

These specialists may be employed by either public agencies or private firms. In cases where the landowner is already practicing active management, personnel who are already involved can help to develop the stewardship plan by using existing plans as a basis.

The planning process begins with a meeting of the landowner and the management team. At this meeting, landowner's goals and objectives are discussed and current management activities are summarized.

The resource assessment

A resource assessment of the landowner's property, equipment, facilities, capital, experience and time is part of the goal setting process. The interagency team conducts a resource assessment to evaluate the potential for achieving these goals and identify priorities for treatment. The assessment may determine, for example, that moisture conditions preclude the development of certain types of recreational facilities, or that soil erosion problems must be corrected before management activities are undertaken. Once completed, this assessment serves as a basis for developing specific management strategies.

The team first obtains maps and aerial photographs of the property, as well as soil surveys and other reference materials. Then they use these materials as a guide for determining the quality, quantity and distribution of resources as they survey the condition of the property on the ground. Specifically, this would include the following:

Soil and water

Soil series, erodibility and topographic information determine site sensitivity and degree to which best management practices (BMPs) need to be applied to protect water quality. Fragile sites adjacent to protected waters, wetlands, drainage networks or agricultural buffer zones are mapped and highlighted for special care. Potential water quality problems such as stream crossings, agricultural runoff and off-site discharges are identified and recorded. A record is made of recent pesticide and nutrient applications. Vegetation types and age classes also help to predict the cumulative impact of forest management activities on runoff. Inventories are also taken to evaluate the hydrologic responses to rainfall frequency.

The information on the soil and water resources will identify specific areas of concern and suggest

priorities. For example, bare soil areas on slopes near open water will require immediate contouring and revegetation. Similarly, approaches to culverts that are easily obstructed need to be cleaned to avoid erosion damage from overflows. The hydrologic and vegetation inventories may identify the need for some flow control structures to regulate the water regimes during the developmental stages of the forest. Potential productivity for timber and forage can also be determined from the soils information.

Wildlife

The presence, arrangement and condition of sufficient suitable vegetation to provide food and cover for desired species groups is the primary consideration for managing wildlife. The wildlife biologist notes the existing trees and other vegetation on the site, as well as the potential for the site to support particular species of trees, shrubs, grasses, legumes and other essential habitat components. Additional considerations must be made if any listed threatened or endangered species are found on the property, and some areas of mature timber must be maintained for species which require this habitat component.

Timber

With the help of a professional forester, landowners can begin assessment of the timber resource by dividing the property into "stands" which contain similar combinations of tree species, ground vegetation, soils and other features which make each one distinct from the rest of the property. In this way, planted stands are separated from naturally occurring stands and areas of young saplings from mature timber.

A professional forester then "cruises" each stand to gather information to use as a basis for future management recommendations. A preliminary cruise identifies the tree species and measures the number of trees per acre, density or "basal area," size classes, growth rate and disease incidence. The information helps the landowner and the forester to plan future stand management. The intensity of this effort depends upon how intensively the landowner wishes to manage this resource.

If the landowners decide to make a timber sale, a more detailed cruise is used to determine merchantable volume, timber quality and potential products such as pulpwood or sawlogs which the stand may yield. Private consulting foresters are best equipped to handle this more intensive type of