

Utah Forest Facts

Utah State
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Rural/Conservation Forestry

NR/FF/003

Forest Management Planning

Lisa Dennis-Perez, Forestry Extension Associate

This fact sheet discusses what forest management planning is, why planning is beneficial for forest landowners, and how to go about preparing a forest management plan.

What is Forest Management Planning?

Forest management planning is a process that helps you identify the resources and opportunities available on your property and what you would like to realize from your property in terms of financial gain and long-term enjoyment. What do you want from your forest land? What do you want your forest to look like in the future? What about your forest is most important to you? Forest management planning is a means of identifying what can be done to enhance and protect the values and aspects of your property that are most important to you. These aspects might include wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, timber, livestock ranching, inheritance values, and others.

The first step in the process of forest management planning involves determining *where you want to be* in terms of your forest resources and property. This step involves deciding on your goals, broad reasons for owning forest land (e.g., aesthetics, wildlife, long-term financial investment and gain, immediate dollar returns, recreational opportunities), and determining more specific objectives, or actions, that will lead to your goals (e.g., improving elk habitat, increasing the value of standing timber through

removal of undesirable and unhealthy trees, decreasing risk of wildfire by removing fallen timber and slash).

Next, you need to determine *where you are* in terms of those goals and objectives. This is done through resource inventory and evaluation. Resource inventory provides information on the quality, quantity, and species of timber on your property; landscape features such as soils and topography; wildlife and plant species of interest or concern; and water resources. While not all of this information may be necessary to complete your objectives, the more information provided in an inventory, the better. Your goals and objectives may change over time, making this additional information necessary.

The next step in forest management planning is identifying a list of recommendations describing *what to do to get to where you want to be*. The recommendations also may include a specific activity schedule that lays out how, when, and where to implement specific actions and how those actions relate to your goals and objectives.

These steps should be detailed in a written plan that is used as a reference for management of your forest. The written plan may be a comprehensive management or stewardship plan that addresses all the steps just discussed, or a practice/activity plan that focuses on how to complete a specific activity to help get you where you want to be.



Types of Written Plans

Depending on your ownership goals, a written plan may be a *management plan*, a *stewardship plan*, or a *practice/activity plan*.

Management and Stewardship Plans – Both management and stewardship plans cover long-term goals and objectives and encompass a time period of ten years or more. These plans include a discussion of your goals and objectives, a detailed property description and resource inventory, and a list of management recommendations with an activity schedule. A management plan sometimes focuses mainly on timber resources, while a stewardship plan encompasses other resource values as well, such as wildlife and recreation. Both types of plans may help you qualify for potential cost-share and tax benefits through the Stewardship Incentives Program and other programs.

Practice/Activity Plan – A practice/activity plan or timber sale plan is not a complete management plan, but instead addresses short-term goals associated with a specific activity, like a one-time timber harvest. This type of plan focuses on describing the details of the activity, such as which trees are to be cut; marking method; method of payment; harvesting system; location of roads, skid trails, and landings; treatment of slash; and erosion control, rehabilitation, or reforestation measures. Such a plan may stand alone as an activity plan or may be prepared as part of the management recommendations section of a more comprehensive management plan. In either case, the information detailed in such a plan is essential to a successful timber harvest and should be included as part of a timber sale contract.

Why Have a Forest Management Plan?

Forest management plans allow you to sort out what you really want from your forest and help you successfully and efficiently reach your goals. Management planning can mean the difference between liquidating your timber resource for a one-time cash return or earning repeated dollar returns from intermittent thinning harvests while at the same time increasing the value of your standing timber. It can mean the difference between having to sell your property to meet property or inheritance tax obligations or insuring that your property stays under family ownership for generations to come by managing for sustainable timber harvests and income production. It can mean the difference between restricting cattle movement because of a tangle of untreated logging slash or potentially increasing livestock forage through careful opening of the forest canopy.

Forest management planning can help protect you, as a landowner, from liabilities associated with the impacts of timber harvesting and other forest activities both on and off your land. Planning can help you make the most of your resources while protecting the resources that we all share, such as water quality and beautiful scenery.

Forest management planning can:

- Help you identify what you really want
- Provide you with a course of action to get you where you want to be
- Help you save time, money, and heartache by:
 - Qualifying you for cost-share and other incentive programs
 - Helping you organize your business records for tax purposes
 - Avoiding costly forest management mistakes

The more forethought that goes into how you manage your lands, the less chance you have of making costly forest management mistakes. Growing conditions in Utah are such that once mistakes in forest management have been made, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the forest resource to recover. Because many of Utah's forest types grow at high elevations with a short growing season and limited moisture, most forest species here have natural rotation cycles of 120 years or more (it takes the trees 120 years to mature). Harvesting trees at the wrong time, cutting the wrong trees, or neglecting a forest health problem like an insect infestation may mean that the income and productive potential of your property will be impacted well beyond your lifetime! These types of mistakes can be avoided by careful planning. Forest management planning can mean the difference between making the most of your resources or having to pick up the pieces after mistakes have been made.



