

## Michigan Forest Stewardship Program Reaches 1 Million Acres

By Mike Smalligan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources Forest Stewardship Coordinator

Michigan achieved a milestone on August 23 when five families completed their Forest Stewardship Plans. With this accomplishment Michigan reached 1 million acres of private woodlands under management with Forest Stewardship Plans. All five landowners and their foresters were recognized with a \$500 gift from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and U.S. Forest Service at the annual celebration of the Michigan Forest Association and Michigan Tree Farm System on September 14 in Naubinway, MI. Their stories illustrate some of the reasons why 6,000 landowners throughout Michigan have developed their own plans.

Nichole and Andrew Flickema are managing their 20-acre woodlot in Charlevoix County for their family, which includes triplets Molly, Olivia, and Drew, who were born this summer. Like many landowners facing big life events, they looked to their woods to provide some income. Their forest is protected by a conservation easement with Little Traverse Conservancy, so they needed a forest management plan to ensure their timber sale would improve their forest rather than degrade it.

The couple hired Martell Forestry in Gaylord to develop a Forest Stewardship Plan for their property and administer their timber sale. Their forester, Kayti Brinkman, has been developing Forest Stewardship Plans in northern Michigan since 2015.

David and Tonya Baker purchased 80 acres last year in Mason County with their children to have a place for deer hunting together as a family. Dave and Tonya hired American Forest Management (AFM) in Houghton, MI, to develop a plan and prepare for a timber sale to diversify wildlife habitat for deer hunting. The Bakers are lowering their property taxes by enrolling in Michigan's [Qualified Forest Program](#) and certifying their good stewardship with the [American Tree Farm System](#). Brandon Bal of AFM has been developing Forest Stewardship Plans for landowners throughout Michigan since 2012.



*Mrs. Flickema takes her triplets out for a stroll. It is never too earlier to introduce children to the wonders of nature. (Courtesy photo by Mike Smalligan, Michigan DNR)*



*Mrs. and Mr. Baker proudly exhibit the signs they received at the Michigan Forest Association celebration. (Courtesy photo by Mike Smalligan, Michigan DNR)*

## U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry

Mark Viel recently retired and has more time to spend in the woods he and his wife have owned for the past 30 years in Newaygo County. Mark wants to grow “blue ribbon hardwoods,” so they hired Wilson Forestry Services in Rothbury to develop a plan and prepare for a timber sale to improve wildlife habitat and manage beech bark disease. The Viels are certifying their 80-acre forest by enrolling in the American Tree Farm System and lowering their property taxes in the Qualified Forest Program. Their forester, David Wilson, has been writing Forest Stewardship Plans for landowners in western Michigan since 1995.



Mark Viel worked with his forester to develop a plan to manage beech bark disease. (Courtesy photo by Mike Smalligan, Michigan DNR)

April Ball’s dad bought land in Iron County in the 1950s, and she inherited it several years ago. The Balls, who live in Wisconsin, hired VanOss Forestry Services in Crystal Falls, MI, to develop a plan for their 40-acre forest. Her husband, Charlie, hunts deer, so they plan to improve wildlife habitat and enroll in the Qualified Forest Program to lower their property taxes. Their forester, Brock VanOss, has been helping landowners in the Upper Peninsula with Forest Stewardship Plans since 2004.

Janet Gibson inherited her parent’s 73-acre forest in St. Joseph County and hired Steinkraus Forest Management in Marcellus to develop a plan. The Gibson family are avid hunters, so they want to improve deer habitat and make plans to pass the land on to their children and grandchildren someday. They want to certify their forest in the American Tree Farm System, lower their property taxes in the Qualified Forest Program, and apply for financial assistance to implement their plan through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#). Jeff Steinkraus has been writing Forest Stewardship Plans for landowners in southern Michigan since 1999.

Landowners have many reasons to develop Forest Stewardship Plans for their woods. Many people need a plan to enroll in the Commercial Forest Program or the Qualified Forest Program to lower their property taxes. Plans help landowners certify their exemplary stewardship through forest certification programs like the American Tree Farm System or Forest Stewardship Council. Some landowners use their plans to obtain financial assistance from the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) to do conservation projects. Many landowners want a plan to prepare for a timber sale, improve wildlife habitat, protect nature, or enhance recreation in their woods.

“The DNR is very proud to assist 6,000 landowners and several hundred foresters over the past 28 years as they care for their privately owned woods,” said Mike Smalligan, the DNR’s Forest Stewardship Coordinator.

“Family forests make up 9 million acres, or 45 percent, of Michigan’s 20 million acres of forests, so it is very important for the DNR to help landowners,” he said. “There are 400,000 forest owners in Michigan, so we still have a ways to go.”

As Dennis McDougall from Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry noted, “Conserving woodlands and sustainable management of private forests benefits all citizens. The U.S. Forest Service is pleased to partner with the Michigan DNR to assist woodland owners through the Forest Stewardship Program.”

The [Forest Stewardship Program](#) was established in the 1990 Farm Bill and is a partnership between the DNR and the U.S. Forest Service to help landowners manage, protect, and enjoy their woods. With funding from Congress and the Forest Service, the DNR provides a small cost share to help lower the cost of developing a Forest Stewardship Plan.

“The real reward is not the government subsidy for the plan, but the fun work that landowners do in their woods to implement their plans and achieve their personal forest stewardship goals,” Smalligan said.

For more information, or to find a forester near you, visit [www.Michigan.gov/ForestStewardship](http://www.Michigan.gov/ForestStewardship) or contact Mike Smalligan at 517-284-5884 or [smalliganm@michigan.gov](mailto:smalliganm@michigan.gov).