

LINCOLN COUNTY FORESTRY, LAND AND PARKS DEPARTMENT

To the Honorable Board of Supervisors
Lincoln County, Wisconsin

The following is a report of the various activities of the Lincoln County Forestry, Land and Parks Department from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019.

OUR 2019 COUNTY FOREST consists of 100,843.05 acres.

2019 TIMBER SALES REVENUE TOTALED \$2,550,242.33. This revenue is distributed as follows: \$254,709.21 to Towns with County Forest Lands; \$509,419.64 to the County General Fund; and \$1,786,112.65 to the County Forestry Fund. Any unused budgeted funds and surplus revenues are transferred to the County CIP Program after the annual audit is completed. 2019 is the second highest year of revenue from our timber sale program.

DURING THE YEAR, 37 TIMBER SALES WERE SOLD with an estimated value of \$1,521,489.53.

FOURTEEN BOUGH PERMITS WERE ISSUED @ \$100.00 per permit = \$1,400.00.

GRANT REVENUES administered by the Forestry, Land & Parks Department during 2019 totaled \$522,157.81. Of this amount, \$2,446.00 was provided by Lincoln County for those grants requiring cost sharing.

REVENUE FROM WOOD SALES AND FIREWOOD PERMITS DURING 2019 TOTALED \$935.00. Two wood sales (\$35.00) and forty-four 30-day firewood permits (\$660.00) were issued. Sixteen firewood permits (\$240.00) were extended.

TREE PLANTING/SITE PREP:

Approximately 38,000 (1,100 trees /acre) 2 year old red pine trees were planted by contract crew on two sites totaling 35 acres in the Town of Wilson.

TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT (TSI):

Approximately 710 acres of aspen release was completed in aspen regeneration areas by logging contractors as a requirement of their timber sale contract.

Approximately 12 acres of swamp conifer site prep was completed by logging contractors as a requirement of their timber sale contract.

Approximately 4 acres of white birch site prep (scarification) was completed by logging contractors as a requirement of their timber sale contract.

SURVEYING: All of the surveying done in 2019 was in conjunction with the Lincoln County Surveyor.

In Section 7 of T35N R6E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the north line of the NE1/4 totaling approximately 1/2 mile of boundary.

In Section 34 of T35N R8E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the west and south lines of the W1/2 NW1/4 totaling approximately 3/4 mile of boundary.

In Section 25 of T34N R5E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the north line of the NW1/4 totaling approximately 1/2 mile of boundary.

In Section 23 of T33N R7E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the west line of the SW1/4 NW1/4 totaling approximately 1/4 mile of boundary.

In Section 26 of T34N R8E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the south and east lines of the NW1/4 totaling approximately 1 mile of boundary. A monument was set at the C1/4.

In Section 14 of T34N R8E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the west line of the SE1/4 SE1/4 totaling approximately 1/4 mile of boundary.

In Section 23 of T34N R8E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary in the NW1/4 SW1/4 NE1/4 totaling approximately 1/8 mile of boundary. Monuments were set at two corners for this line.

In Section 10 of T33N R7E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the south and east lines of the NE1/4 totaling approximately 1 mile of boundary. A monument was set at the C1/4.

In Section 2 of T33N R7E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the west and north lines of the SW1/4 SW1/4 totaling approximately 1/2 mile of boundary. Monuments were set at the W1/16SW and C1/16SW.

In Section 9 of T33N R8E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the south, west, and north lines of the NW1/4 totaling approximately 1 1/4 mile of boundary. Monuments were set at the N1/16NW and C1/4.

