

WVPOA Forest Management Guidelines & Application Approval Form

Preface - Please read

One of the major benefits of living in Wilderness Valley is the serenity and beauty of our forestland. Certainly, an objective of the WVPOA is to ensure the proper care and stewardship of our forests, protecting in perpetuity from improper management.

The main purpose of this form is to help landowners determine best practices for their property if they are having a full-scale timber harvest across a significant chunk of their property. If you are a landowner looking to remove a few trees to increase yard space, sunlight, etc., then the following sections may not be as relevant to you, but still good knowledge to have in your toolbox.

I want to preface by saying what is considered “proper” forestry now may not be considered “proper” forestry in the future, given that new forestry methods for the lake states are continually being researched and published, new forest health issues/diseases/pests enter our forests, and the climate shifts. Regardless, it’s important to make the health and longevity of our ecosystems a primary goal.

Timber markets, distance to mills, required equipment, and size (acres) of harvest can all play a part on how doable the harvest is, **if at all**. Despite best intentions, sometimes harvests logistically and financially are not feasible unless your neighbors are also willing to have their properties harvested.

Why forestry?

Our forests in the Valley consist primarily of northern hardwoods, with smaller components of red pine plantations, aspen (popple) clones, and lowland conifer swamps.

We have the ability to enhance the quality, health, and diversity of our forests with proper forest management techniques. One method to improve future timber growth and quality in our types of forest is to periodically conduct selection harvests and thinning of trees where appropriate. The objectives of selection harvests and thinning operations are:

1. Develop a healthy, diverse, resilient forest by removing some of your poorer quality interior trees, which concentrates growth on fewer, high quality trees. Undesirable trees occupy growing space and compete with the better trees for moisture, sunlight, and nutrients. Removing them from the stand will allow desirable trees to grow more rapidly.
 - Exceptions to this rule: it’s always best practice to leave a few dead trees; these act as wildlife hotels and become valuable for soil health when they inevitably fall to the ground. Aim for one standing dead tree per acre in an area that will not conflict with your recreation (ex: don’t leave a standing dead tree where it can fall on roads, trails, deer blind, etc.).
2. Promote the growth of more desirable tree species. What constitutes “desirable” is going to be slightly different depending on each property and what already exists/has the potential to exist on the landscape, but in general it’s trees that offer a mix of aesthetic, wildlife, economic, and ecological value.
 - Some trees considered to be more desirable in our upland forests are the American basswood, yellow birch, sugar maple, eastern hemlock, red pine, white pine, red oak, and white oak.
 - Retaining, promoting, or clearing out an area to plant “keystone” tree species is one of the best ways to enhance wildlife habitat on your property
 - An example of a keystone species would be white oak: an exceptionally high number of invertebrates and wildlife rely on white oak for habitat and food.
 - Read more about keystone species at <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>
 - Exception: you never want to completely rid a native species of tree or vegetation from your

property or area unless there is an outstanding forest health issue that recommends this as a best practice (example: removing oak within a certain boundary of infection to halt the spread of oak wilt).

3. Regulate the density of trees to encourage optimum growth and health of the stand. Many forested properties contain too many trees for maximum growth. Although the stand may be composed of desirable trees, competition among the trees for growing space and resources can be severe. Therefore, thinning is often needed to regulate spacing among trees so maximum growth can be achieved within a shorter timeframe than what would normally occur in a forest.
 - Forests go through natural thinning and species changes called “succession”. Natural succession in a forest is an ongoing process, but can take decades to reach an optimal state.
 - Selection harvesting and other thinning operations can mimic natural succession.
4. Produce a net-positive effect on wildlife habitat, forest health, and the overall functions of a forest ecosystem. A thinning can:
 - Provide structural diversity for songbirds and deer
 - Standing dead trees for cavity nesting critters
 - Wood debris for soil health and the prey base
 - Optimum spacing for a sugarbush
 - Mimic old-growth forest conditions
 - Create landscape and species diversity
 - Reduce fire hazard
 - Produce firewood
 - Generate income
5. Selection harvests and other thinning operations are beneficial to our forests only if best forest management practices are employed and appropriate techniques are used for the forest’s specific characteristics.
 - Improper methods can seriously damage a forest, which will have long lasting ecological and visual effects, and take decades to correct.
 - Some forest types do not benefit as much from a selection harvest; some benefit far more from a heavy-handed approach like gap creation or patch cuts, like aspen.
 - For further reading on forestry, I recommend “Forestry for Michigan Birds” available for free on Michigan Audubon’s website here:
 - <https://www.michiganaudubon.org/our-conservation-impact/forestry-for-michigan-birds/>
 - Although this publication is bird-focused, its content is applicable to Michigan’s forest types, wildlife, and ecosystems. It’s a short read, digestible, and direct.

