Developing Your Forest Management Plan

Step 1. Decide What You Want
The first step in planning how to manage your woodland is to develop a list of objectives. What do you want from your woodland? When do you want it? Your management tasks will be clearer if your objectives are specific. For example, “to improve the land for wildlife” may be too vague to guide you in your decisions. On the other hand, an objective “to increase the song bird population on the property” may lead you better to specific management practices.

When you have multiple objectives, be sure to set priorities. Some objectives will be compatible and have common resources and tasks associated with them. But, others may be incompatible and you will have to choose among them.

Step 2. Find Out What You Have
The second step is to have an inventory performed on your property. This can be done by you and with the assistance of a forester or arborist. Usually, the trees and their characteristics will be assessed, but you will also want to note details about other resources like water features, topography, wildlife nesting and feeding sites, and wildflowers.

You will use your inventory results in many ways. First they will help you determine your first management options and priorities. Later they will help you track and monitor any changing conditions in your woodland.

Always be sure of where your exact property boundaries are, and have them clearly marked.

Step 3. Identify Potential Management Practices
After you identify your objectives and inventory your woodland, consider all the reasonable management practices that will help you meet your objectives. They might include:
- Planting trees
- Thinning the trees
- Fencing
- Improving wildlife habitats
- Installing erosion controls
- Constructing trails
- Controlling weeds and exotic plants

Seek professional advice on which practices are appropriate for your property and capabilities.
**Step 4. Assess Labor and Financial Resources**

Once you have developed a list of potential management practices that will achieve your objectives, evaluate your labor and financial resources available to carry them out.

What are your abilities and interest in doing it yourself? How much time are you willing to devote to forest management activities? What are the availability, cost and quality of contractors to do the work? How much money do you have to implement your plan? What kind of equipment will be needed?

The answers to all these type of questions will influence what you can do on the homeowners association’s property.

**Step 5. Develop an Activity Schedule**

Next, prepare an activity schedule that lists management practices and approximately when you expect to perform them. For forest management, this schedule will cover at least one year up to ten years.

Always inspect your forestry projects at least annually. Walk through the woodland and look for storm damage, erosion, invasive plants, and insect and disease problems. Also look for your successes in wildflower planting, wildlife habitat improvements, and tree maintenance.

**Step 6. Keep Good Records**

It will be difficult for you to update your plans and make sound decisions about the future unless you keep accurate records of what you have done. These records may also be important for tax and real estate issues.

Management records may include:
- Management plan
- Property survey
- Property inventory
- Management activities accomplished (what, where, when)
- Source of professional assistance (name, address, telephone number)
- Contracts
- Forest management expenses