

## Forest Management Guidelines for Easement Properties

The purpose of a conservation easement is to protect a myriad of conservation values, often including forest resources. Although there is nothing wrong with taking a “preservationist” approach and letting natural processes prevail in your forest, it is widely acknowledged that because forests are renewable resources they can be periodically logged and still provide many ecological and social functions and values (like wildlife habitat, beautiful scenery, watershed protection, clean air, healthy soils, and recreation). However, forests can also be badly managed to the detriment of all those things.

Forest resources are unique to each property and therefore what the Little Traverse Conservancy both allows and requires regarding forest management on conservation easements varies widely. Many conservation easements specifically allow for forestry activities, from gleaning dead and down wood for personal firewood use to selective commercial logging for timber production or even clear-cutting in some types of tree stands. Some easements simply allow timber harvesting in accordance with “best management practices,” with no additional detail specified. Others outline the specific management practices in great detail and require an approved forest management plan and pre-and post-cutting inspections. The latter approach can best help protect exceptional forest resources without adding a great deal of complexity and cost to establishing and monitoring a conservation easement.

Regardless of what your conservation easement allows or requires, there are steps that every landowner can and should take to ensure the best protection and management of forests. One of the most valuable and basic steps is to develop a forest management plan for your property. Basic plan components include:

1. Identification of landowner’s goals and objectives. Examples include making money from a saw log harvest, promoting a certain type of wildlife, fostering recreational opportunities, or restoring native biodiversity. For conservation easement properties, the purposes of the conservation easement must also be considered.
2. Inventory what is present. The inventory, (a.k.a. timber cruise) is the most important part of the forest management planning process. Unfortunately, sometimes it is not done to an adequate degree. Besides indicating

merchantable timber, the inventory should identify elements like percent species composition, presence of species vulnerable to disease or insects, presence of dead snags or other factors important to wildlife, and state of ecological succession. A brief summary of the inventory is often depicted by means of a cover-type map (see p. 4).

3. Prescribe management activities. Management prescriptions should be developed for each cover-type or different tree stand and describe in detail things like purpose, location, access requirements, species and percent cover to be removed, harvest method, erosion control and site restoration measures, and time-lines. The Michigan Society of American Foresters has set forth model guidelines for the proper management of woodlands.

It is worthwhile in the long-run to select a qualified professional forester or other resource professional to write your forest management plan. The cost of a plan is highly variable depending on many factors, but might range from \$500 - \$1,500 or more. A consulting forester can also provide services for additional fees like marking trees for harvest, requesting bids, selecting a reputable logger, and monitoring and overseeing the harvest. It is generally not recommended that the logger or timber buyer be allowed to write your management or cutting plan.

There are government assistance programs available to landowners to promote long-term; economically viable; and socially, ecologically, and environmentally responsible use and stewardship of privately-owned forest lands. One program in

Michigan is the Forest Stewardship Program. Any private non-industrial forest landowner with a minimum of 12 acres of land (at least 5 of which must be forested) who wants to manage the land for its many resources is eligible to participate. Up to 50% of the cost of the plan preparation (not to exceed a flat fee of \$300.00 plus \$1.25 per acre) and many implementation practices may be cost-shared. Interested landowners should contact their local DNR Service Forester for more information and to be referred to a certified plan writer in their area:

Tom Stone  
DNR Service Forester  
Northwest Lower Michigan  
231-238-9314

### Is a Forest Management Plan Part of Your Easement?

Please be sure to submit a forest management plan and notify LTC’s Stewardship staff if required to do so by your easement agreement. Even if no notification is required, LTC Stewardship staff always appreciates being notified of planned timber harvest activities. If you would like to talk to a conservation easement landowner with a forest management plan who is actively engaged in forest management activities in collaboration with LTC’s Stewardship staff, please let us know.

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Rich Stevenson  
DNR Service Forester  
Eastern Upper Peninsula  
906-293-5131 ext. 4043

**For forest management assistance in Charlevoix and Emmet Counties also contact:**

Chris Anderson  
Conservation District Forester  
231.582.6193.

The following websites provide more information about forest management on small private properties:

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources**  
([www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr))  
Search for the Forest Stewardship program and a publication entitled "Managing Michigan's Wildlife: A Landowner's Guide"

**Michigan Forest Association**  
([www.michiganforests.com](http://www.michiganforests.com))

**Michigan Society of American Foresters**  
([www.michigansaf.org/](http://www.michigansaf.org/))  
In particular, check out their on-line publication: "Forest Management Guidelines for Michigan"

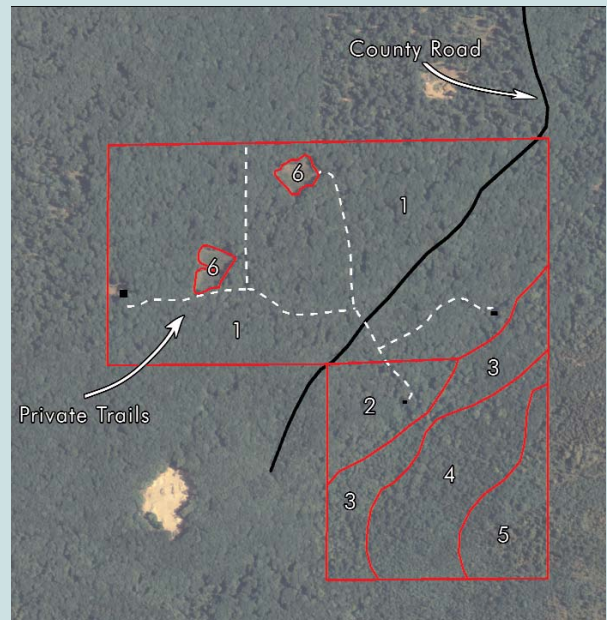
**USDA Forest Service**  
Forest Landowners Guide to Internet Resources  
([www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/flg/index.cfm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/flg/index.cfm))

## Selling your

Please notify our office as soon as possible so we can ensure that the new owners are aware of and understand the conservation easement.

## Conservation

*This article was taken from the 2007 Conservation Easement Landowner Newsletter.*



This is the covertime map from a forest management plan prepared for the owner of a 120-acre property protected by an LTC easement. The numbers denote different coverts of tree stands.

**Stand #1:** Northern hardwood dominated by sugar maple and beech, thinned in the past and managed for quality timber and wildlife habitat.

**Stand #2:** Northern hardwood dominated by sugar maple & beech. Differs from #1 in that it was not thinned in the past. Management goals similar, but poor quality trees need to be thinned.

**Stand #3:** Sapling and pole-sized aspen, red maple, and green and black ash regenerating throughout heavily cut-over area, managed to maintain brushy habitat for wildlife by frequent cutting.

**Stand #4:** Transition from hardwood to swamp conifer. Managed for wildlife habitat, little or no cutting planned.

**Stand #5:** Cedar, with some very large scattered specimens, managed for wildlife and promoting cedar trees, little or no cutting planned.

**Stand #6:** Openings created and managed (through selective planting) for deer food plots and bird viewing.