COUNTY FOREST ROAD AIDS PROGRAM: We continued our County Forest road maintenance program including graveling, installing culverts, improving drainage, right-of-way brushing and regular grading and snowplowing of roads. In 2019 we received approximately \$311.73/mile for maintaining 27.25 miles of roads for a total of \$8,494.55. A GIS layer was developed several years ago showing the locations of culverts on our gas tax roads and these structures were identified by diameter and length, prioritized and placed on a replacement schedule. All high priority culverts have been replaced and we are now focusing our efforts on roadside brushing, ditching and moderate risk culverts. One culvert was replaced on Cinder Road and one culvert was replaced on Poplar Road in 2019 as well as 5.35 miles of roadside brushing being conducted on Camp Ave.

COUNTY CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE HABITAT FUNDS FOR 2019: We continued work on our County Conservation Aids grant for improving access to locations on the county forest by upgrading the access road to Posey Rapids. Wildlife Habitat funds were used for conducting roadside brushing on Camp Ave.

PRAIRIE DELLS SCENIC AREA: The Forestry, Land and Parks Committee accepted the donation of a 5-acre parcel bordering the Prairie Dells Scenic Area in 2015. This donation will allow our department to enhance the recreational opportunities in this location and will also prevent future developments from occurring adjacent to this scenic area. A three acre timber sale was established on county land on the west side of the river at the Prairie Dells property. This sale was harvested in 2019 in conjunction with a harvest that took place on the Merrill Memorial Forest. This sale brought in \$3,143.01 in revenue.

ORGANIZED AND/OR COMPETITIVE ACTIVITIES WERE CONDUCTED on the County Forest in the Underdown Recreation Area by the Underdown Horse Club, Rocky Run Stable and the Rhinelander Area Silent Trails Association (RASTA) and in the Harrison Unit by the Harrison Hills ATV Club.

THE UNDERDOWN RECREATION AREA is available for a variety of uses year round. Groomed and tracked X-C ski trails, snowshoe trails, horse trails, single track bike trails, fat bike trails, hiking trails, and a snowmobile/winter ATV trail are all mapped and signed in the Underdown. Season trail passes were made available to the public to offset the cost of these trails. Several small bridges were constructed by the bike club on the single track bike trail where wet areas are crossed. Signing and trail improvements were also completed on several trail segments by this club. New gates were installed in various locations to accommodate horse drawn wagon events for the Underdown Horse Club. Concrete manure bunkers for horse use were also constructed at the trailhead. A new groomer for the ski trail that was purchased using donated funds continued to be utilized. Several segments of Cross-County ski trail had dozer work and trail signing improvements completed. An RTA grant was obtained for improvement work and maintenance of non-motorized trails in the Underdown over the next two years. The amount awarded to Lincoln County under this grant was \$16,281.24 and we must match these dollars for a total project cost of \$32,562.48.

COUNTY PARKS ACTIVITIES: Regular maintenance of County parks and facilities was performed during 2019. We have been using non-lethal means in an integrated approach to control geese population issues at Tug Lake County Park. A new road was constructed at Newwood Park to allow for better access to the playground equipment for maintenance activities. Several new campfire rings were installed within our campground system. Drainage improvement work was done to several campsites and hazard tree removal and timber stand improvement work was conducted at Otter Lake Campground.

INVASIVE SPECIES: In 2007, a significant garlic mustard infestation was discovered in the Underdown Block of the County Forest and on adjacent private land. Our department took immediate action to try to control the spread of this invasive plant by conducting a search to find new infestations and applying herbicide where the plant was known to occur. Since then, many other small, satellite colonies of this invasive plant have been found in other locations of the Underdown, Harrison and Wildwood Blocks.

In addition to Garlic Mustard, other invasive species have been discovered on County Forest property. Glossy Buckthorn, Japanese Barberry, Crown Vetch, Leafy Spurge and Japanese Knotweed have been found in areas of Underdown and Harrison. Steps are taken to control or eradicate these species when they are found. A GIS Layer is maintained to identify every known location of invasive plant species on the county forest. We will continue to monitor and treat known infestations while being observant for new species and infestations on the County Forest. The Forestry Department has provided training and publications to user groups of the County Forest and to townships within the county on how to identify invasive plant species so that they can assist our department with early detection and treatment. The workload on this issue continues to increase as we make every effort to control invasive plants on the county forest.

