



# Interim Forest Management Plan

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## Property Identifiers

Property Name and Designation: South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area

County: Oconto

Property Acreage: 605

Forestry Property Code(s): 4316

Master Plan Date: 1982

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## Part 1: Property Assessment (1-2 pages maximum)

The following items should be considered during the property assessment. Not all sections may be relevant for all properties.

### General Property Description

- Landscape and regional context:  
The South Branch Oconto River originates from several branches flowing from Oconto and Langlade counties. The stream flows through Menominee county and the project area begins close to the Menominee/Oconto line. The project area continues along the stream corridor for 11.1 miles to where the North and South Branches combine to form the Oconto River. The South Branch Oconto River is a Class I trout stream with special regulations along a portion of the river.
- History of land use and past management:  
The South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area began in the 1950's as a water demonstration area. The river flows through an area with a mix of agricultural and forestry uses. Early management focused on reducing negative agricultural impacts to the river and providing access for anglers. The value of the property for wildlife habitat and use was also recognized. Fishery habitat work has included erosion control, cattle watering stations, and in-stream trout habitat installation. Forest management on the property and on adjacent County Forest Property has generally left an uncut buffer of at least one rod along the stream bank. The buffer on most sales has been considerably greater than this.

### Site Specifics

The South Branch Oconto River Fisheries Area is about 87% forested. Current forest types include:

Aspen:	226 acres	44% (of forested lands)
Northern Hardwoods:	100 acres	19%
Balsam Fir	45 acres	9%
Swamp Hardwoods:	42 acres	8%
White Pine:	34 acres	7%
Hemlock:	29 acres	6%
Other types:	41 acres	7%



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Various size classes and successional stages are present on the property. Early successional stages are dominated by aspen. The property has developed age diversification of aspen stands ranging from seedling to sawtimber size and 1 to 80+ years of age. The oldest aspen stands have been passively managed as riparian management zones along the river and will continue to be managed as such. The aspen stands have generally been created and/or maintained through commercial timber harvests.

Northern hardwood stands range from poletimber size to large sawlog. While many of these stands are capable of producing high quality hardwood, several have been degraded by past logging practices. Large diameter, tall trees exist, but many are of poor to moderate quality due to past "high grade" timber harvesting. Northern hardwood stands will develop into late successional stage forests, but currently the stands within the property are at mid-successional stages.

Other timber types range from young hardwood/conifer plantations to large white pine. Stands generally range from early to middle successional stages. Significant riparian management zones have been managed passively during timber management activities. Riparian management zones will offer an opportunity to passively manage stands towards later successional stages.

- State Natural Area designations: There are no State Natural Area designations within the Project Boundary.
- High Value Conservation Forests (HCVF) or other resources/natural community types limited in the landscape: No HCVF areas have been designated on this area. Some of the conifer stands, particularly hemlock and white pine have large trees and are providing structure that may be locally rare.
- Biotic Inventory status: No Biotic Inventory has been conducted on this project.
- Deferral/consultation area designations (refer to the following website): No Deferral/Consultation areas have been designated for this project. Some stands are deferred from harvest due to location on the landscape.
- Rare species: Wood turtles and Blanding's turtles have been documented on or in the vicinity of the project and suitable habitat exists for both species. Red-shouldered hawks nest in the vicinity of the project and could be found within the boundary of this Fishery Area.
- Invasive species:
- Soils

## Cultural and Recreational Considerations

- Cultural and archeological sites: There are no historical sites listed on the property. One archaeological site is known within the boundary of the Fishery Area and others may exist. No comprehensive survey for archaeological sites has been completed. Recreational use of the property is facilitated by parking lots located at several sites. In addition, service roads within the property are used by anglers and other visitors to gain access to the river.

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## Part 2: IFMP Components (1-2 pages maximum)

**Management Objectives** (Outline primary forest management objectives):



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The objective of this property is to protect and enhance the high quality fishery of the South Branch Oconto River and to provide habitat which fosters a variety of other recreational and educational pursuits. Habitat management within the river will be directed Fishery staff with assistance, if needed, by other Department staff or cooperators. Topographic and covertype changes will be used to delineate riparian management zones within the corridor of the river. Any harvesting within these zones will take water quality and aesthetic factors into consideration.

All forested stands outside of riparian management zones are currently scheduled for management. Additional riparian management zones may be established. Much of the property can be described as a forested corridor following the river. The relatively narrow property effects accessibility and stand acreage available for forest management in some areas.

The objectives for the major forest cover types are:

**Aspen:** Provide wildlife habitat while producing forest products by maintaining the aspen type. Aspen will be managed through coppice regeneration harvests at rotation age while adhering to green tree retention guidelines. Diversification of age classes and early successional types can be maintained through this method. Some aspen stands within riparian management zones will succeed towards northern hardwood types due to passive management.

**Northern Hardwood:** Maintain water quality, provide wildlife habitat, and produce forest products while developing and maintaining the northern hardwood type. A secondary objective in several stands will be to move towards an uneven-aged condition and develop large trees.

**Balsam Fir:** Maintain water quality, provide wildlife habitat, and produce forest products. Many of the balsam fir stands have significant components of other species and offer opportunities to convert or maintain fir. Stand level determinations will be needed.

**Swamp Hardwood:** Maintain water quality, provide wildlife habitat, and to a lesser extent produce forest products while maintaining the swamp hardwood type. Several of these stands are portions of riparian management areas and/or offer very limited logging chance.

Other timber types representing small proportions of the overall property will generally be managed to maintain the type following the guidelines set forth in the WDNR Silviculture Handbook. Riparian management zones will be managed passively or with selection harvests retaining significant tree stocking density in order to protect water quality. Riparian management schemes will generally favor later successional forest types. Though limited in acreage, a few small white pine and hemlock stands offer opportunities to manage timber types that are somewhat lacking in the landscape.



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## Property Prescriptions:

Aspen will be managed even-aged with coppice regeneration harvests conducted at rotation age outside of riparian management zones. Green tree retention guidelines will be followed. Rotation ages may be modified to increase age diversity as desired. Generally snag, den, and mast trees will be retained during harvests.

Northern hardwood will be managed to develop uneven-aged stands. Single tree selection with canopy gaps will be the dominant system, although other systems may be appropriate at stand level. Overall management will strive to develop large, long lived species to maximize watershed protection. Where mast trees are a component (mainly oak and beech) they will be favored.

Balsam fir can be managed even-aged to maintain fir or converted to other types (aspen, red maple, northern hardwood). Shelterwood, overstory removal, or clearcutting are all applicable systems.

Swamp hardwood may be managed even-aged or uneven-aged with stand level determinations needed. Several of the swamp hardwood stands offer limited logging chance and may be managed passively for water quality and wildlife habitat. Swamp hardwood silviculture is currently developing and the WDNR Silviculture Handbook guidelines will be followed.

White pine and hemlock will be managed even-aged to encourage the development of large trees. Extended rotations and/or encouraging old growth characteristics are desirable.

The other, less significant timber types will be managed in accordance with the WDNR Silviculture Handbook.

## Approvals:

Joe Henry	5/14/2013
_____ Regional Ecologist	_____ Date
Ryan Severson	05/14/2013
_____ Forester	_____ Date
John Huff	05/14/2013
_____ Property Manager	_____ Date
Jeff Pritzl	05/14/2013
_____ Area/Team Supervisor	_____ Date