How Do You Do Forest Management Planning?

The six basic steps for developing a forest management plan for your property are:

1. Seek the assistance of a professional.
2. Determine your goals and objectives.
3. Inventory and evaluate your resources.
4. Formulate an activity schedule.
5. Implement activities and monitor progress toward meeting your intended goals.
6. Review your plan every few years and update it when necessary.

There are several sources of assistance for resource management planning. Most often, you will want to consult with a professional forester when planning the management of your forest land. A Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FF&SL) service forester can help you with resource inventories and management planning free of charge. A service forester can help you develop a management plan, a timber harvest plan, or a stewardship plan, and also can help you apply for cost-share programs such as SIP or conservation easement programs such as the Forest Legacy program. A list of FF&SL offices and service foresters follows. For more information about FF&SL, call 801-538-5555 or visit their web site at www.nr.state.ut.us/slf/slfhome.htm.

Private consulting foresters also can help you develop a forest management plan, inventory your resources, and/or oversee timber harvesting on your property. Services of consulting foresters are not free, but if you hire a consulting forester, they are obligated to represent your best interests during the time that they work for you. A list of private consulting foresters can be obtained from FF&SL foresters or USU Forestry Extension at 435-797-0560.

Depending on your goals and objectives, there may be times when the advice of other resource management professionals would be helpful for management decision-making. For example, if you are interested in managing your land for wildlife habitat, a wildlife biologist from the state Division of Wildlife Resources may be able to help you and your forester with the preparation of your management plan.

USU Forestry Extension provides educational assistance in the form of publications such as this, a quarterly newsletter, and a web site (www.ext.usu.edu/natres/forests). For more information about the forest landowner education program, or to be added to the program mailing list, call 435-797-0560.

Components of a Forest Management Plan

Should include:

- 1) Ownership goals and management objectives: this is the heart of the plan and describes what you want to gain from your property and resources.
- 2) Maps: help to describe the property and resources and may include topographic maps, soils maps, cover type or stand maps, and aerial photos, if available.
- 3) Property boundary description: a legal description of your property location and acreage.
- 4) Resource inventory data: descriptions of water bodies, wildlife, vegetation, soils, topography, and access. Timber inventory data should include information on the species, sizes, quality, and quantity of timber; stand structure and condition; and the presence and extent of forest pests (bark beetles, mistletoe, etc).
- 5) Management recommendations: detailed management options and how they relate to ownership goals and objectives.
- 6) Activity schedule for recommendations: specifies a timeline for management activities.

Might include:

- 1) Discussion of current and future forest products markets and how that relates to the timing of timber management activities.
- 2) Examination of costs of different management options and their potential returns.
- 3) Detailed recordkeeping section describing all past, current, and projected expenditures and returns.

Remember: A forest management plan is a guide and a tool to help you make decisions, look at your options, and plan for the future. The plan may need to be modified as your ownership goals and objectives, and site conditions, change over time.

Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands Offices

State Office

Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
1594 West North Temple, Suite 3520
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-5703
801-538-5555

Bear River Area

Cache, Rich, Box Elder, and Weber Counties
Craig Pettigrew, Area Manager
Blaine Hamp, Area Forester
Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
1780 North Research Parkway, Suite 104
North Logan, Utah 84341-1940
435-752-8701

Northeastern Area

*Wasatch, Summit, Duchesne, Uintah,
and Daggett Counties*
Dale Jablonski, Area Manager
Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
152 East 100 North
Vernal, Utah 84078
435-781-5463

Southeastern Area

Grand, San Juan, Carbon, and Emery Counties
Stan Baker, Area Manager
Bill Zanotti, Area Forester
Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
1165 South Highway 191, Suite 6
Moab, Utah 84532
435-259-3766

Wasatch Front Area

*Morgan, Davis, Salt Lake, Tooele,
and Utah Counties*
Dick Buehler, Area Manager
Barbara Gardner, Area Forester
Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
1594 West North Temple, Suite 3520
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-5703
801-538-5555

Central Area

*Millard, Wayne, Piute, Sevier, Juab,
and Sanpete Counties*
Kelly Allen, Area Manager
Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
115 East 900 North
Richfield, Utah 84701
435-896-5697

Southwest Area

*Washington, Garfield, Kane, Iron,
and Beaver Counties*
Ron Larsen, Area Manager
Clint Reese, Area Forester
Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
585 North Main
Cedar City, Utah 84720
435-586-4408

Acknowledgments: The Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands provided review for the production of this fact sheet. I also thank the Extension Services of Oregon State University, Pennsylvania State University, and Rutgers University for publications on forest management planning that contributed greatly to the content of this document.

Utah State University Extension is an affirmative action/equal employment opportunity employer and educational organization.

We offer our programs to persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. Published July 1998.