

2020 Annual Report





WISCONSIN YOUNG FOREST PARTNERSHIP

VISION

Sustainable wildlife populations through
landscape-scale conservation.

MISSION

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership seeks to achieve landscape-scale conservation in Wisconsin for high priority species by **collaborating with like-minded partners**, *promoting and creating young forest habitat through active forest management*, and providing technical and financial assistance to private forestland owners.

A YEAR OF CHALLENGES

By Tracy Beckman
WYFP Member and Executive Director of Lumberjack
RC&D Council, Inc

If there is one word that comes to mind when we think of 2020, it is *Challenge*. With a world-wide pandemic early on, many organizations had to adapt and that was a challenge. It was no different for Lumberjack and WYFP... so adapt, we did. Zoom became the thing to have, so right away we bought a subscription that could be used by all our sponsored groups. Navigating the ins and outs, being patient when technology didn't go our way, learning to mute/unmute... all were a new challenge. Setting up our homes for remote work was a challenge. When so many things were up in the air, we learned that our classification was essential, so while following the protocols from the USFS and the CDC, we went about business.

For WYFP that meant shifting from in-person engagement to virtual meetings, conferences, and workshops. It also meant being creative and taking initiative because we sure did not want to let any significant amounts of time go by without being in touch with landowners and our partners.

It became clear that reaching out in different ways was the way to go. So, rather than doing a mailing, we improvised and worked with partners on digital outreach. Outreach plans had to be changed but resulted in us receiving analytics for which we normally don't have access. We can use that information to learn more about landowners' behavior. Randee Smith, WYFP Coordinator, began cultivating relationships with other groups doing similar work, which resulted in access to more information and

resources. We held partnership meetings virtually and while not ideal, we became closer. We saw your pets, we met your kids, we learned about your space and it strengthened the Partnership.

"Persistence and resilience only come from having been given the chance to work through difficult problems."
– Gever Tulley

So, while we weren't doing things as usual, the partnership thrived and became even more efficient in 2020. For me, that is the epitome of what Lumberjack RC&D wants for our sponsored organizations.

So now, instead of describing 2020 with the word *Challenge*, I look back on it and think of another word: *Resilience*. That is

what I've seen from the WYFP in 2020 and it's been an honor to describe it here for you in the opening statement for the 2020 Annual Report.

Tracy Beckman



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

The partnership is only as strong as those that form it.

Aldo Leopold Foundation (ALF)
American Bird Conservancy (ABC)
Louisiana-Pacific Corporation (LPC)
Lumberjack RC&D Council
My Wisconsin Woods (MWW)
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Pheasants Forever
Ruffed Grouse Society/
 American Woodcock Society (RGS)
The Forestland Group, LLC
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Wisconsin Bird Conservation Partnership (WBCP)
Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA)
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Wisconsin Society of American Foresters (WSAF)
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation (WWF)



"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

-Andrew Carnegie



HABITAT IMPACT

The partnership achieves landscape-scale conservation by working on public and private lands. Impact from 21 northern counties is below.

17,880 LANDOWNERS CONTACTED

32,120 SINCE 2014

1,176 SITE VISITS

1,733 SINCE 2014

62 CONTRACTS

584 SINCE 2014

1,312 ACRES OF IMPROVED YF HABITAT

7,393 SINCE 2014

95 MANAGEMENT PLANS WRITTEN

838 SINCE 2014

7,654 ACRES OF IMPROVED HABITAT

71,912 SINCE 2014

15,486 ACRES OF YF HABITAT FROM COUNTY, STATE, AND FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

116,078 SINCE 2014

LANDOWNER SUCCESS



The partnership prides itself on assisting landowners to reach their property goals and beyond.

Nestled in the northeast corner of Wisconsin in Rusk County, lies 350 acres of diverse woodlands including mature forests adjacent to lowlands and a meandering creek. The Schlomann brothers received this property in early 2000 from their father who had purchased a portion of it in the 1980s. The brothers were able to increase the original acreage when they purchased the adjacent parcel in 2010.

