

FORESTRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (FAP)

Want Better Woods? Forest Management Can Help

By Ben Savoie, District Forester

Every woodland is unique, which makes forest management complicated, interesting, and ultimately very rewarding. The features of a forest, such as the geography, soil type, moisture levels, and present plant communities, can tell us a lot about what is going on in the woods. Land use and management history are also important factors in the current state of a woodland. Just as the woods can vary, so can what each landowner hopes to get out of a forest. You may be interested in valuable timber, wildlife habitat, or just the beauty of nature. When deciding how to manage forests, we must keep in mind both the unique characteristics of the land and the landowner's goals, to reach the best possible outcomes.

Often forest landowners decide to "let nature take its course." This may work in places where disturbance is historically rare and not very severe, but most of Barry County's forests have a different history. Prior to European settlement in the 1800s, low intensity fires were intentionally set frequently, shaping the natural plant communities in Southwest Michigan. Since farms and towns sprung up, these prescribed fires have been all but eliminated, forests have been fragmented, and many problematic invasive species have been introduced. To reach a desired outcome, even if that is just to keep the forest as it is, active management is

generally required.

Once you have a goal in mind, the next step is figuring out which forest management practices will help you reach that goal. While there are some management practices to avoid, there are many techniques which can be beneficial to the long-term health of your woods. Think of all these management practices like the many different tools in a toolbox. Depending on what you hope to build and what you are starting with, you will need to choose the right combination of tools for your project.

For example, there is a much-maligned harvesting technique known as clear-cutting. It is a tool that foresters may use for species of trees that benefit from that kind of disturbance, such as quick growing aspen stand. But clearcutting often looks bad and has been used poorly in the past, giving it a bad name. Timber stand improvement is a tool commonly used to help improve the health of the forest, while also saving the best trees for harvest later. It may be easy to sell your best trees first for a quick dollar, but waiting and harvesting a properly managed stand later can lead to a greater long-term payoff and can keep the forest healthy for longer. If you are unsure about certain management practices, it is important to talk to a qualified forester and see if a given practice is right for you.



**MICHIGAN
FORESTRY
Assistance Program**

2018 FAP STATS

Allegan, Barry, and Ottawa Counties

104 landowner site visits

62 professional referrals

560 acres enrolled in QFP

13 forestry outreach events conducted

15 forestry education media publications

\$98,805 estimated economic impact

Active forest management is key to improving and protecting the health of this county's forests for generations to come, and the conservation toolbox is full of great management tools to help us get there. If you are interested in learning more about forest management or would like assistance in finding a consulting forester in your area, give District Forester Ben Savoie a call at 269-908-4134, email at ben.savoie@macd.org, or stop in at 1611 S. Hanover St. in Hastings, Suite 105.

Forest Pests You Should Know



Oak Wilt— In Barry County!

Red and black oaks are most vulnerable. Symptoms include rapid summer leaf die-off. Oak wilt can be spread through root grafts or spores carried by insects. Cutting live, infected trees quickens the spread of the disease. Please do not cut or trim oaks April through September. If an oak is wounded, apply tree wound or latex-based paint immediately. Do not move firewood.



Beech Bark Disease (BBD)— not yet found in Barry County, but widespread in Michigan

Beech bark disease (BBD) is caused by both a sap-feeding scale insect and a fungus. American beech trees are first infested with beech scale. Scale feeding allows infection by the *Neonectria* fungus. The fungus kills the wood, blocking the flow of sap. Don't move beech firewood or logs from infested areas to uninfested areas. Controlling the natural spread of BBD is not feasible because both the scale and fungus are moved by animals and the wind. Report new finds.



Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB)— not yet found in Michigan

Maple trees are the main target of ALB attack, but this hungry critter can cause serious damage to over a dozen Michigan native tree species. Adults are glossy black with irregular white spots on its wing covers. Body lengths range in size from $\frac{3}{4}$ " to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ". The antennae are black with blue bands and are as long as the body in females and longer in males, giving it the "longhorned" moniker. Visit mi.gov/alb for more information.



Hemlock Woolly Adelgid— (HWA) not found in Barry County, but nearby

HWA was recently detected in four Southwest Michigan counties. An internal quarantine has been established that regulates the movement of hemlock from these four counties. Barry County does not have many naturally occurring hemlock, but landowners with hemlock should be on the lookout. An infestation is generally recognized by white, waxy material at the base of hemlock needles. Visit mi.gov/hwa for more information.