

Whose woods these are...: spreading the roots of private forest stewardship.

[Supplement, Vol. 16, No. 4] [August 1992]

Mecozzi, Maureen

[Madison, Wisconsin]: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, [August 1992]

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WDI475V4RNI5J9D>

<http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC/1.0>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.



SPREADING THE ROOTS OF PRIVATE FOREST STEWARDSHIP

Whose woods these are...

Mine, yours & ours

Ownership implies responsibility. You wouldn't buy a new car and never change the oil, or build a house and neglect to put in plumbing, or bring home a pedigreed dog and not bother to walk or groom it. Without planning, without maintenance, without nurturing, you lose your initial investment and any benefits that might accrue.

The same goes for owning forested land, with one small but critical difference: Although one person holds the deed, many people have a stake in how the land is used.

To understand this, look beyond the obvious practical and financial benefits gained from harvesting timber and take another view of the things a woodlot can provide: wildlife habitat, recreation space for family, friends and neighbors, cleaner air and water for people across the state, around the world, and in the generations to come. Managing woodlands for the future adds another dimension to ownership — that of stewardship.

In a country founded on the right of individuals to do as they please with whatever is theirs, the notion of stewardship may seem idealistic, perhaps even naive. And yet, as our numbers grow greater and our needs more diverse, the transition from private landowner to private land steward becomes increasingly important.

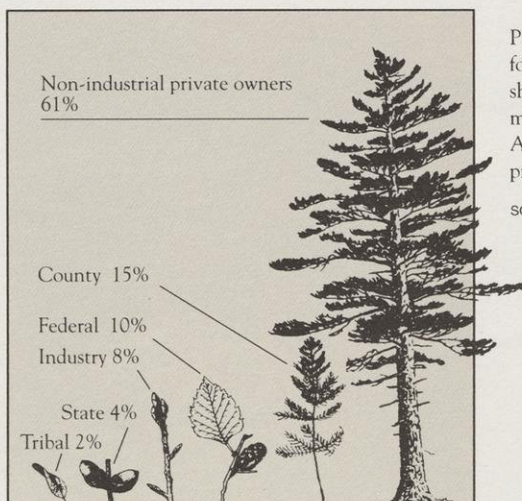
To paraphrase an old English proverb: "Those that tend trees love others besides themselves." Inside, you'll meet woodland owners who enrich and sustain life in all its forms by practicing forest stewardship.



JEAN B. MEYER

WHO OWNS WISCONSIN'S FORESTS?

PERCENTAGE OF OWNERSHIP
WISCONSIN'S 15.3 MILLION FORESTED ACRES



Private individuals own the lion's share of forests in Wisconsin and the U.S. As the chart shows, well over half of Wisconsin's 15.3 million forested acres are in private hands. About 57 percent of the nation's forests are privately owned.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION

NEDRA ASKEY:

"My piece of heaven"

Under a menacing sky, a raw, chill wind whipped through the oaks, pelting the hikers with rain aspiring to sleet. The unseasonably cold spring afternoon didn't dampen the spirits of Nedra Askey, however. With a clutch of students in tow, Askey walked a section of the 200 partially forested acres her family owns in the Baraboo Hills of Sauk County, declaring, "This is my piece of heaven!"

Askey, a 7th-grade science teacher at the Sauk Prairie Middle School in Sauk City, had brought several students up to the land to see forest management practices at work. A few years ago, that wouldn't have been possible.

"We bought this property in 1963," said Askey. "I had no intention of doing anything with it other than just letting it be. I didn't want it logged. I didn't want it changed in any way. And that's how it stayed until 1985."

That was the year Askey took several environmental education courses to keep up with new developments in her field. "Jim Carlson, a private forester, spoke in one class about forest management," she recalled. "I asked him to lead forest field trips for my students...it was an education for me! A well-managed forest can be beautiful and provide income, too."

Carlson helped the Askeys draw up a plan, taking into account their desire for maintaining the natural beauty of the site. "I wanted to make sure there were enough old trees and snags for woodpeckers and other wildlife," Askey said.