Though the Schlomann family doesn't live on the land, they do visit several times each month and primarily use it for deer and bird hunting. Historically, there was no forest management plan in place. One of the brothers, Don Schlomann, realized that their forest needed more help as they prepared to do some select cutting on the property.

Fortunately, Don became aware of assistance available to private landowners after receiving a mailing from the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership (WYFP). "I knew the property had aged out of producing timber and wasn't sure if we were doing the select cutting correctly," said Don. "I needed help and wanted to get another prospective. Being able to partner with people to enhance my property was an exciting opportunity."

After receiving Don's eager response, WYFP coordinator Randee Smith reached out to him to develop the best path forward. During their conversation, Randee learned that Don had a logger scheduled for the following winter and was more interested in getting advice on what to harvest rather than on funding assistance. After coordinating a site visit from a forester, Randee was a step ahead addressing future concerns as she moved him forward to obtain cost-share funding for a management plan.

Through one of WYFP's partners, the American Bird Conservancy, Don was awarded a grant to hire a certified plan writer to create a forest management plan for the property. Having this plan in place helped speed up the application process when he applied to the Natural

Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to fund a harvest of his mature aspen, perform alder shearing (to enhance young forest habitat), plant trees, and create pollinator habitat.

Just one year after the alder shearing, Don noted a difference in the wildlife that he was seeing. Most notably was the increase in grouse and

woodcock, a species not seen before on the property. "I was surprised at how much the birds had responded. We can't even take the dogs shed-hunting anymore as they all just get too birdy!"

Don credits his forester, Pete Anderson, for the success of his forest management plan. Using his relationship with program staff, Anderson made the process simple for Don from the start of the plan writing to the implementation of the harvest. "Pete Anderson did a really good job of creating edge; you can't even tell 100 acres were cut! I can't speak more highly about it all," exclaimed Don. "I just wish I would've known about this program 10 years earlier!"

The Schlomann family are excited to visit their property more this year and plan to continue some alder shearing and maintenance. Randee Smith is also pleased with the progress Don has made and recently suggested NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program as another means to get some financial incentives. Looks like NRCS hasn't seen the last of Don Schlomann!

"I was surprised at how much the birds had responded (to the management). We can't even take the dogs shed-hunting anymore as they all just get too birdy!"
— Don Schlomann

COLLABORATION IS KEY

WYFP prides itself on organizations working together towards similar goals and taking advantage of new opportunities.

Being a part of an organization, sometimes it seems like it is you against the world. There are many groups out there working towards their missions, but sometimes those key action items overlap with others.

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership was formed to bring like-minded organizations together and join efforts instead of duplicating them. Randee Smith, coordinator of WYFP says, "Each of our partners brings something different to the table that enables us to function as a whole. Some provide funding sources or staff, others bring knowledge about workshops and outreach, while others keep us in the loop about research or the current timber market."

New opportunities arise all the time and it is up to WYFP to keep evolving to put its best foot forward for landowner care and conservation. Behind the scenes, partners have been working towards a very exciting collaboration that finally came to light in 2020!

WI DNR teamed up with Aldo Leopold Foundation (ALF) to form My Wisconsin Woods (MWW) whose goal is to reach unengaged landowners, meet them where they are at, and move them closer to taking actions to manage their land. Part of this process is providing resources and connecting the landowner with a local DNR forester for a site visit.

Some landowners are perfectly fine with just a site visit, but there are still barriers like money and know-how to implement recommended practices. This is where WYFP comes into play! After the site visit, a forester can check a box in the landowner database that says the landowner is interested in learning more about financial assistance. Just by checking this box, the WYFP coordinator gets an email notification about the request and can reach out to the landowner to discuss further.

My Wisconsin Woods did a direct mailing campaign in Fall 2020 to private landowners offering a site visit and implementing the new system. Foresters and other staff were made aware of the collaboration and changes that would assist WYFP in helping landowners.

Overall, this pilot test was a success! Between the close communication of staff and the shared use of the private forest landowner database, all organizations were happy with the efforts to move landowners in the direction towards further management. Lessons were learned from the pilot and will assist in making future mailings more efficient.

