

8. Thinking Through Your Forest Management Objectives

By Peter Smallidge

The chapters thus far have given a broad background to the types of issues and interests that exist within private forests. The beauty of private forests is that each has its own set of ownership objectives – objectives that serve as milestones towards the accomplishments of the owner. Do you know what your ownership objectives are?

The quality and character of the forest and woodlots you where live and work will depend on what you do, or don't do, with these lands. Refining your forest management objectives will help you maintain or improve the quality and character of your forest. The pivotal and perhaps most important step in deliberate forest management, as with other decision making processes, is to clearly and explicitly recognize your objectives. The range of services available to help you recognize your forest management objectives illustrates the great value placed on this step.

Clearly stated objectives provide direction, simplify the decision making process, and provide a basis to gauge success. Your management objectives reflect what you value about your forests. These are your tangible and intangible personal values and the values provided to your community as a result of your management activities. Thus, the secret to successful forest management is to have explicit

and realistic objectives. But what is involved and what assistance is available to help?

The first step in making your forest management objectives is thinking about your forest: why you own your forest, what you like about your forest, and how you want your forest to look in 5, 10, 20, or more years. Many people own forests because they inherited them, purchased them as a place of sanctuary, or purchased them for investment purposes. This is a start for your objectives as it explains perhaps a sentimental value, the value of retreat or seclusion, the value of an investment, or most likely some combination of the three. You may like to visit the part of your forest where you had a pleasant experience, a scenic overlook, the spot where you can always flush

a grouse or run a rabbit, or the stand of red oak or sugar maple that will someday help support you in retirement. Finally, the vision of your future forest is probably closely aligned with what you like about your forest. For example, keeping the memorable spot unchanged, ready access to grouse cover, or an increase in the sawtimber value of your oak or maple stand.

Again, your values help define your forest management objectives. These thoughts and visions are the basis of your forest management objectives because they provide the direction and the standards for successful management.

Multiple objectives are possible. Consider the needs and desires of all family members.



The next step is to ensure your objectives are mutually compatible and realistic for your forest. This is where some people start to have trouble, but there are several sources of assistance available.

Master Forest Owners

One source is a group of forest landowners like you who are volunteers and forest ambassadors trained by Cornell Cooperative Extension as Master Forest Owners (MFOs). MFOs are not foresters, they are forest landowners trained as volunteers. They can help you think through your forest management objectives, and can point you in the correct direction for self-help or professional services. Typically, MFOs will schedule with you a half-day visit to your forest, listen to your forest management values, and help you think about your forest management options. Your MFO can suggest Cornell Cooperative Extension publications available to address some of your specific needs. Contact your county's Cooperative Extension office for useful forest management publications or for the name and phone number of your local MFO.

Organizations that many MFOs and other forest landowners belong to are the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) or Catskill Forest Association (CFA). NYFOA and CFA are active, landowner based organizations full of good information and good people. Forest landowners that are members of NYFOA and CFA often lead woods walks or may be available to discuss forestry with you.

Department of Environmental Conservation

A second option for assistance in stating your forest management objectives is the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation public service foresters. The DEC public

service foresters are trained professionals, and will visit with you free of charge to discuss your forest management objectives. As professionals, DEC foresters can provide technical guidance on forest management questions. Like MFOs, the public service forester is a good listener and will help you think through your objectives. The differences between MFOs and DEC foresters are complementary. An MFO can not make forest management prescriptions, but probably can visit with you sooner than a DEC forester and can relate to you as a forest landowner. Although the MFO will likely recommend you contact a DEC forester, the MFO will help prepare you to optimally utilize your time with a DEC forester.

Depending on your interests and needs, the MFO or DEC service forester may suggest you engage a professional private consulting forester. Because private consulting foresters provide fee-based services, land owners are best positioned if they have their objectives well defined. You can call the DEC in Albany for the phone number of the closest DEC forester or for a list of consulting foresters.

Northeast Decision Model (NED)

A third source of assistance to help with your forest management objectives is a US Forest Service software package called the Forest Stewardship Planning Guide module of NED (ver. 1.1). NED is a cluster of computer modules from the NorthEast Decision (NED) model for forest management that runs well on most computers that will run Microsoft Windows. You can download a free copy of the Forest Stewardship Planning Guide from the World Wide Web or call to receive a copy by mail. The Forest Stewardship Planning Guide will help you think about your management objectives, perhaps show you some options you hadn't thought of, and help you select mutually

compatible objectives. Other NED modules focus on forest growth simulation, wildlife habitat suitability, and forest health.



NED software training sessions are often provided through Cooperative Extension.

Summary

To bring this to closure, let's specify a realistic set of forest management objectives. From the examples here, blended to illustrate management with multiple objectives, you may desire to (1) keep the big trees where you saw your first pileated woodpecker; (2) maintain at least 10 acres as suitable cover for grouse and rabbits, and (3) produce high quality red oak sawtimber. Your objectives may not all be accomplished from the same acre, but it's very likely they are all possible from your forest.

These then are the basics and the support sources to help you state your objectives and start the management of your forest. Remember, knowing your forest management objectives is an important part of deliberate forest management planning that will help you get the most from your forested land.