

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, 2023 through December 31, 2023.

OUR 2023 COUNTY FOREST consists of 100,843.05 acres.

TIMBER SALE REVENUE: Timber harvesting generated \$ 2,750,376.29 This revenue is distributed as follows: \$ 275,037.69 to Townships with County Forest Lands; \$ 550,075.17 to the County General Fund; and \$ 1,925,263.43 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. 2024 saw a significant increase in timber sale revenue over the 2022 total. A few high volume/value timber sales contributed to this second highest ever timber sale revenue spike. Generally speaking, pulpwood markets have been and continue to be weak. Lincoln County is fortunate to have two significant mills in Tomahawk and two others just to the south in Rothschild and Mosinee.

TIMBER SALES SOLD: Thirty-one timber sales with an estimated value of \$1,813,725.30 sold in 2023. Two of the timber sales had been returned to Lincoln County in 2022 by the original bidder due to their inability to complete the sale.

PERMITS ISSUED: Eleven balsam bough-cutting permits issued for \$100.00 per permit totaled \$1,100.00. Six Christmas tree permits issued for \$5.00 each. Three new land access permits issued for \$100.00 each. Nine disabled motorized access permits issued. Four Organized Event permits were issued.

GRANT MONIES: Grants administered by the Forestry, Land & Parks Department during 2023 totaled \$337,002.52. Of this amount, \$18,719.81 was required in cost sharing by Lincoln County.

REVENUE FROM WOOD SALES, BIOMASS AND FIREWOOD PERMITS: The Forestry Department handles firewood sales on closed timber sales, marked wood sales, and occasionally biomass from timber sales. Six wood sales (\$1,609.56), twenty-nine 30-day firewood permits (\$580.00) issued and six firewood permit renewals (\$120.00) for a total of \$2,309.56.

TREE PLANTING/SITE PREP:

Approximately 63,000 red pine were planted in on 63 acres in the Townships of Wilson and Somo by a contract planting crew. A contractor was hired to power trench and spray herbicide on one hundred fifty six acres to prepare several sites for planting in spring 2024 and 2025. DNR bulldozer operators scarified approximately 17 acres to promote pre-harvest oak regeneration establishment.

TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT (TSI):

Approximately 962 acres of aspen release was completed in aspen regeneration areas by logging contractors as a requirement of their timber sale contract.

Approximately 133 acres of red maple release was completed in red maple regeneration areas by logging contractors as a requirement of their timber sale contract.

SURVEYING: All of the surveying done in 2023 was in conjunction with the Lincoln County Surveyor.

In Section 06 of T33N R8E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the south line of the SE1/4 SE1/4; and the east line of the E1/2 SE1/4 totaling approximately 3/4 mile of boundary.

In Section 13 of T33N R5E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the east line of the NW1/4 NE1/4 and the north line of the SE1/4 NE1/4 totaling approximately 1/2 mile of boundary.

In Section 4 of T33N R8E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the west line of the E1/ SW1/4 totaling approximately 1/2 mile of boundary.

In Section 18 of T35N R6E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the east line of the SE1/4 SW1/4 & the north line of SE1/4 SE1/4 totaling approximately 1/2 mile of boundary. A monument was established C1/16SW

In Section 13 of T35N R5E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along County Forest property boundary for the east line of the SE1/2 SE1/4 totaling approximately 1/4 mile of boundary.

In Section 13 of T33N R7E, county owned land property line was established and T-style fence posts were placed at various points along the property boundary for the east line of the NW1/4 NW1/4 and the south line of the NW1/4 NW1/4 totaling approximately 1/2 mile of boundary.

In Section 24 T33N R7E, T-style fence posts were placed at various points along the County Forest property boundary for the east line of SE1/4 NW1/4 totaling approximately 1/4 mile of boundary.

COUNTY FOREST ROAD AIDS PROGRAM: We continued our County Forest road maintenance program including graveling, installing culverts, improving drainage, right-of-way brushing, regular grading and snowplowing of roads. In 2023, we received approximately \$351.00/mile for maintaining 27.25 miles of roads for a total of \$9,564.75. Three culverts were replaced on gas tax roads in New Wood and the database updated. Due to the ice storm in early winter, extensive roadside brushing was done by the Highway Department and the Forestry Department to reopen the roads. Road shoulders were brushed again later in 2023 to finish the clean-up. In 2021, a small borrow pit was opened along Armstrong Creek Road to reduce travel time for hauling material. ARPA money was used to hire a private contractor to crush 6,700 yards of gravel in the borrow pit on Armstrong Creek Road.

COUNTY CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE HABITAT FUNDS FOR 2023: County Conservation Aids is a 50/50 grant available to counties and Wildlife Habitat is a grant based on the number of county forest acres. Staff completed the County Conservation Aids project on a forest road off of Ski Hill Road in the Town of Harrison. This project improved public access to Frog Lake and included installing culverts, repairing ongoing erosion problems, ditching and crowning a segment of the road and hauling gravel. County Conservation Aids were also used to brush roadsides of County Forest

roads in New Wood to keep them open for hunter access. Wildlife habitat funds will be used to complete a hunter walking trail project in the Whiskey Bill Road Grouse Management Area in 2024.

ORGANIZED AND/OR COMPETITIVE ACTIVITIES: An approved permit and proof of insurance are required to organize and host an event on County Forest property. The Distance Riders of Wisconsin, Badger State Games and Ice Age Trail group all hosted events on the County Forest in the Underdown Recreation Area. The Iron Bull Red Granite Grinder bike race included a segment through the New Wood area of the County Forest.

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 mountain bike trails, fat tire bike trails, hiking trails, and a snowmobile/winter ATV trail are all mapped and signed. The early winter ice storm left a lot of clean-up work before trails could be opened. The purchase of trail passes by users is required and helps to offset the cost of maintaining the ski and horse trails. The annual Free Trail Pass Weekend was held in February. The horse and bike club members volunteer time to help maintain the trail systems they use. A Recreational Trails Program grant request for improvement work and maintenance of non-motorized trails in the Underdown has been submitted in 2022 and 2023 but due to extensive competition, Lincoln County was not awarded a grant.

COUNTY PARKS ACTIVITIES: Total parks revenue from 2023 was \$23,344.32. Forestry staff mowed lawns and performed other maintenance of County parks and facilities during 2023. A temporary fence is erected to keep geese off the beach at Tug Lake County Park. The well pump at Tug Lake failed and was replaced. Fascia boards and other rotting boards were replaced on the Tug Lake pavilion.

Old wells near Tug Lake Park, Otter Lake, Hay Meadow Park and Larson Lake Park were properly decommissioned by a contractor with the aid of a 50/50 grant through DATCP.

The Forestry Department was selected to use ARPA fund dollars to make improvements at Camp New Wood, Otter Lake and Hay Meadow/Prairie Dells. New vault toilet facilities were installed at Hay Meadow Park with the ARPA funds. Lincoln County also received a donation from a local source to replace the vault toilets at the New Wood Campground which also took place in 2023. The Forestry Department has started working on improving the campsites and access to New Wood Campground as well. ARPA funds were also assigned to the Forestry Department to resurface the Hiawatha Trail in Tomahawk. Bids were taken to supply the aggregate for the project. The Lincoln County Highway Department was awarded the bid and will have all of the aggregate hauled to a nearby location by the end of 2023.

Camp New Wood Park and Campground are being included as points of interest on the developing Great Pinery Heritage Waterway. The Great Pinery Heritage Waterway is being organized and promoted as a paddle trail on the Wisconsin River from northern Lincoln County, south through Marathon County.

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 colonies of this invasive plant have been discovered in other locations of the Underdown, Harrison, New Wood and Wildwood areas. In addition to garlic mustard, other invasive species are present on County Forest property. Glossy buckthorn, Japanese barberry, crown vetch, leafy spurge and Japanese knotweed are present in areas of Underdown and Harrison. Garlic mustard and glossy buckthorn are present along the

Hiawatha Trail by Tomahawk. The section of trail is closed for the recommended period during treatment of the garlic mustard. Glossy buckthorn is so prevalent along the trail it is not treated. A GIS layer was created to identify known location of invasive plant species on the county forest. Steps to control or eradicate these species occur when discovered. Spraying with herbicide is the most efficient, cost effective way for us to control these species in the quantity they exist. Spraying garlic mustard consumes many weeks of time and the workload continues to increase as we discover new infestations. 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. We will continue to monitor make efforts to control invasive plants while being observant for new species and infestations on the County Forest. We worked with Land Conservation to erect informational signs on invasive species at several trail heads on the county forest.

A 50/50 grant totaling \$10,000.00 was awarded by Lumberjack R, C, & D to the Forestry Department for the hiring of a private contractor to assist in spraying garlic mustard in the Underdown. Hiring a contractor saved the Forestry Department many days of extra work with many more plants sprayed before going to seed.

LINCOLN COUNTY ACCESS PLAN and FOREST ROADS: Lincoln County has many miles of non-gas tax forest roads used for logging and public access purposes. Motorized travel is allowed on some of these roads while some are blocked to prevent damage to the road itself or for hunter walking trails, snowmobile trails, and other non-motorized experiences. A GIS layer exists for these forest roads along with a culvert inventory, which is updated as necessary. Limited maintenance is performed by the county on the majority of these forest roads, unless necessary. Road construction and maintenance activities follow Best Management Practices for Water Quality guidelines and permit requests are submitted if necessary. Condition of these woods roads are noted by auditors for forest certification and may result in corrective actions if they are in disrepair. Old, metal culverts on these roads are replaced as the department has time and when logging activity is scheduled.

In 2023, the Forestry Department used Forest Access account funds to replace large culverts and haul gravel to improve the road surface on an open woods road in the Town of Wilson. This work will improve accessibility for logging contractors and the general public. The construction also moved a short section of the road off of private land onto County Forest.

The Forestry Department continued to work with adjacent private landowners on issuing permits for them to access their lands through the County Forest. Our Recreation Officer continued working on the County Forest, following up with complaints of illegal dumping, contacting non-paying campers, helping to reduce vandalism and maintain order on our public lands and recreational facilities.

LINCOLN COUNTY 5-YEAR OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN: Updated in 2021 with the assistance of North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning, the City of Tomahawk, The City of Merrill, local townships and special interest groups. The Lincoln County Board of Supervisors approved the updated plan on October 19, 2021. It is effective January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2026. At the June 20, 2023 meeting, the Lincoln County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution amending the plan to include a recommendation in Chapter 6 for the development of a new campground accessible from the ATV/UTV trail system. We will continue to use Outdoor Recreation Plan as a guide for our recreation program.

SNOWMOBILE TRAIL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM: Lincoln County participates in the State Snowmobile Trail Grant Program and holds a contract with the State of Wisconsin to develop and maintain public snowmobile trails in the county. Lincoln County contracts with six snowmobile clubs to

maintain all of the trail mileage. A total of 318.2 miles of snowmobile trail qualified for the \$300.00/mile reimbursement rate resulting in a grant value of \$94,460.00 for the 2022-23 Lincoln County program. During the 2022-23 snowmobile season, the clubs spent more than \$300.00/mile in maintenance and qualified for an additional \$46,909.14 supplemental payment from the program. Due to the extensive damage from the early winter ice storm, an additional storm damage grant request was submitted and received totaling \$29,003.21.

We continue to apply for new trail miles that fit the parameters of the program.

ATV TRAIL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM: Lincoln County participates in the State summer and winter ATV trail program and holds a contract with the State to develop and maintain public ATV trails in the county. The summer ATV trails traverse the Harrison Hills area and connect with Langlade and Oneida County trail systems. Lincoln County staff perform the majority of the maintenance on the summer ATV trail system. Lincoln County has again contracted with the Harrison Hills ATV Club to assist with brushing and signing the summer trails. We continue to implement an emergency signing system at trail intersections for the summer trail network. This system is linked to the County's 911 system to provide first responders with more accurate emergency locations. We continue to work with local ATV clubs to identify possible sites for ATV trail/route links.

In spring 2023, it was discovered that a corner of private land has been used for public access to the county forest and the summer ATV trail without an easement for decades. Lincoln County purchased .6 acres from an adjacent landowner to maintain public accessibility to the County Forest and recreational trails. After purchasing the new property, a short section of new ATV trail/access road was constructed by forestry staff late in the summer of 2023.

Lincoln County was approved for a 2023-24 trail maintenance grant of \$47,335.00 for 47.3 miles of summer ATV and UTV trail at \$1,000/mile (plus insurance) as well as \$249.50 for maintenance of 1 mile of TROUTE. A summer ATV/snowmobile trail re-route grant for \$20,136.54 was approved with construction nearly completed in the summer of 2023. This re-route will increase user safety, reduce erosion and ease maintenance of the trail.

Lincoln County's winter ATV trails run in conjunction with designated portions of snowmobile trails. Five snowmobile clubs maintain 227.1 miles of winter trails @ \$100/mile (plus insurance) for a total of \$22,864.00.

ICE AGE TRAIL: We continue to work with our local chapter to provide quality facilities and address issues as they arise. Permits are issued to the local club allowing access to areas of the county forest for trail maintenance.

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. Becher-Hoppe Associates inspected the dam in 2014 and several deficiencies were identified to bring the dam in compliance with state code. These deficiencies were all addressed in 2015 including replacement of 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 required inspections of the dam on a routine basis.

BEAVER PROGRAM: The Lincoln County Forestry Department continued to work with USDA APHIS program regarding beaver problems on the Lincoln County Forest and County Forest road system. APHIS is able to react quickly to issues we find on the county forest during the summer and save the county money on future road repairs and loss of timber value. Forty-four (44) nuisance beaver and 18 dams were removed at the request of the Forestry Department in 2023. The Forestry

Department does not request all known beaver colonies be trapped and dams removed as they do provide ecosystem benefits.

FOREST CERTIFICATION: The Lincoln County Forest became SFI certified in March 2005 and FSC certified in July 2007. The County Forest Program is audited annually to ensure compliance with certification standards. The Forestry Department implements any changes required on the County Forest by SFI and FSC to maintain our certified status. Required updates were made to the Timber Sale Contract and haul tickets for chain of custody purposes. Several other county forests were selected for the audit this year.

LAND SOLD, RATIFIED, CONFIRMED AND APPROVED: Sixteen tax deed properties were sold to private individuals for \$ 523,677.10. Approximately 1.8 acres of Forestry Shop Property was sold to the Town of Birch for \$ 4,000.00 to expand the town hall property and Chat Cemetery.

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) has again contracted with Fehr Graham to keep employees up to date with safety training. Our department worked with Fehr Graham to update our written plans for hazardous communication, control of hazardous energy, excavation safety, emergency action and fire prevention plan, personal protective equipment, occupational noise exposure and blood borne pathogens. Field staff completed a first Aid/CPR refresher and chainsaw safety in 2023.

DNR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT: 2023 Accomplishments on the Lincoln County Forest submitted by Carissa Knab, DNR Wildlife Biologist and Eric Borchert, DNR Wildlife Technician.

Flowages:

The DNR manages 3 impoundments on Lincoln County Forest (LCF) lands encompassing 27 acres of shallow wetlands. Wildlife staff actively managed water levels on Camp 26, Trapper Morrison, and Coffee Creek Flowages in 2023. Regular dike mowing was completed, and no major infrastructure maintenance was necessary this year. APHIS assisted with beaver trapping on Trapper Morrison. Camp 26 contains an approximately 5-acre wild rice bed. The rice crop was excellent in 2023; however, another drier than normal summer prevented staff from raising water levels in the fall to maximize use by migrating waterfowl. Lastly, the DNR's wildlife program rolled out a wetland infrastructure prioritization process in 2023. The goal of the project is to strategically direct funding and staff resources away from lower priority impoundments to medium/high priority impoundments. DNR staff are currently evaluating the priority rankings of all impoundments operated by DNR staff, including the 3 that fall on LCF lands.

Forest Openings and Trails:

DNR wildlife staff assist with the management of 345 constructed wildlife openings on LCF lands totaling approximately 325 acres. Staff did not facilitate the mowing of forest wildlife openings or hunter walking trails in 2023, as efforts shifted to Langlade County for the calendar year. However, DNR staff did support and assist LCF staff in drafting a Turkey Stamp Application seeking funds for wildlife openings mowing and oak scarification projects. It was a competitive application year, and the projects were not selected for funding.

Wildlife Surveys:

Numerous wildlife population monitoring surveys were conducted in Lincoln County in 2023. Many of these surveys fall completely within or partially within Lincoln County Forest Lands.

2 ruffed grouse drumming surveys

2 woodcock singing ground surveys

3 carnivore track surveys

1 breeding waterfowl survey

Summer deer observations surveys

DNR staff worked with Lincoln County cooperators to conduct whitetail deer aging during the fall hunting seasons.

DNR research staff began a black bear den survey project in 2022. In 2023, bear dens were again visited in Lincoln County where staff collected biological data and fitted sows with GPS tracking collars. The project aims to improve the input parameters of the DNR black bear population model. The project focuses on black bear reproduction, updating parameters like average litter size, cub survival and litter frequency.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD):

In 2023 DNR staff continued to collect and sample wild deer for CWD monitoring and surveillance within the county. In November 2022 DNR was notified by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) that a farm-raised deer on a deer farm in Lincoln County tested positive for CWD. As a result of this new detection, a baiting and feeding ban was reinstated starting Dec. 12, 2022 and the ban remained in effect throughout 2023.

EQUIPMENT PURCHASES IN 2023: A new 2022 Ram 2500 with snow plow was purchased to replace the county parks truck. A used 1998 Mack quad axle dump truck was purchased from the Highway Department to replace a single axle platform truck to help improve the efficiency of hauling materials for road and trail maintenance. A new replacement bucket was purchased for the end loader.

OTHER: Forestry Department staff assisted in clearing brush from the Jack Pines area near the Service Center. Lincoln County enrolled the Lincoln County Forest and other forested county properties with timber harvesting potential into the WI Department of Natural Resources Bat Habitat Conservation Plan. Forester assisted Land Conservation Department (7 days) with survey monument verification and establishment project within the Lincoln County Forest. In addition to the four wells near parks, three others located on the Lincoln County Forest were decommissioned with the aid of a 50/50 grant through DATCP.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Bowe
Forest Administrator