Forest Management Policy

Wilderness Valley forests are considered eligible for harvesting by the WVPOA Board of Directors.

Property owners must complete and submit the attached application (Forestry Application Approval Form) to the Board of their intention to conduct a timber harvest OR remove trees. The primary purpose of this is to ensure the property owner thoroughly understands all policy requirements.

The level of information required on the Forestry Application Approval Form depends on the scale of operations:

1. If removing a few trees to less than an acre (for the purpose of increasing yard space, sunlight, firewood, etc.) your application does not need much detail, and all you need is a harvest plan (see point c for a detailed harvest plan below):
2. If having a timber harvest:
 - a. The property owner must submit a harvest plan and/or timber sale contract to the Board. **Upon WVPOA Board of Directors approval of the timber sales contract, the contract can then be bid.**
 - i. If this is going to be a large-scale harvest across the length of your property, it's best to have a timber sale contract in place to protect you and your forest. If this is going to just be a handful of trees across a few acres, then a harvest plan may be all that you really need. Either of these (harvest plan or contract) can be completed by the forester (**read more about picking a forester at point 3, below**).
 - b. **The harvest plan and/or timber sale contract must include:**
 - i. A description and assessment of property
 - ii. Type/details of harvest
 - iii. Goals of the landowner
 - iv. Desired future conditions
 - v. Map of the property with accurate property boundaries, harvest area, locations of utilities, decking area.
 - vi. The access and haul roads used by the loggers must be specified.
 - c. A harvest plan can be as simple as a few sentences and look something like this:

“The John Doe property is 30 acres of mature northern hardwoods, but only 5 of those 30 acres are going to be harvested. The harvest specifications are as follows: Selection harvest down to 90 basal area with focus on retaining 14”dbh and above sugar maples as crop trees for future seed source and for increased crown spacing to help with sugarbush output. Trees are marked to cut with orange paint. Installing two ½ acre gaps to regenerate mid-tolerant species like red oak and yellow birch. In these gaps, pushing over 1 whole sugar maple tree with the root ball still attached to provide a drumming log for grouse and habitat for rabbits. Scatter slash evenly across harvest area. Shortwood harvest only due to the high amount of residual trees. See map for harvest area boundaries and access roads.”
 - d. Timber sale contracts are more in-depth. They are a legal document. Each forester may have their own style of contract. **See point 6 for some required contract items.** Visit this website to help formulate your contract: https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/timber_sale_contracts_e1656

3. The Wilderness Valley Board of Directors highly recommends working with a **registered consulting forester** to provide the following services:
(note – all foresters charge a fee and/or collect a percentage of the timber sale revenue for their services):
- Assess the property and recommend harvesting methods based on your forest's characteristics and your goals
 - Establish legal, accurate property boundaries
 - Prepare a timber sales contract
 - Obtain bids for the harvest and select a logger
 - Select and mark trees for harvesting
 - Ensure compliance of the contract before, during and after the logging operation.

Please note that foresters and loggers are two completely different entities: foresters have the training and background to determine which trees need to be cut and why, and marks them for the logger to harvest

- Foresters also write up timber sale contracts
- We highly recommend using a registered forester if you yourself are not a forester
- Using the logger to provide the services of the forester and conduct the logging operations can very much be a conflict of interest.

