



2021 ANNUAL REPORT



***“Conservation Districts helping
family forest owners become stewards.”***



March 2022

Mission

Support family forest owners in realizing the economic, social, and ecological sustainability of their forests.

Vision

Family forest owners acknowledge multiple values in their forests, engage in thoughtful planning to support those values, and trust conservation districts as their gateway to addressing natural resource concerns.

Values

- No-cost, one-on-one technical assistance is the cornerstone of service delivery.
- Success depends on the strength and breadth of local partnerships.
- Forest management begins with a written plan.
- Family forest owners' values are the most critical factor in the management and non-management of their forests.

Strategic Priorities

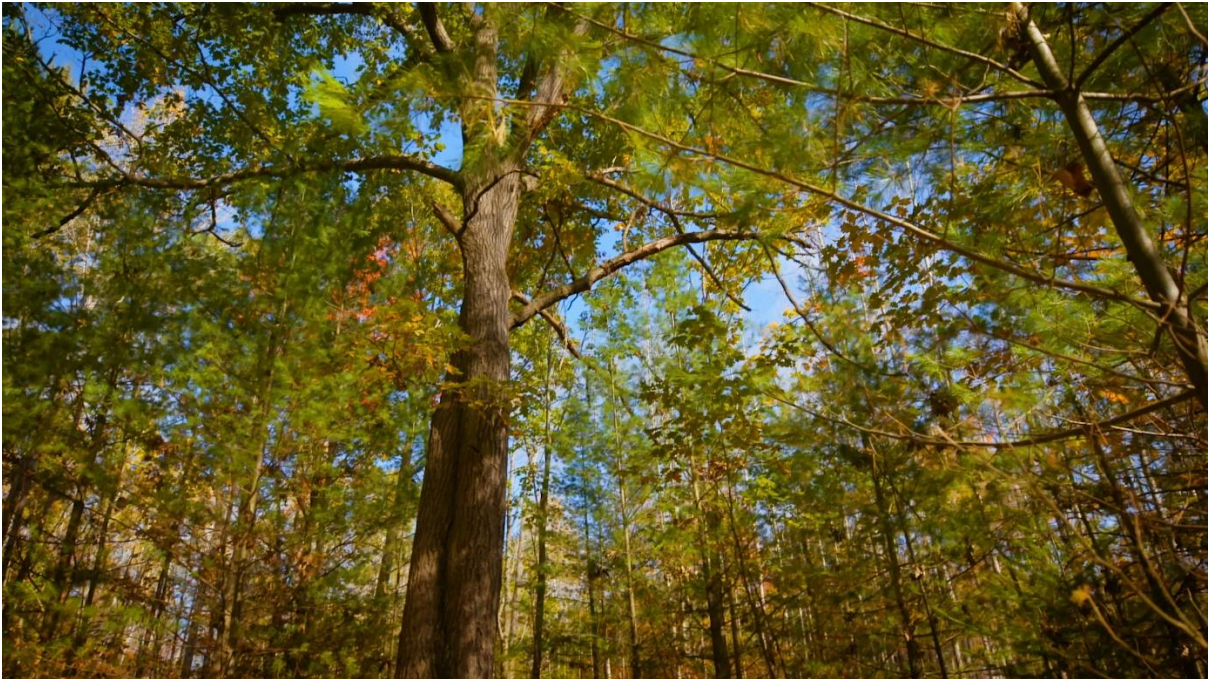
1. Enhance regional and statewide economies through the support of forest products industries.
2. Increase the number of family forests managed according to a written forest management plan.
3. Diversify statewide program funding.
4. Retain conservation district foresters employed through the Forestry Assistance Program.

Background

Michigan's Forestry Assistance Program (FAP) helps family forest owners become active stewards of their forests and woodlands. Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), conservation districts, state and federal agencies, and private sector natural resource professionals work together to help family forest owners achieve their goals and get the most from their wooded property, at no cost.

In 2021, the FAP distributed 19 grants to conservation districts to hire public service foresters; those grants covered 46 counties. Foresters hired through the grant do not compete with the private sector. Rather, they serve as an initial point of contact for forestry-related natural resource concerns in their community.

The program is funded through State of Michigan General Funds and restricted revenue from the Private Forestland Enhancement Fund, derived from enrollment in the Qualified Forest Program (QFP).



2021 Program Achievements

- \$10.5 million of economic activity through referrals;
- 2,143 one-on-one landowner site visits;
- 1,101 referrals to the private sector (385 of which were for timber harvests and 526 for the development of forest management plans);
- More than 1,000 referrals to the public sector for financial assistance and technical assistance;
- A total of 60 risk assessments completed for the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program's Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat*A*Syst; and
- 65 American Tree Farm System inspections.

2021 Targeted Goals and Accomplishments

1. Increase awareness and enrollment in Michigan's Qualified Forest Program.

Enrollment in QFP is critical to FAP's longevity. Funds generated from 2-mill equivalent fees are necessary to offset FAP's reliance on State of Michigan General Funds. FAP foresters are essential for the continued promotion of this opportunity for family forest owners. Enrollment in QFP for 2021 was near the annual average at 69,034 acres. Total enrollment beginning January 1, 2022 is 805,341 acres (as of 12/27/2021).