LINCOLN COUNTY ACCESS PLAN: Restoration work to Posey Rapids Road was concluded and improvements to our primary gas tax roads and to the Averill Creek Firelane were completed with grant funding. Constructed concrete horse manure bunkers at the Underdown trail head and installed several gates on the horse trail to accommodate horse drawn wagon events. Maintenance work was done on the single track bike trails. Performed rehab work on portions of the summer ATV/UTV trail in order to continue controlling erosion on the trail and make conditions more user friendly. Continued work on acquiring access permits for private individuals that access their lands through the County Forest. Issued temporary access permits for individuals hauling forest products from private lands across the County Forest. A Recreation Officer continued working on the County Forest and helped reduce vandalism and restore order to our public lands and recreational facilities.

LINCOLN COUNTY 5-YEAR OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN was updated in 2016 in conjunction with North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning, the City of Tomahawk, The City of Merrill, local townships and special interest groups. The Plan was approved by the Lincoln County Board of Supervisors on October 18, 2016 and is effective January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2021. We continue to implement this plan.

LINCOLN COUNTY'S 2018-2019 SNOWMOBILE TRAIL MAINTENANCE PROJECT was approved for \$87,120.00 consisting of 290.4 miles of trail @ \$300/mile. Seven clubs in the county were contracted to maintain the total number of funded miles in Lincoln County. In addition, supplemental maintenance funding was approved at 100% statewide making the portion paid out to Lincoln County's clubs an additional \$46,220.96. We acquired grant funding in the amount of \$85,276.50 to replace a 12' x 40' steel clear span bridge on Corridor 16 south of Gouda Road and \$10,004 to replace two culverts on Corridor 19 north of 4-Mile Road.

ATV PROGRAM: We received trail maintenance aids of \$22,464.00 consisting of 223.1 miles of winter trails @ \$100/mile and \$33,495.00 consisting of 47.8 miles of summer ATV and UTV trail at \$700/mile as well as \$287.96 for maintenance of 1 mile of TROUTE. Five snowmobile clubs contracted to maintain the funded miles of winter ATV trail in the county. These trails are part of the county's snowmobile trail system. Our summer ATV mileage traverses through the Harrison Hills and links up with Langlade and Oneida County Trails as well as the communities of Gleason, Harrison, and the Pine Lake area. Lincoln County maintains the summer ATV trail system, and contracts with the Harrison Hills ATV Club to assist with brushing and signing. We continued to implement an emergency signing system for the summer trail network which is compatible with the County's 911 system. We continue to work with ATV clubs in the Somo, Wilson, and Spirit Falls areas to identify possible sites for an ATV trail/route link as well as to the Village of Gleason. Lincoln County continues to participate in the permanent Utility Terrain Vehicle program which began on July 1, 2012.

ICE AGE TRAIL: Several sections of the Ice Age Trail were relocated and/or reconstructed as needed with the majority of the work being done in the Harrison area. We continue to work with our local chapter to provide quality facilities and address issues as they arise.

HARRISON FLOWAGE DAM: An owner-responsible inspection of the Harrison Dam is required every 10 years in order to keep the dam in conformance with state law. The dam was inspected in 2014 by Becher-Hoppe Associates and several deficiencies were identified to bring the dam in compliance with state code. These deficiencies were all addressed in 2015 to include replacing the stoplogs in the spillway; brushing the toeslope of the dike; performing concrete repair work on the catwalk and erecting a dam warning sign. We continue to do maintenance and monthly county inspections of the dam on a routine basis.

BEAVER PROGRAM: The Lincoln County Forestry Department continued to work with USDA WS APHIS regarding beaver problems on the Lincoln County Forest and on the County Forest road system.