4. If you choose to go without a forester, then at the very least:
- a. You need to make sure the logger is insured
 - b. You have legally established your property boundaries through the use of survey-grade GPS equipment or hire a surveyor (do not use OnX hunt or GISFetch)
 - c. You know where all of the below and above-ground utilities are located, and provide your logger with a map or direction so that harvest operations will not disturb or ruin them (gas pipelines, wells, septic tanks, power lines, etc).
 - d. If on a Valley road and not a county road, your or the logger must provide a bond for the road
 - e. Access roads and timber decking/landing areas will not impede Valley traffic or emergency services
5. Procedures not allowed without sufficient reasoning and explicit permission via the Board:
- a. Removing an excessive amount of trees OR clearcutting (gaps over 2 acres): For the majority of our forests in the Valley, the minimum BA the forest can be taken down to due to aesthetics is 80 basal area. Unless the forester provides a compelling reason to (forest type, like aspen is aging out and falling over (aspen is a short-lived species and benefits from clearcutting)) and there is a long-term plan for what the forest will look like when it regenerates.
 - b. High-grading: This is when, overwhelmingly, the best and largest trees are the majority of the trees removed. Also called diameter limit cutting.
 - i. This trap is surprisingly easy to fall into if you don't know how to look at trees or piece out what you are being told. For example, a logger might tell you they'd only be taking a few of your trees; just the really big ones, and they're letting all the small ones grow, and the harvest is going to be really light-handed, etc.
 - c. Excessive slash from logging operations: Slash (limbs, branches, bark from logging operations) must be cut up and scattered enough to have a clean and uncluttered appearance. Small piles (under 10'x10') of slash are permitted for wildlife habitat.

6. Additional Requirements (contract items):

- a. All trees designated for removal (timber harvesting only) MUST be marked with paint, around the trunk at breast height, and on the stump, going into the ground.
 - i. The forester can then select and mark trees for harvesting by using paint. Such marks must be on the trunk and stump, and still remain after the cutting, so that the board may review the harvested trees.
- b. Need to get property surveyed if harvest is within 50ft of property boundary; Onx hunt and other applications are no replacement for a legitimate property boundary survey.
- c. All roads shall be maintained to the original good condition following the operation.
- d. The overall harvest site must have a clean appearance following the operation.
- e. The property owner grants permission for board members to enter the property for purposes of inspecting the work for contract compliance.
- f. Neighbors and adjoining property owners must be advised of your forestry plan and estimated timeframe
- g. The property owner is responsible for obtaining all necessary permits, required by Otsego County zoning.
- h. The property owner is responsible for the repairs of any and all roads damaged by logging equipment. The owner assumes responsibility if they approve the operation and dismiss the logger.
- i. The property owners shall provide themselves, or secure from the company hired to do the work, a bond in the amount agreed upon by the WVPOA Board. The Bond amount shall be determined on a case by case basis, using several factors, such as the roads bordering and/or intersecting the property to be thinned, the size of the tract being thinned, the amount of trees being cut, the equipment to be used, and any special circumstances regarding the property being thinned or the nature of the work. Said bond shall be forfeited to the Wilderness Valley Property Owners Association, if **any** of the following should occur, whether intentional, or not.
 - i. Contract requirements are not met
 - ii. Cutting exceeds amount approved in application.
 - iii. Cutting exceeds trees that were marked.
 - iv. Damage to roads, caused by logging equipment, is not repaired

The WVPOA assumes no responsibility for damage to property or personal injury or death resulting from the harvesting authorized.

The property owner shall sign **the attached Forestry Application Approval Form** and submit to the Wilderness Valley Property Owners Association Board of Directors, indicating his/her agreement to these terms. Said agreement must be fully approved prior to the start of timber harvest.

WILDERNESS VALLEY PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 871 GAYLORD, MI. 49734

Forestry Application Approval Form

Any Wilderness Valley property considered eligible for timber harvesting operations must comply with the WVPOA Forestry Management Policy dated February 2024. Owner of property agrees, by signing below, to fully abide by all rules/restrictions in **WVPOA Forest Management Guidelines** pursuant to onset of any forestry operations.

Date Submitted: _____ Tract Numbers: _____

Property Owners Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____
(Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Forester Name: _____ Phone: _____

**The following must be submitted and approved by the Wilderness Valley Property Owners Association, Inc.,
before any forestry operation may proceed:**

1) Harvest Plan and Map OR Draft Timber Sale Contract and Map

2) Performance Bond in the amount of \$ _____, which will be forfeited to the Wilderness Valley Property Owners Association, Inc. if not forested in accordance with the WVPOA Forestry Management Policy.

I have read the WVPOA Forest Management Procedures, Policy and Guidelines and will abide the rules and procedures therein.

Property Owner Signature _____ Dated _____

WVPOA, Inc. Board Member Approval:
