

FORESTRY 101



Woodland Management Plans

by Laurie Taylor Thomas

Kentucky has more than 12 million acres of woodlands with about 8 million acres considered family owned. The decisions these landowners make or don't make regarding their woodlands can have long-term environmental and economic effects, not only on their property, but on Kentucky as well. Fortunately, woodland owners are not alone in figuring out what they can or need to do with their woodlands and how to do it. There are public and private professional foresters across the state ready to assist woodland owners develop woodland management plans that can serve as a roadmap to producing healthy and productive woodlands that meet the landowners' objectives. This article discusses the common elements of a woodland management plan, the types and intensity of plans, and provides an overview of the professional forestry assistance available to Kentucky woodland owners.

Developing Objectives and Goals for your Woodland

By thoughtfully developing objectives and goals for your woodland you ensure you are investing your time and energy wisely and can better communicate with the professional foresters providing assistance. Well-defined objectives and goals can also help you avoid unwanted changes to your property. The national Forest*A*Syst self-assessment guide (<https://www.forestasyst.org>, highlighted in Kentucky Woodlands Magazine Volume 8, Issue 1) suggests woodland owners think through and develop their objectives and goals by answering the following questions:

1. Do you wish to hunt or observe wildlife in your woodland?
2. Do you want your woodland to produce income?
3. Will you or others use the woodland for recreation?
4. Is the beauty of your woodland important to you?

Woodland Management Plan Elements

While no two woodland management plans are the same, several elements are common to most plans. Common woodland plan elements include: landowners' objectives or goals; property information such as location, maps, and/or aerial photos; woodland inventory data and descriptions; and specific woodland management prescriptions designed to meet the landowners' objectives or goals for their woodland. Other elements may be included depending on landowner interests and the type of woodland management plan.

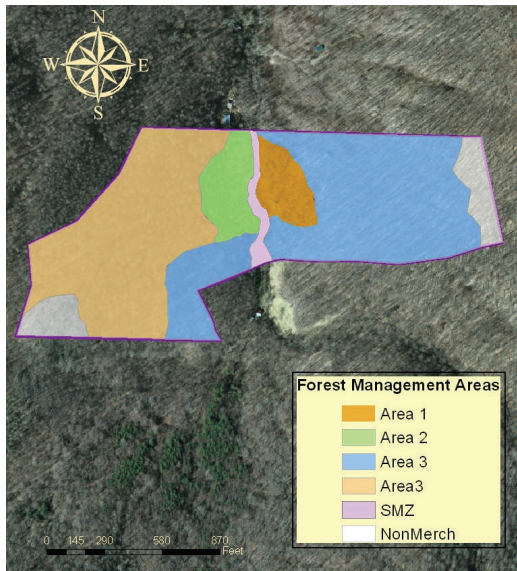
Landowner Objectives for the Woodland

When developing their objectives and goals for their property, the landowners should consider why they own their land and what their hopes and dreams are for the property; they should think comprehensively and long-term but recognize that objectives or goals may change as conditions in their woodlands and life change. The goals should be specific for current and future use of the property, because this will help determine the actions to be taken and avoided. Often landowners tell foresters, "I want to do what is right for the land and make a little money." Foresters use the landowner's objectives to make the management plan, so without specific objectives the forester can only make decisions based on their ideas of "what is good for the land," which might not support the landowner's objectives. The objectives and goals provide the essence of what the landowner cares about and what they want for and from the property. All woodland management plans are based primarily on the objectives and goals of the woodland owner. While the forester will be creating the plan, the woodland owner should take an active role in creating the plan by clearly defining their objectives; they should think of themselves as a co-creator of the woodland management plan.

Property Information and Maps

Property maps can provide a tremendous amount of information that is useful for the forester as well as landowners who want to enjoy their property. Maps developed by foresters typically include: stands or management units that share common features, woodland roads or trails, and other impor-

tant resource areas such as water bodies or other high-value areas. In order to create these maps, foresters will need to know the property boundaries. For information on marking woodland boundaries refer to Kentucky Woodlands Magazine Volume 11 Issue 1. The maps may be based off topographic maps or aerial photographs. Woodland owners may also want to check out their property by using several online mapping tools such as Google Earth (<http://earth.google.com>) or the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Services (USDA



Woodland management plan maps often detail property boundaries, roads, trails, and stands or management units such as those depicted by the shaded areas in the map above.

NRCS) Web Soil Survey (<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>), which contains a wealth of information beyond soils.

Woodland Inventory Data and Descriptions

The woodland inventory is a crucial part of the management plan that the forester will complete for the landowner. By conducting a resource assessment of the property, the forester will be able to provide detailed information about species composition and density in each of the stands or management units, identify potential concerns, such as invasive species, as well as provide timber volume and other planning data needed for timber harvests. The intensity of the inventory will be based on the type of woodland management plan and the interests of the woodland owner. For example, woodland owners interested in participating in carbon offset programs such as the Kentucky Nature Conservancy's Working Woodlands program (<https://tinyurl.com/y8gg94ug>) will require a more intensive woodland inventory to accurately record carbon sequestration.