On some stands, ironwood and poplar trees were girdled or removed to make space for valuable red oak, which is sprouting naturally now that sunlight can reach the forest floor. The oaks produce acorns favored by wild turkeys; the birds roam the Askeys' property now and it's likely they'll be there in the future, guaranteed of good habitat and a steady food supply.

To date, three 40-acre parcels have been selectively logged; the job was done so carefully it's hard to tell that a chainsaw or ax had been anywhere near the land. "By thinning out the scrubby non-commercial wood, and by harvesting some of the marketable timber, we've made breathing room for the better-quality trees," Askey said. "Now they can grow unhindered. In another 20 years, my grandchildren will be able to enjoy this woods and also gain income from it. It's their legacy."

The Askeys are realizing some financial benefits from the property now, both from timber sales and tax breaks. As directed by the Managed Forest Law, property owners who follow an approved forest management plan receive a reduction in property taxes.

Perhaps most of all, the woman who has spent 23 years in front of a blackboard values her woodlands as a teaching tool. Students visiting her forest examine trees, test the water in her bass pond, and observe birds and wildlife at close range. "It's a living classroom," she said. "There's no better way to learn."



Have tree, will teach: Nedra Askey shares her forest with students from the Sauk Prairie Middle School. Family friends visit Askey's woods to hunt deer and ride horses.



ROBERT QUEEN

PRIVATE CONSULTATION

Government alone can't foster stewardship. That's why state and federal foresters appreciate the role private, or consulting, foresters play in helping landowners design and follow through on forest management plans.

Jim Carlson, a consulting forester now in his 13th year with Oakwood Forestry Consulting of Sauk City, works with property owners all across southern Wisconsin. "We provide all the services a woodland owner might need," Carlson said. "That includes everything from setting up timber sales to planting seedlings. But I think the most important thing I do is listen."

"When I meet with landowners, the first thing we do is 'cruise' or walk through the woodlot. I ask a lot of questions, trying to determine what their objectives are for the property. Do they mainly want high-quality timber? Are they more interested in wildlife habitat? Do they want both? I want to get a feeling for their expectations and goals. When I know that, then I can talk about the different ways to achieve those goals."

"It's important for landowners to understand the monetary value of their woodlands. Sometimes, landowners just take the first offer that comes along for the wood — and they end up getting about half of what the timber was really worth. When we set up a timber sale, we'll get five, six or maybe more competitive bids first."

"Helping landowners take part in a forest stewardship program is really satisfying to me, because when more people appreciate what they have, they can spread that appreciation to others. People who don't own forested land may take it for granted. They may not understand that it takes time and effort and a real commitment to tend a woodlot. We're all users, we're all consumers of the forest in one way or another. A well-managed forest benefits all of us."

DR. PAUL MADSEN:

"It's a struggle...but it's a good struggle!"

When Paul Madsen was asked to estimate the number of tree seedlings he's planted on two parcels in Columbia County over the course of 15 years, he replied with some uncertainty: "95,000, perhaps? Maybe more....you know, they don't all make it. The deer, the rabbits...drought! It's a struggle to keep them growing, but it's a good struggle!"

Despite the frustrations, Madsen, professor emeritus of surgery at the UW School of Medicine in Madison, has been

state Tree Farm Program as an outstanding woodland owner in 1981.

Madsen's interest in forests goes back to his youth in Denmark, where he spent many pleasant hours hunting and skiing in the woods. "When I had the opportunity to purchase property for recreation, I wanted wooded land that could support wildlife," he said. "Dennis Mahy (a DNR forester) and Pat Kaiser (DNR wildlife manager) told me there are a number of ways to create new habitat and improve

in the state. Selective trimming and logging of the stand for pulp — "for now, we've removed every third row" — has brought income for Madsen and room for cross-country skiing, a favorite pastime of his wife Renate.

Madsen's enthusiasm for the forest (matched only by that of his Westphalian spaniel, Dana) couldn't be contained by one woodlot. Seven years ago, he purchased a 285-acre farmstead overlooking the Wisconsin River and began an extensive reforestation and prairie restoration project. He's planting hardwoods for permanent cover and conifers for timber. About 90 acres are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which pays property owners to set aside or reforest erodible land for a period of 10 years or more. "The CRP funds just about cover the property taxes," Madsen said.

Returning the hilly fields to forest hasn't been easy. A heavy cover of foxtail grass chokes out the roots of seedlings. Deer and rabbits munch the tender branches and bark of young trees. An early drought in 1988 — "forty-two days straight without rain!" — wiped out nearly 90 percent of the 35,000 seedlings planted that spring. Madsen himself accidentally set a brush fire that burned 30 acres of newly planted trees. Tools and planting equipment stored in a barn on the property had to be removed after repeated vandalism.

Still Madsen perseveres, using new methods to give his trees the best possible chance of survival. Hundreds of plastic tree shelters protect a large field of seedlings from hungry wildlife and drying winds. Madsen has even tried inserting "bitter pills" into the ground near the roots of young trees. "The manufacturer says the bitter taste grows right into the tree branches," he said. "The deer don't like it and they stay away."

"My wife says this tree planting is an expensive hobby," Madsen said. "Of course, she's right. But it's very satisfying!"



ROBERT QUEEN

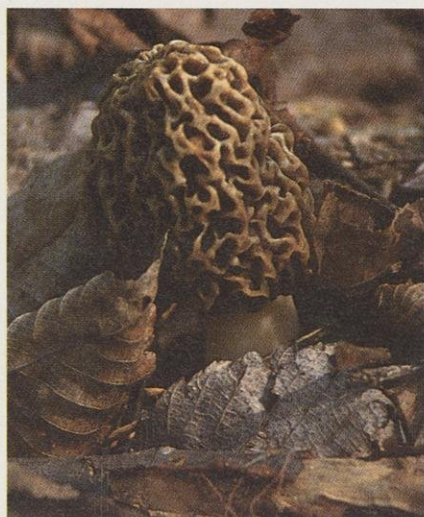
Where some see field, Paul Madsen sees forest. In a few years, thousands of hardwood and conifer seedlings he's planted will make their presence known.

more than willing to take up the cause of forest stewardship. His efforts have not gone unnoticed: He was recognized by the county Land Conservation Office and the

existing habitat through planting trees and managing older stands."

He bought his first woodlot 15 years ago — a 200-acre parcel with a mixed bag of trees. Scotch pines, originally planted by the previous owner for Christmas trees, grew up unruly — they're hardly worth harvesting, and the same goes for the jack pine making inroads on a cleared area. "But the deer like those spots, you see," Madsen said. So do the deer hunters with whom Madsen shares his land. A small pond Madsen dug on the property is now part of a 14-acre DNR wetland restoration project.

Like soldiers at attention, 50-year-old red pines rise in row after row of a large stand nearby the Scotch patch. The trees were some of the first planted by machine



JEAN B. MEYER

The morel, a woodland delicacy.

ROBERT QUEEN

JOHN GARGULAK:

"I cast my lot with trees."

Discharged from military service in 1948, John Gargulak put on his civvies and returned to the family dairy farm, located on the site of an old logging camp in Rusk County. He milked cows and cut timber, but making ends meet was difficult. "I didn't know if I was milking the cows to keep the logging going, or if I was logging to keep the cows going," he said.

"So in 1965, I held an auction and got out of farming. I barely made enough from the sale to buy a new logging truck and loader." With that decision, Gargulak cast his lot with trees — a decision he does not regret.

Gargulak had been buying second-growth hardwood lands since 1950. "In those days, you could buy a forty (40 acres) for \$100 or even less," he said. "I bought hundreds of acres that had gone tax delinquent."

In the ensuing 40 years, he's nursed 2,600 acres back to full productivity by practicing sound forestry. With the advice and assistance of DNR foresters, Gargulak selectively cuts and thins trees, following timber stand improvement techniques. The result: Thriving, densely stocked stands of maple, oak, butternut and bass-

BOB BECKER



Joanne and John Gargulak.

wood trees, which are marketed as high-value, veneer-grade logs. Over 100,000 Christmas trees — white spruce, balsam fir and white, red and Scotch pine — provide a steady supply of greenery for the Gargulaks' retail lot, a Rice Lake landmark for 30 years. They sell about 1,200 Christmas trees a year.

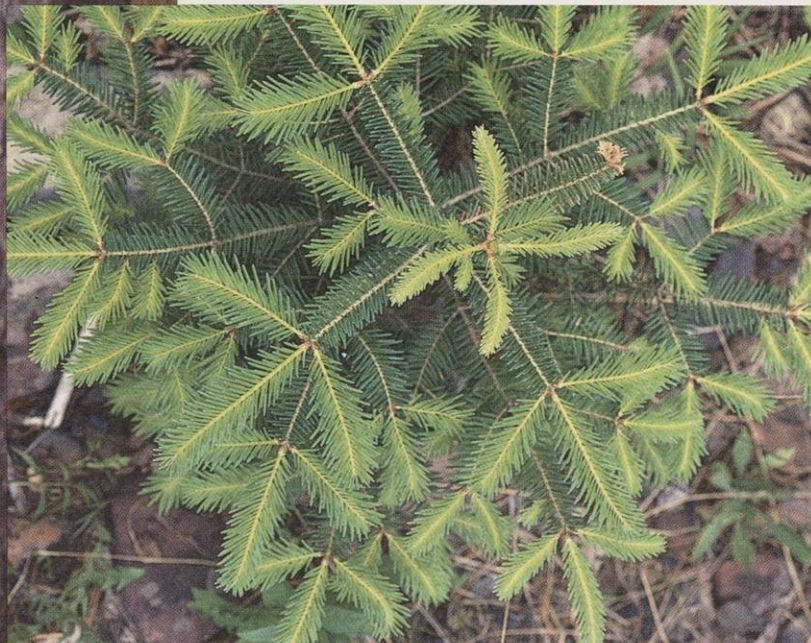
Gargulak and his wife Joanne respect the land that provides their livelihood. They've built seven quarter-acre ponds on their property to aid in groundwater replenishment. "We've stocked rainbow and brown trout, because we like to fish," John said, "but the herons and otters usually get to them before we do."

John Gargulak has been recognized locally and statewide for his careful forest management work and land stewardship ethic. "Owning and managing forestlands has been a good investment for us," Gargulak stated. "I'm proud I had a hand in making this land productive again."

Compiled from an article by Bob Becker originally published in the December 1990 issue of *The Timber Producer*, with permission of the editor.

(left) Red pines ready for harvest.

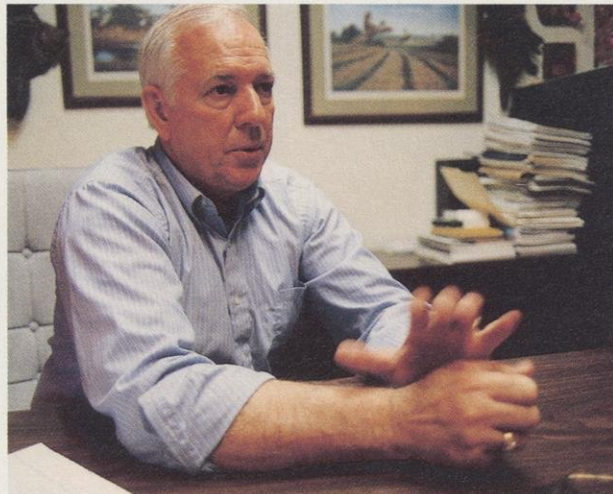
(below) A young white spruce on the way up.



DON BLEGEN

BILL HORVATH:

“It’s more than trees.”



ROBERT QUEEN

Stewardship is a way of life for Bill Horvath.

Bill Horvath intends to have the number one forest stewardship plan in Shawano County. “Timber, recreation, wildlife, wetlands, watershed protection — I’m going to do it all on my 90 acres,” he said. “I take a holistic view of what a forest is. It’s more than trees.”

Horvath’s all-encompassing outlook stems from his job as staff to the Forestry Committee of the National Association of Conservation Districts. “Soil and water conservation districts go back to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s,” Horvath said. “They were set up to help farmers stop soil erosion and protect watersheds.”

Today’s conservation districts shoulder additional responsibilities.

“Conservation districts are involved in land-use planning, environmental education, forestry, recreation, flood control, you name it,” said Horvath. “They function like little DNRs.”

Wisconsin is unique in that each county is set up as a conservation district. Locally elected members of a county’s land conservation committee work with other districts, state and federal agencies to involve area landowners in the Stewardship Incentive Program, the Managed Forest Tax, the Conservation Reserve Program and other land-management initiatives.

“Conservation districts have been a direct link between landowners and the government for 60 years,” Horvath noted. “It’s local people helping each other for

the good of the community and, ultimately, the country.”

Horvath hopes more owners of private woodlots will participate in forest stewardship programs. “Not many private landowners know how to manage their woodlands for timber, or for anything else,” he said. “Most erroneously assume that taking timber off is bad for the land, a big expense, or just too much trouble.

They assume a woodlot will just take care of itself, that new trees will grow and wildlife will thrive. But that’s often not the case.”

He’s especially excited about restoring

three former wetlands on his property. “I remember this land from my childhood,” he recalled. “I tracked mink, weasel, rabbits and deer here.” The land changed hands; the new owners drained the wetlands for pasture. Today the land is back in the family and Horvath is blocking drainage ditches and planting grasses to make memories come alive. The restored wetlands will help protect groundwater and provide habitat for songbirds, ducks, furbearers and other wildlife.

“With the planning and financial assistance from the stewardship programs, private landowners will discover ways to make their woodlots amazingly productive and valuable, whether the lots are 40 acres or 400 acres...not only for timber, but for wildlife, watershed protection and for recreation too,” Horvath said. “Just taking that first step — asking professionals for help — will make all the difference in the world.”



DNR PHOTO

A NATURAL PARTNERSHIP

Where the bedrock rises 500 feet above the plain, where cerulean warblers skim thick stands of oak, hickory, maple and ash, where a creek rushes like liquid diamonds down a quartzite gorge — that's where you'll find one of the best examples of cooperative forest stewardship in the state.

Over the past two decades, the Wisconsin chapter of The Nature Conservancy (a conservation organization dedicated to preserving biological diversity) acquired parcels of land totaling more than 6,000 acres in the Baraboo Hills of Sauk County. The preserve encompasses southern Wisconsin's only undeveloped watershed and Baxter's Hollow, one of Wisconsin's last remaining deep forest communities. Otter Creek, home to pickerel frogs and other rare aquatic invertebrates, drains the preserve.

"Biologically speaking, it's an incredibly rich area," said Fred Clark of the Conservancy. "Within the boundaries there are sand barrens and relicts of the hemlock forest. It's probably the most important nesting site for forest birds in this part of the state. Bobcat may be living up there, too."

Recognizing that the actions of nearby private landowners could affect the preserve in ways both good and bad, the Conservancy joined with the Department of Natural Resources on a project to accentuate the positive.

The project, funded through the Forest Stewardship Program, has two purposes. The first is to inventory and map the area's major vegetation types and the distribution of rare and common plant and animal species.

With this data, a DNR forest ecologist can carry out the project's second purpose: Helping landowners and other natural resource specialists develop forest and land management plans that meet the landowner's needs and help to protect the biological diversity of the Baraboo Hills. The ecologist also holds training sessions to discuss inventory information with landowners in the area.

"The private landowners in the Baraboo Hills have a real appreciation for what's here, and they've been very cooperative," Clark noted. "We look forward to sharing the knowledge we've gathered with them."



GREGORY K. SCOTT

A shelf fungus and a wood frog are but two examples of the diverse species found in woodlands. (left) Who can put a lock on fall splendor? Private woodlands provide public benefits — cleaner air and water, lumber, recreation, and breathtaking beauty.



DON BLEGEN

BECOMING A FOREST STEWARD

The 1990 Federal Farm Bill directed the U.S. Forest Service to develop a stewardship program with an ambitious goal: To see that 25 million acres of nonindustrial private forest land would be managed in an environmentally sensitive way within the next five years — voluntarily.

"That's very much in keeping with the approach of the Forest Service," said Charlie Higgs, director of DNR's Bureau of Forestry. "They've long had a policy of encouraging forest owners to try different management methods through education

lations already dictate what landowners can do on their property," said Higgs. "Property owners have to go through zoning hearings, get permits, submit reports.

"That's why we'd really like for private forest owners to take up stewardship voluntarily. It's so much more positive and cost-effective in the long run. If your own house is in order, the neighbors won't come knocking."

In essence, that's what the Forest Stewardship Program is all about: Giving woodlot owners the information and the financial incentives to tend their forested

lands for the public good as well as for personal gain. "We're asking private woodlot owners to 'leave it better than it was,' to manage their forests for the future," said Higgs. "And we're prepared to help."

The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) offers information on stewardship practices to landowners and the general public; training for resource professionals and service providers who work with private forest owners; and funding for conferences and meetings where forest landowners can exchange ideas and information with forestry professionals.

The Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) provides financial assistance to private landowners who follow approved forestry practices. Owners participating in the Stewardship Incentive Program make a 10-year commitment to tend their woodlands according to a plan developed by a professional resource manager.

The landowner and resource manager work together to meet the landowner's objectives for wildlife habitat, watershed protection, recreation and timber production. Up to 75 percent of the costs of planning, planting, improving and protecting land can be covered by the SIP program. Private individuals, groups, associations, corporations, Native American tribes and other legal private entities owning less than 1,000 acres of qualified land may participate.

Wisconsin provides another financial



GET IN TOUCH

For more information about the Forest Stewardship Program, the Stewardship Incentive Program and the Managed Forest Law, write the DNR Bureau of Forestry, Box 7921, Madison WI 53707, or call your local DNR forester.

Other organizations that can help:

Wisconsin Forest Productivity Council
P.O. Box 1375
Rhinelander, WI 54501
(715) 369-3475

Wisconsin Woodland Owners
P.O. Box 285
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-4798

Association of Consulting Foresters
Wisconsin Chapter
c/o Allan Waelchli
Route 5 Box 208
Shawano, WI 54166
(715) 526-6020



JEAN B. MEYER

Stewardship spans the generations.

and incentives, rather than through regulation and enforcement."

The voluntary emphasis is especially important because private woodlands are part of a larger whole, whether it's a single watershed or an entire state. "No woodlot is an island," Higgs observed. "When a private forest owner cuts timber improperly and creates erosion, or drops trees across streams, or just plain ignores aesthetics, you'd better believe somebody's going to notice." Even accepted forestry practices such as the judicious use of herbicides can draw fire from an environmentally-aware public.

"Plenty of local, state and federal regu-

incentive for woodland owners to become forest stewards. Under the Managed Forest Law, the property taxes of landowners who follow approved management plans will be reduced significantly.

"If all the 200,000 private forest owners in Wisconsin took stewardship to heart, we'd have a truly special, meaningful gift to give future residents," said Higgs. "It would be a living example of how to respect the land."

PUBL-FR-072

© 1992, Wisconsin Natural Resources,
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Produced by the DNR Bureau of Forestry
Forest Stewardship Program

Written by Maureen Mecozzi
Designed by Moonlit Ink
Cover photo by Don Blegen