red pine. The remainder is classified as non-forested, including types such as open water, wetlands, rights-of-way, grass openings, shrubs and bogs. The different cover types present on the Polk County Forest are detailed under “Forested Communities” in Chapter 800 (820.1).

The great majority of the forest is located in the Northwest part of the county in Sterling Township. The remaining portions are mainly in the Northeast part of the county in Lorain and McKinley Townships. Chapter 900 contains maps showing the location of the County Forest.

130.1.6 Wildlife

The Polk County Forest provides habitat for wildlife common to 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 decadent stands. 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 White-tailed deer and ruffed grouse. 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 or northern goshawk.

130.1.7 Rare and Endangered Resources

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

130.1.8 Water

Within the forest boundaries there are a variety of surface water resources. These include

1400 feet of frontage on Sommers Lake in Clam Falls Township and all of Mackie Lake in McKinley Township. There are three unnamed lakes within the Forest that are not known to support fish. Portions of four trout streams run through the County Forest. The Apple River, a warm water stream, flows adjacent to Forest land in Apple River Township.

130.2 CULTURAL FACTORS

130.2.1 Recreation

Forest-based recreation has expanded rapidly in recent years in Polk County. Recreational opportunities with developed facilities include parks, parking lots, and snowmobile, all – terrain vehicle, equestrian, hunter/walking, and snowshoe trails. 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 sight-seeing.

130.2.2 Economy

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

130.2.3 Roads & Access

All Polk County Forest lands are open to the public for foot travel. In addition to the town and county roads that access the forest, the county also maintains 7.81 miles of County Forest roads. A number of gated or bermed special use trails and roads are also available. Access management remains a controversial issue on the Forest. Both motorized and non-motorized recreation 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, Polk 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 Polk 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 has led to user conflicts. In particular, dramatic increases in the number of all terrain vehicles (ATV's) has pressured County forests into providing trails for their use and resolving access conflicts on the County Forest. Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users are common.

b. Demands for timber products are predicted to increase. At the same time, more private forest land is being lost to residential development, and forest landowners are decreasingly interested in managing land primarily for timber values.

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 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.

e. Polk 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 may be complicated by increasing public pressure to reduce timber harvests on county forests.

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, and honeysuckle have all gained a foothold in Wisconsin's forests. Refer to Chapter 800 (830.4) for specifics on this subject.

h. The Forest could be 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 43 management compartments ranging in size from 40 acres to 1120 acres. Within the county forest boundaries approximately 47% of the land is county owned with most of the remaining 53% in Township land, State land, or private holdings. A map of these compartments can be found in Chapter 900.