Woodland Management Prescriptions

This section of the management plan is where the forester matches the woodland owner's objectives and goals with the woodland resources of the property. The prescription of activities can include: woodland health management activities such as controlling invasive species; practices

to encourage the growth of certain trees, such as crop tree release; or how timber harvesting should be implemented to ensure proper tree regeneration as well as post-harvest activities. This section of the woodland management plan also typically includes a schedule of the management activities along with site specific details of how to implement the prescriptions.



Example of forest stand improvement practice prescription: mid-story trees are marked for removal to increase sunlight levels near the forest floor to enhance the regeneration of desired tree species.

Photo courtesy: Jeff Stringer

Types of Woodland Management Plans

There are numerous types of woodland management plans that can vary in length from a few to many pages. The woodland plans will cover the management plan elements discussed previously to varying degrees based on the interests and needs of the owner. Woodland owners should make sure the plan they receive will fit their needs. For example, if the owner is interested in accessing financial assistance programs they should get either a Kentucky Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) or a Conservation Activity Plan for Forest Management (CAP-FM) as they are required to participate in most USDA NRCS programs. Financial assistance programs help woodland owners offset the costs to implement forestry and conservation-related practices (for more information <http://www/nrcs.usda.gov/programs/> or contact a local NRSC office). Ultimately, the type of plan the landowner chooses will be based on their individual situation. The following is an overview of the most common types of woodland management plans developed in Kentucky.

Kentucky Forest Stewardship Plan

The Kentucky Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) is offered through the Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF). This plan utilizes a standard template developed by the U.S. Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program (<https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/forest-stewardship/program>) to meet all the federal requirements of the national forest stewardship program. The FSP has a 10-acre minimum requirement and, in addition to the common plan elements mentioned above, it includes the following: a description of the desired woodland condition; suggested monitoring activities to be done by the forester or landowner; it must be reviewed and renewed, revised, or rewritten at the end of the specified management period or sooner, as needed, to be considered current. A KDF forester will visit the property and landowner to discuss stewardship opportunities for no fee.

Conservation Activity Plan for Forest Management

The USDA NRCS has also developed a forest management

plan template called the “Conservation Activity Plan – Forest Management” (CAP-FM) that is similar in many ways to the Kentucky Forest Stewardship Plan. CAP-FMs are forest management plans that are site-specific and address one or more resource concerns on land where forestry-related conservation activities or practices will be planned and applied. Financial assistance through NRCS may be available to help cover the cost of developing a plan which can range from approximately \$1,350 to \$6,400 depending on the size of your woodland.

Kentucky Woodland Management Plan

For landowners with less than 10 acres or those not needing a more detailed plan there is an alternative that is less comprehensive than the FSP or CAP-FM. These plans contain the same common elements mentioned above but in a shortened version. Its important to note, these plans do not meet the requirements for financial assistance through NRCS. The KDF can develop these woodland management plans for no fee, but they can also readily be developed by private consulting foresters for a fee.

Kentucky Woodland Practice Plan

A Kentucky woodland practice plan is a detailed, written prescription used to lay out specific, on-the-ground forestry practices. These practice plans typically focus on a single practice such as tree planting, invasive species removal, or site preparation for regeneration, but could also include multiple practices. These practice plans are developed by the KDF and can be used with existing FSPs and CAP-FMs or not. In addition to a detailed description of the prescription, these woodland practice plans may include a map of where the work is to be accomplished.

Woodland Management Assistance

Woodland owners are strongly encouraged to work with professional foresters in the development of their management plans regardless of the type of plan they choose. Professional foresters work directly with the woodland owner to create a management plan that meets the landowner’s goals and objectives and is appropriate for the property. Below are the various groups of foresters available to work with Kentucky woodland owners.

Kentucky Division of Forestry

In addition to forest health protection, wildland fire management, master logger training, tree seedling nurseries, urban forestry assistance, and forestry education, the KDF employs service foresters to work one-on-one with woodland owners in the development of an appropriate management plan. Visit <http://forestry.ky.gov> or call (502) 564-4496 to connect with a KDF service forester in your area.



Photo courtesy: Billy Thomas

Professional forestry assistance for Kentucky woodland owners is available through the Kentucky Division of Forestry as well as private consulting foresters.

Kentucky Association of Consulting Foresters

The Kentucky Chapter of the Association of Consulting Foresters of America is the organization that represents the professional consulting foresters in Kentucky. In addition to assisting woodland owners with timber sales, timber appraisals, and timber trespass issues, consulting foresters can develop woodland management plans for woodland owners. Visit www.kacf.org to locate a consulting forester.

Kentucky Technical Service Providers

The USDA NRCS certifies Technical Service Providers, which are professional foresters interested in working with NRCS programs, to develop CAP-FMs for woodland owners in Kentucky. The cost of these plans may be covered with NRCS financial assistance. To receive a CAP-FM, visit your local NRCS office (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ky/contact/local/>) and let them know you would like to sign up to have a forest management plan developed for your property. Visit <https://techreg.sc.egov.usda.gov/CustLocateTSP.aspx> to find TSPs certified to develop CAP-FMs.

A woodland management plan is an important tool in producing healthy and productive woodlands. By working with one of the state’s many public or private foresters, Kentucky woodland owners can make wise, informed decisions regarding the care and management of their property. And this in-turn can create positive, long-term environmental and economic benefits.

About the Author:

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