2. Diversify program funding through external grants and partnership agreements.

Even with increased enrollment in QFP, innovative partnerships are going to sustain the program financially and socially. MDARD is working with a variety of new partners to evaluate new models for delivering forestry assistance. In late FY 2021, MDARD was notified of a \$5.4 million award from the NRCS' Regional Conservation Partnership Program. The project focuses on tree planting on family forestland and abandoned agricultural fields in the Northern Lower Peninsula. A portion of these funds will supplement FAP grants in the region. Progress on this project will be provided in the FY 2022 annual report.

3. 2,000 on-site visits to forest properties.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on landowner site visits was less dramatic in FY 2021 than last year. The pandemic forced some family forest owners to think deeply about their management decisions. Contrarily, lingering concerns related to COVID-19 prevented some family forest owners from engaging with their FAP forester. Overall, site visits were higher this year. The year ended with the program accomplishing just above the annual average – 2,143 site visits.

4. More than \$10 million of total estimated economic activity through referrals

While the FAP experienced extremely high levels (>50%) of forester turnover in FY 2021, the program met its goal of \$10 million in total estimated economic activity through referrals. For the first time in program history, four grantees exceeded \$1 million in referrals. It is no surprise that the four grantees to accomplish this feat have employed the same forester for many years. This speaks to the value of longevity in these FAP positions. The total estimated economic activity through referrals in FY 2021 was \$10,530,903.

5. 1,500 referrals to the public and private sectors.

Referrals to private sector service providers and government programs maintained a pattern similar to site visits. It was clear throughout the pandemic that conservation was not canceled and that the forest products industry still planned to operate. The program exceeded the 2021 goal of 1,500 referrals by more than 600.

Climate Action and Reforestation in Northern Michigan

In late 2021, MDARD learned that it was successful in securing \$5.4 million through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program for a tree planting project. The project, “Climate Action and Reforestation in Northern Michigan” takes innovative approaches to traditional private land tree planting financial assistance by working with a few contractors and bundling landowners together.

Project partners include Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Huron Pines, The Nature Conservancy, Michigan State University Department of Forestry, and the Arbor Day Foundation. Our diverse group of partners is excited to protect water quality, enhance soil health, and sequester carbon through tree planting. Look for future correspondence about this project.



Goals for 2022

1. Increase awareness and enrollment in Michigan's Qualified Forest Program.
2. Implement actions identified in the 10-year master plan.
3. Implement "Climate Action and Reforestation in Northern Michigan" RCPP project.
4. 2,000 on-site visits to forest properties.
5. 2,000 referrals to the public and private sectors.

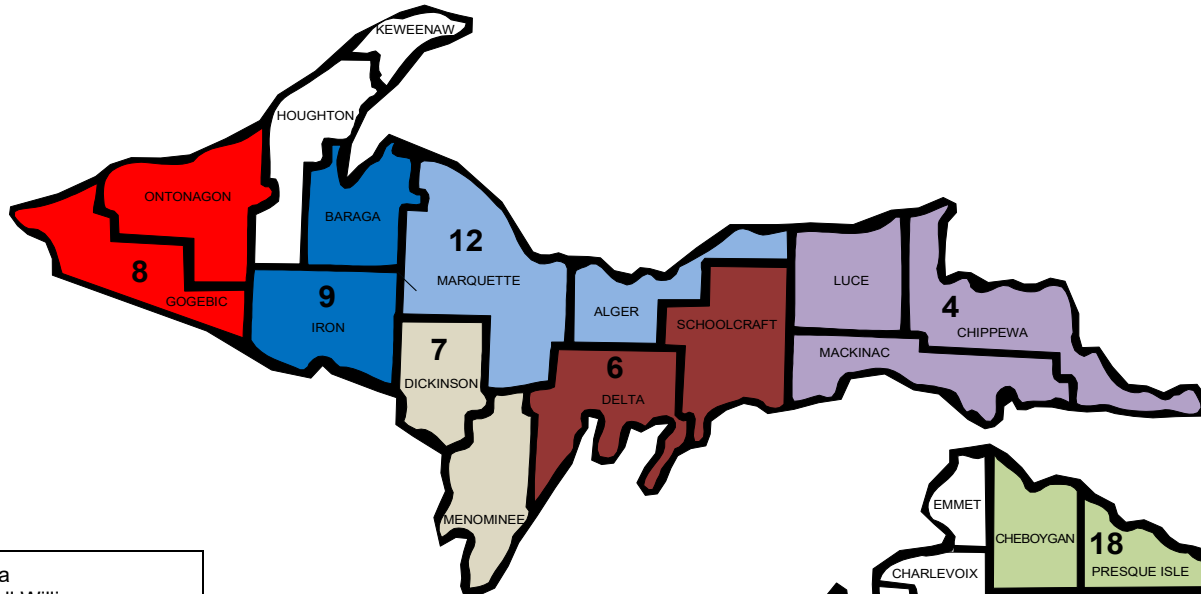


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FY 2022
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