

FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLANS

Ensuring a healthy forest for the future

By Mark Ellison

For a private forest landowner in Wyoming, managing trees might seem like a daunting task; however, help is only a phone call away.

Through its Forest Stewardship Program, the Wyoming State Forestry Division assists forest landowners in actively managing their lands through forest stewardship planning. This service is provided to Wyoming property owners free through the division's five district offices across the state.

So, what is a forest stewardship plan?

The plan describes the current condition of the forest, the desired future condition of the forest (as determined by the landowner), and outlines the activities and an implementation schedule to get there. For most forests, this is an ongoing, long-term process that requires commitment and patience from landowners.

Why do you need a forest stewardship plan?

Wyoming forests are continually changing and evolving. Recently, factors such as mountain pine beetle, noxious weeds, drought, wildfire, and forest fragmentation have made managing trees especially challenging. A stewardship plan identifies the unique challenges of each property and offers recommendations to mitigate and/or capitalize on existing conditions to improve tree health while striving to meet the goals of the landowner.

What are some typical goals of a forest stewardship plan?

Landowners, similar to their properties, are very different, which leads to many different goals and objectives; however, most landowners often share several of the same goals, including: improving forest health, reducing tree mortality from insects and disease, improving wildlife habitat, generating forest products, reducing noxious weeds, improving rangeland health, mitigating wildfire danger, improving riparian health, increasing streamflows, and improving outdoor recreation.





Mechanical harvesting systems, such as this whole tree processor, are light on the land and very efficient at thinning conifer stands.



This ponderosa pine stand has been thinned, improving conditions for remaining trees and resulting in better overall forest health and resiliency.

How do you meet goals and take property from the current condition to the desired condition?

The forester/natural resource professional will recommend forest activities to meet your goals. For example, if a goal is to reduce tree mortality from mountain pine beetle (MPB), the forester will first recommend steps to protect the forest from the current MPB epidemic then make recommendations to protect the forest from future MPB epidemics. To protect the present forest, forest stands susceptible to MPB are evaluated and infested trees identified.

Next, infested trees are treated to prevent MPB from spreading, healthy trees susceptible to MPB are sprayed with an insecticide, and the area is monitored to gauge the effectiveness of the practices. Next, thinning might be recommended to remove unhealthy, highly susceptible trees from the forest, thus increasing spacing and reducing competition between remaining trees, and making the forest more vigorous and more resilient to future MPB attacks.

An added benefit of having a forest stewardship plan is the on-the-ground expertise and local forestry knowledge a forester will impart to the landowner. For instance, while the fieldwork is being conducted, the landowner is invited to accompany and learn how the forest is inventoried and evaluated. If landowners have questions or concerns about their forests, the forester can address them in the field and show specific examples. On-the-ground assistance is also available for administering specific activities, such as marking trees for a timber sale, identifying locations for logging trails, identifying boundaries for forest thinning units, marking MPB infested trees, etc. The forester's local knowledge and experience with contractors in the area will also assist the landowner in hiring the contractor best-suited to conduct a specific activity.

A schedule for implementing each activity is included in the plan and typically covers a 10-year period. The schedule is based on the goals and priorities of the landowner and recommends specific timeframes to complete activities. It assists the landowner in yearly planning and allocating needed resources to complete each activity. After 10 years, the plan should be revised to reflect conditions and, if necessary, additional activities should be recommended to ensure the landowner's goals are being achieved.

Is there funding available to landowners for forest activities?

Having a forest stewardship plan opens some doors for landowners in terms of funding. Many activities recommended in a typical forest stewardship plan qualify for cost-share assistance through several agencies and organizations. Your local forester can assist in determining which cost-share programs would apply best to your property. Activities that may be cost-shared include forest thinning, weed eradication, tree planting, fuels reduction, aspen enhancement, stream bank stabilization, etc.

What else is included in a stewardship plan?

All plans have several requirements and standards that each must meet; however, each plan is also unique to the individual property and may include several unique items. The following are several common elements of a typical forest stewardship plan:

Accurate and up-to-date maps – Utilizing recent aerial photography, topographic maps, and county assessor property data, maps are customized for each property. GIS and GPS technologies accurately determine acreages, distances, elevations, and to pinpoint locations of property

boundaries, specific management units (forest stands, riparian areas, rangeland areas, etc.), roads, water bodies, historical/cultural sites, buildings, etc.