FOREST CERTIFICATION: The Lincoln County Forest became SFI certified in March, 2005 and FSC certified in July, 2007. We worked on implementing necessary changes on the County Forest required by SFI and FSC forest certification.

LAND SOLD, RATIFIED, CONFIRMED AND APPROVED by the Lincoln County Board in 2019 included 6 tax delinquent properties sold to the City of Merrill, 2 tax delinquent properties sold to the City of Tomahawk and 23 tax delinquent properties sold to private individuals for a total of \$234,717.43.

DEPARTMENT SAFETY PLAN: Continued development and implementation of our department safety plan. The Lincoln County Public Works Safety Group (Highway, Forestry, Solid Waste and Maintenance Departments) worked with County Mutual in 2019 to implement this plan. Programs are in place for hazardous communication, control of hazardous energy, confined space entry and excavation safety, emergency action and fire prevention plan, personal protective equipment, occupational noise exposure and blood borne pathogens.

DNR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT: 2019 Accomplishments on the Lincoln County Forest submitted by Janet Brehm, DNR Wildlife Biologist

Flowages:

Water levels and wildlife were actively monitored on Camp 26, Trapper Morrison, and Coffee Creek Flowages in 2019.

- Coffee Creek: Board walls surrounding the outlet are leaning and noted by DNR staff. The idea to decommission this flowage is being discussed. The DNR contacted APHIS to remove beaver and unclog the tube.
- Camp 26: The wild rice crop was good this year as no illegal activity occurred to completely lower the water as in 2018. The DNR contacted APHIS to remove beaver and unclog the tube.
- Trapper Morrison: APHIS was called in to remove beaver and unclogged the tube.

Wildlife Openings:

Mowing is performed with the objective of setting back woody encroachment and promoting herbaceous (grass/forb) cover to benefit deer, woodcock, ruffed grouse, turkeys and many other forest wildlife species. This cover type is an important habitat component for many of our game species as well as numerous other non-game species. Openings are mowed on a 4-year rotation.

Turkey Stamp funds were awarded to Lincoln County Forest in the amount of \$18,000 for FY20 and FY21. Janet Brehm assisted with the application which was titled “Lincoln County Forest Openings and Trails Habitat Maintenance”. For FY20, the southern Harrison Hills and Underdown forest openings and trails were mowed in fall of 2019 by JJ’s Brushcutting (contractor). An NHI review occurred for the project. The next area to be mowed is the Spirit Falls block in the NW corner of Lincoln County Forest, which bids will need to be solicited again. A majority of funds were used in the first year of mowing. Kleinschmidt and Brehm discussed using the remaining \$2,200 in turkey stamp funds as well as Nickel-an-acre funds and the local wildlife budget to mow the Spirit Falls block in 2020. An interim report is due September 30, 2020 for the Turkey Stamp, which local DNR wildlife staff will assist with.

Pittman-Robinson (PR) County Forest Wildlife Grant Award was awarded to Lincoln County Forest in the amount of \$4,000 for the Camp 26 Grouse Management Area (GMA) for FY19 (project funded by June 30th, 2019). Janet Brehm also assisted with this application for the hunter walking trails and forest opening mowing work to reopen the GMA. The project was completed by JJ’s Brushcutting and the funds were charged \$3,800. An NHI review occurred for the project. A second request for PR County Forest Wildlife Grant Award was submitted to continue work on the Camp 26 GMA. The project involved additional hunter walking trails, forest openings, as well as gate purchases. The second phase of the project was not funded. However, mowing by JJ’s ended up covering a majority of the hunter walking trails requested to be mowed by the second phase of the project. The loops off Krueger Rd did not get mowed, which had gate requests as part of funding not rewarded. The DNR plans to continue to assist with upkeep of the Camp 26 GMA and will add this area to the forest openings mowing rotation on an every other year basis.

Wildlife Surveys:

Wildlife surveys that were conducted in 2019 on the Lincoln County Forest included woodcock peenting survey, ruffed grouse drumming survey, turkey, deer sightings and fawn to doe ratios, winter and summer waterfowl surveys, carnivore tracking, and furbearer tracking. Grouse and turkey surveys include spring breeding activity as well as brood counts in the spring and summer. The furbearer tracking survey was partially completed in 2019 because DNR Office of Applied Sciences determined the survey data was not useful, which was discontinued. The winter waterfowl survey was also discontinued after the 2019 survey period for the same reasons. The bear bait survey was discontinued in 2018, however, a bear hair-snare survey was completed on public lands and private lands in 2019. Lincoln County Forest had several hair-snare survey sites conducted with permission from the Administrator. The county was kept informed regarding the new process and pictures of bears visiting one site was shared with the Administrator and used for information across the state via social media. Results will be shared in 2020 and the bear hair-snare survey will occur again in about 5 years.

The ruffed grouse drumming count was high in 2019 in the New Wood area of Lincoln County Forest and the same in the Harrison Hills from 2018 to 2019. Statewide ruffed grouse drumming

activity increased 41% between 2018 and 2019, based on the roadside survey to monitor breeding grouse activity. As for the ruffed grouse brood survey, statewide brood observations remained relatively the same from 2018, but down from the long-term average mainly due to lack of observers reporting data. Wisconsin DNR is currently evaluating utility and methods for all wildlife surveys, and as part of that review will be assessing ten-week brood surveys and potential alternative methods, such as development of mobile applications or citizen science opportunities, to provide a more robust index of game bird brood production. A tri-state effort (Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan) is looking at disease as a potential factor as well, but localized weather events that have occurred, like heavy spring rain and late winter snow, could play a factor, as well as habitat. Grouse populations ebb and rise on a nine to eleven-year cycle. Young forest creation as well as age class diversity play an important role on the county, and it appears Lincoln County grouse population are doing well. Continual efforts to decrease the size of aspen cuts and provide a diversity of age classed nearby is helpful to grouse management. The DNR also published a Grouse Management Plan in 2019 with Brehm being part of the process.

In the fall of 2019, Lincoln County Forest agreed again to be part of a targeted Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance effort. CWD was confirmed in late 2017, in NE Lincoln County, in the Town of Harrison. To determine range and infection rate of CWD in this area, the DNR established a goal to test 450 deer inside a Surveillance Area which included northeast Lincoln, northwest Langlade and south-central Oneida counties. The DNR met this overall goal however CWD sampling continues to be a priority. The Lincoln County Forest Administrator and Committee agreed to special public land permits, which required testing of deer heads for CWD, to help the DNR meet their goal. About 50 square miles of Lincoln County Forest occur within the established Surveillance Area, and the DNR had a goal of about 1 deer per square mile with this effort. In 2019, 165 tags were made available again, 30 tags were issued, and 4 tags were registered.

In 2019, Lincoln County Forest was not part of the collaboration between WI DNR and the Missouri Department of Conservation to restore ruffed grouse by translocation of grouse from northern Wisconsin to the River Hills region of east-central Missouri over a three-year period from 2018 to 2020. The county was involved in 2018.

Other:

In the fall of 2019, DNR staffers, Eric Borchert and Rikki Ratsch, installed the wooden sign for the Camp 26 Grouse Management Area the was made by DNR staff (intersection of New Wood Rd and Whiskey Bill Rd). The wooden Trapper Morrison sign is finished, just needs to be installed at the Averill Creek Fire lane and Camp Ave intersection.

Chapters of the “Lincoln County Forest 15-Year Comprehensive Land Use Plan” were reviewed by wildlife staff.

EQUIPMENT PURCHASES IN 2019: 2019 John Deere Lawn Tractor and a 2019 RAM 2500 Pick-up Truck with BOSS V CXT Plow.

Respectfully submitted,
Kevin Kleinschmidt
Forest Administrator