Results from the fall mailing campaign are below. My Wisconsin Woods is thrilled with the response and the site visits completed! Landowners referred to WYFP after the site visit are being assisted. We look forward to sharing where these landowners ended up in the next annual report.

17,850 LANDOWNERS CONTACTED

17 COUNTIES

1,060 SITE VISITS

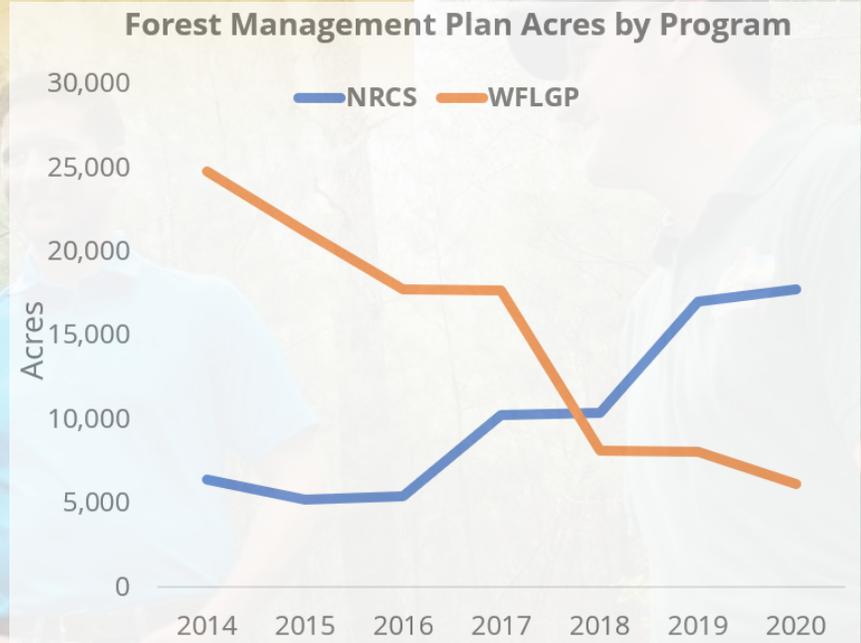
6% RESPONSE RATE

PRIVATE LANDS OUTREACH

The partnership collaborates with partners to target private landowners to provide technical and financial assistance to improve habitat.

There are two cost-share programs that are popular for funding a forest management plan for landowners: the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP).

Across the state of Wisconsin, the overall acreage impacted through funded forest management plans has stayed relatively the same, even though each program has different trajectories. Some factors that have had an impact over the years are an overall stronger support for private lands work, a stronger focus on forest related practices within EQIP, and more staff focused on financial assistance.



REFERRALS

The partnership connects interested landowners to programs and resources that helps them reach their property goals.

71 to Natural Resources Conservation Service

16 to Managed Forest Law Program

7 to Deer Management Assistance Program

6 to WI Forest Landowner Grant Program

4 to USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

116 REFERRALS IN 2020

588 SINCE 2014

9 to WDNR Forestry

3 to WDNR Wildlife

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

The partnership promotes and advocates for young forest habitat.

ALF PARTNERS WITH WYFP

WYFP is excited to have the Aldo Leopold Foundation join as a partner. ALF is a conservation organization that works to inspire an ethical relationship between people and nature. ALF's work of caring for the land, community education, and cultivating leadership for conservation fits perfectly in the partnership.

MWW PARTNERS WITH WYFP

My Wisconsin Woods is a partnership of public agencies and private organizations lead by ALF and WI DNR. WYFP joins the ranks of these organizations to reach the unengaged landowners across the state and offer free services that connect landowners to trusted sources of information, property visits, technical and financial assistance, and events and workshops where they can meet like-minded landowners.

PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION INTERVIEW

Coordinator Smith participated in a UW-Madison research project on Conservation and Succession Success for Farm and Woodland Owners. This research is through a 5-year USDA grant to work with new landowners that have been transferred land. Smith provided her experience and knowledge with woodland owners over the years which was combined with other professional to get a picture of how landowners may be going about getting assistance on their land. Next step in the process is to conduct landowner interviews and then conduct analysis that should help guide professionals going forward.



