



Illinois Forestry Development Council

Critical Issues Facing Illinois Forests and Forestry

Critical Issue: The Need to Increase Numbers of State Forestry Professionals and Technical Staff (in Particular, Those Working with the Public)

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Who are the Stewards of Illinois Forests? Although national and even global issues concerning forest resource use and misuse often capture the media's attention, it is the arena of state forest resource management in which the public has the greatest likelihood of interaction with a forestry professional. Staff of the Division of Forest Resources, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), are prepared to assist the public reap and reconcile the economic, ecological, and emotional benefits that Illinois forestland can offer. The Division's mission is to protect, perpetuate, restore, conserve, and manage the forest and related resources of Illinois, public and private, rural and urban; and to ensure for future generations the greatest economic, scientific, and social benefits that can only be provided through a forest ecological system.

Why Does Illinois Need State Forestry Professionals? Trained forestry professionals and technical staff are responsible for providing information and assistance to private forest landowners, to cities and communities managing urban forests, and for continued tree nursery operations. Lack of access to state forestry professionals ultimately affects Illinois residents who own forested property in the state, those who enjoy and visit Illinois forests and natural areas, and industries that rely on a steady flow of wood as a raw material. The critical issue at hand is that the state of Illinois lacks enough qualified personnel to meet the forest management needs of its citizens.

- **Increasing Support Systems:** Over the next 25 years the American public's insatiable demand for wood is predicted to rise another 25%. Due to the reduction of logging on federal forestlands, harvesting timber on privately owned forestlands has become increasingly more attractive economically, although problematic ecologically. The goal of the IDNR District Forester is to put each Illinois landowner on the path to managing their forestland with a sound plan.
- **Enhancing Urban Forest Management:** Managing the trees of Illinois cities and communities requires as much technical expertise as managing rural forestlands. The state's urban and community forestry program is

Several Illinois
District Forester
positions are
vacant or in interim
status

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J. Mangun



“State forestry personnel head count has been decreasing at the same time that forest management demand has been increasing.”

-Illinois citizen comment

“Too often I see land owners sell timber without a State Forester plan or timber contract. I feel if there were more foresters the land owner could have timely service, they could receive more money for their timber.”

-Illinois citizen comment



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designed to provide assistance to municipalities and civic groups that seek to initiate tree inventories, planting, and maintenance programs.

- **Maintaining Nursery Operations:** Reforestation projects and streamside vegetation restoration efforts require the production and distribution of high quality, native plant material. State nurseries operate to provide landowners with appropriate plant materials, often at no-cost, to meet a wide variety of land management objectives.

Present Status: In Illinois, over 90% of the 4.26 million acres of commercial forestland is in private ownership. Of these landowners, approximately 83% are farmers or private, non-farming individuals. An estimated 80% of these have never received professional forestry management assistance. Motivated landowners currently face delays up to two years before requests for technical forestry assistance can be met. At present levels of staffing, state forestry professionals will only be able to chip away at this backlog for the foreseeable future. It is important to note that this backlog persists despite the availability of private consultant foresters for hire; many Illinois landowners are unwilling or unable to incur the additional cost. Logging private land without a professionally prepared management plan can result in lowered economic return and degraded wildlife habitat.

In fiscal year 2004, the Illinois State Appropriation to the IDNR was 549.8 million, a 22% reduction from FY 2003 and a 28% reduction from FY 2002. Recent (2005) layoffs of IDNR employees have only worsened the situation.

Future Outlook: As awareness of forest stewardship and incentive programs grow, the demand for a professional state support system will be greater than ever. Eligibility requirements for landowner assistance programs often specify approved forest management plans. The need for more educational programs that explain the mechanics of oak regeneration, prescribed burning, habitat fragmentation amelioration, water quality improvement, and incentive program enrollment cannot be met without the personnel to teach them.

Call for Action: The Illinois Forestry Development Council continues to highlight the essential role of state professional foresters in Illinois and to raise awareness of forestry in urban and rural communities across the state. Without a return to adequate levels of staffing, forest resource conservation in our state will suffer serious setbacks. Increasing the number of forestry professionals and technical personnel must be the first step in reestablishing a win-win relationship that ensures the vitality and productivity of Illinois forests.

Additional Reading

Illinois Forestry Development Council. (1999). *Realizing the Forests' Full Potential: Assessment and Long-Range Action Plan for Forest Resources in Illinois*. Urbana, IL: The Council and University of Illinois.

Leatherberry, E.C. (2003). *Illinois' Forest Resources in 2001, Res. Note NC-385*. St. Paul, MN: USDA Forest Service, North Central Research Station.