Forest stand recommendations – The forest is broken into stands of similar characteristics. Stands are typically based on tree species, age, density and/or condition. Recommendations are made for each specific stand to address forest health and landowner goals.

Firewise recommendations – Recommendations are given to reduce fuel loads and prevent catastrophic wildfire from destroying resources on the property. If a residence is on the property, defensible space recommendations are made to create a safe area for firefighters to protect the residence. Alterations to the residence itself are also recommended to reduce flammability of the structure.

Wildlife habitat recommendations – Recommendations are made to improve habitat for a wide range of animal species. Recommendations could include aspen enhancement, riparian improvements, fish pond establishment, rangeland improvements, invasive plant eradication, etc. Activities might include prescribed burning, forest thinning, weed spraying, stream bank stabilization, fencing, and tree planting.

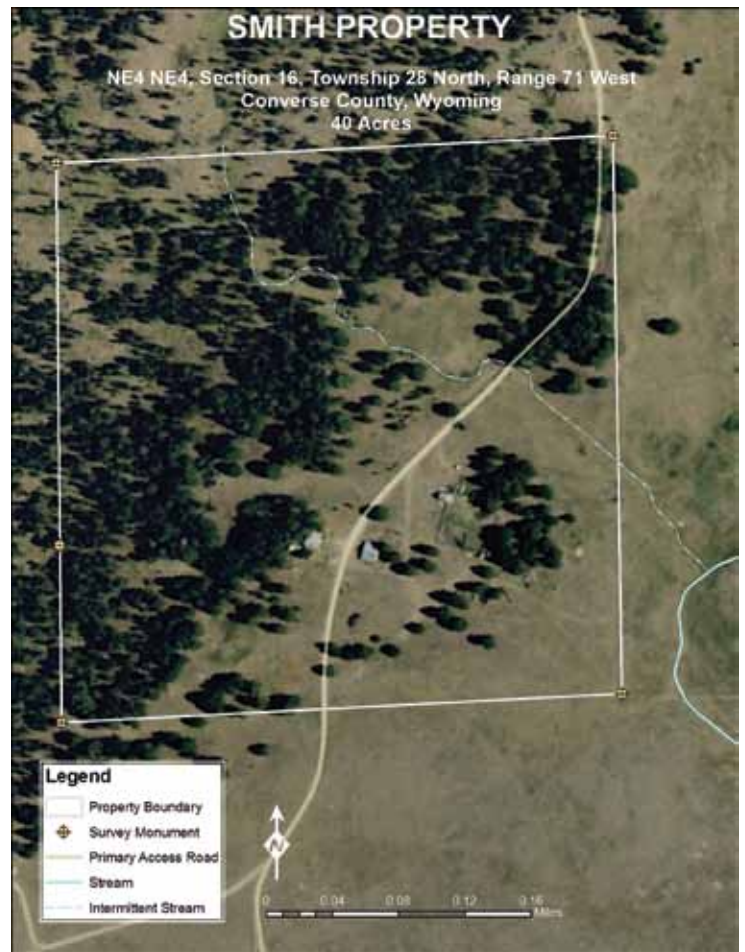
Forest health/diversity recommendations – Recommendations are made to improve forest health and increase tree species and tree age diversity. Activities might include forest thinning, timber harvesting, tree planting, prescribed burning, and invasive plant removal.

Forest product production – Recommendations are made to maximize production of desired forest products. Products might include house logs, sawtimber, post and poles, firewood, and wood chips.

If you think a forest stewardship plan could help you better manage your forest, please contact your local Wyoming State Forestry Division office to schedule a meeting with a forester. Private consulting foresters can also provide forest stewardship plans at a cost to the landowner; however, preparation time could be much shorter. Check with your local forester for an estimate on the preparation time for a plan and/or to get a list of private consulting foresters in your area.

Check here <http://slf-web.state.wy.us/forestry/offices.aspx> for a list of Wyoming State Forestry Division offices. To learn more about the national Forest Stewardship Program, go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/fsp.shtml>.

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Property maps such as this give the landowner a bird's-eye view of their ownership and identifies points of interest.



Defensible space has been created on this property by thinning the lodgepole pine forest and treating the surface fuels.