MOTUS TOWER APPROVED

Emily Filiberti, new MS student in Wildlife Ecology at the University of Maine, will be starting a golden-winged warbler adult survival study with sites in Wisconsin (Oneida County), Tennessee, and Pennsylvania in 2021. Two Motus automated telemetry stations will be installed west of Rhinelander to aid in detecting tagged warblers. These stations are part of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System (see motus.org for more information) and will help expand the Motus station network in the Midwest. The Midwest Migration Network and the University of Maine are collaborators on a Competitive State Wildlife Grant awarded to Missouri Department of Conservation. The expansion includes 48 new stations across the Midwest and 11 new stations across Mexico, Costa Rica, and Colombia. This will greatly improve opportunities for conducting research on migratory wildlife in the region.

TWS MEETING – GROUSE SYMPOSIUM

As part of The Wildlife Society meeting, RGS helped host the Upper Midwest Ruffed Grouse Symposium on February 25th. WYFP members attended from various organizations as well as other professionals bringing attendance to 120. A common message was heard throughout the symposium, that collaboration and landscape-scale management was key to make the impact we need to benefit grouse. The work that WYFP and its partners do are important for grouse and many other wildlife species.

NEW BRANDING – NEW WEBSITE

Getting a fresh look, WYFP redesigned their logo while making sure to keep the same elements for recognizability. A mission statement, vision, values and more were laid out in an easy to share document so partners and interested organization know what the WYFP brand is all about. Rounding it all out, WYFP moved their website and redesigned it for a more modern look and user friendly experience. Check it out at www.wiyoungforest.org.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year Virtual Tour

The Wisconsin Tree Farm Committee (WTFC) likes to celebrate the forest management accomplishments of their members through their annual Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year awards program. The winner for that year hosts an in-person field trip to show people the wonderful practices they are doing on their land. 2020 threw a curveball that forced many organizations to get inventive and the WTFC didn't hold out when it came to celebrating that year's Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year!

With UW-Extensions as organizer and camera crew, representatives from various organizations came together to plan a virtual Tree Farm field day for 2020. Landowner Chuck had done some wonderful work with young forest on his land with help from NRCS funding and Pete Anderson as his cooperating forester. Randee Smith, WYFP coordinator, participated in the virtual tour discussing how the alder and aspen management Chuck completed on his property has created wonderful wildlife habitat. Chuck even had his young forest surveyed for golden-winged warblers that was used in research. While out with the technicians, they did indeed find golden-winged warblers which Chuck was thrilled to learn more about and get up close and personal with this little bird.

Not only has Chuck created great young forest habitat, but he has also worked hard to create a robust and extensive road network, create pollinator plots, actively manage over 1,000 acres using various forestry activities, work around the creek, and even collaborate with his neighbors.

www.witreefarm.org/tree-farm-field-day-2020

\$5 Million in New Funding For Young Forest Habitat

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) was awarded a five year extension of their Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This RCPP titled "Improving Forest Health for Wildlife Resources in MN, WI, MI" provides financial and technical resources to private landowners to create early successional forest on their property.

This young forest provides critical breeding habitat for the golden-winged warbler, a bird species of concern. This extension build on the results of the current RCPP program and further strengthen our partnerships in the region. It will provide \$5 million in new funding and create more than 6,000 additional acres of essential breeding habitat for golden-winged warblers and other early-successional forest birds in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The RCPP renewal is expanded to also develop 670 acres of breeding habitat for Kirtland's warblers in Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.



RUFFED GROUSE SYMPOSIUM

The need for young forest, large-scale management, and collaboration were common topics that re-enforces the need for WYFP.

On February 25, 2020, Wisconsin hosted an Upper Midwest Ruffed Grouse Symposium. This event was geared towards professional wildlife biologists, foresters, and researchers managing ruffed grouse in the Upper Midwest. In total, 120 professionals from 8 different states attended the symposium, including a range of WYFP members.

Discussing landscape level habitat management as well as research needs, professionals sought to get on the same page before identifying the next steps towards managing ruffed grouse across the region. The day was well rounded with talks on current research, management efforts, and planning. Discussions also focused on learning about factors impacting grouse such as disease, policy, forest product market trends and climate.

Participants heard talks on aspen harvest and utilization trends in the lake states; the importance of private forest in managing ruffed grouse; teaching the next generation of foresters to manage timber for wildlife; and trends in grouse detection and abundance, among others.

The overall tone from managers is a shared agreement that regionally, we have an uphill battle and need landscape level solutions, monitoring, and management. This won't come down to small habitat projects unless they fit into a larger landscape level plan and vision.

Heather Shaw mention, "Decisions we make now have a direct impact on the future of the resources and traditions we are passionate about."

Next Steps Identified

Wildlife managers, grouse researchers, and biologists are in agreement: we need to start thinking on a landscape level and how everyone's efforts dovetail together to accomplish the transformative changes we need to support

healthy forests for ruffed grouse. We need to stop being reactionary and start being proactive. We need to start thinking of ways we can make that transformative change by advocating for the forest products industry by working with legislators and local economic development to incentivize investment in the forest products industry and eliminating barriers to management.

There is a need for RGS/AWS to transition from small scale habitat projects to partnering with public land managers to play a key role on the ground through assisting with large scale projects and planning to be additive to the bigger picture of conservation at scale on a landscape level.

Thankfully, the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership can be player working towards landscape-scale projects and conservation with the help of all our partners.

These topics and more were recapped in a recent [Project Upland](#) podcast episode featuring Ben Jones, Brent Rudolph, and Forrest Gibeault recorded at the symposium.

By: Jon Steigerwaldt RGS

"Collaboration has been a repeating message that RGS and our partners want to continue to deliver," says Heather Shaw.



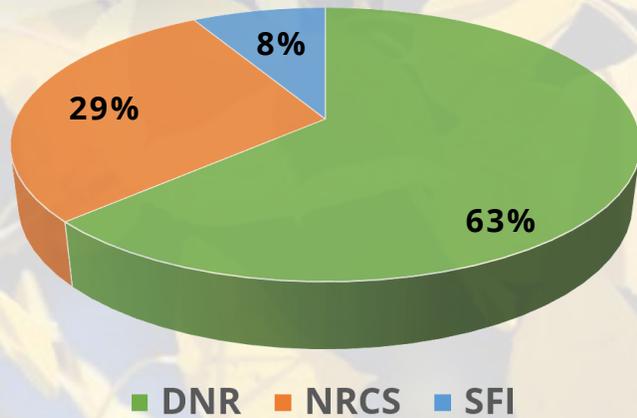
FINANCIAL

WYFP depends on grants and support from partners to provide funding for coordinator and administration expenses.

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership is grateful to have such supportive partners to keep things running smoothly.

Majority of expenses are personnel expenses for the coordinator position. In 2020 with lack of in-person events, travel expenses decreased. Combining outreach efforts with partners and not performing a separate mailing campaign saved on material expenses as well. As a result, WYFP did not apply for another Ruffed Grouse Society Drummer Grant as in previous years.

WYFP 2020 Revenue Sources



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

With the help of partners, WYFP anticipates a productive and exciting 2021!

LANDOWNER OUTREACH

WYFP will continue working with partners to combine outreach efforts and assist landowners from a unified front. Simplifying the process for landowners will result in more action taken and increased habitat for wildlife.

In combination with Lumberjack RC&D, WYFP will be trying something new using a digital media campaign to reach landowners and promote cost-share programs to reach their woodland goals.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

WYFP promotes young forest by attending events to educate landowners and professionals. The ruffed grouse presentation to the Learning in Retirement group was rescheduled to 2021. Other planned events are the Natural Resources Foundation golden-winged warbler field trip, Elements of Wildlife Habitat workshop, and hosting a booth at the coverts reunion.

CREATING WILDLIFE HABITAT TOGETHER



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