

Threats to Wisconsin's Environmentally Important Forests

In discussing the definition of Wisconsin's environmentally important forests, it was clear that considering both internal and external threats to the sustainability of these forests was integral to their identification and protection. These threats are impacting the lands within the selected Forest Legacy Areas. The threats that contribute wholly, or in part, to the fragmentation and loss of the contiguous blocks of forest system include:

Homes and residential development within the forest. There is excessive development pressure in the forested portions of the state, particularly where the presence of lakes and streams increase the recreational potential of these lands.

High property taxes. Forestlands are being assessed on the highest value use of that land rather than current use. The high property taxes are forcing many private and industrial landowners to sell their land to developers.

Rapid turnover of property. Items mentioned above are leading to a more rapid turnover of property ownership than in the past. This, in turn, results in owners who have no long-term connection to the property and who are less interested in sustainable forestry practices and principles.

Forest industry restructuring. Forest industries have been a major property owner in many areas of the State, particularly in the north. Companies are trending towards less land ownership and selling off their land holdings. This may further fragment forest ownership and forest cover.

Urban sprawl. The metropolitan areas are expanding into Wisconsin's forests. These bring homes, utilities, shopping and other amenities, further fragmenting the forest cover.

Easy access from metropolitan areas. The metropolitan population finds easy access to recreation in Wisconsin's forests. This recreation includes summer homes as well as other developed forms of recreation. Such activities contribute to the fragmentation of Wisconsin's forests.

Changes in State on-site waste disposal codes. Recent changes will make the construction of disposal systems in many important forests possible. This, in turn, encourages development within the forest leading to more parcellization and fragmentation.

Deer populations. When forest fragmentation occurs, the accompanying openings and landscaping, creates ideal the situation for deer populations to rise to abnormally high levels. This negatively impacts forest regeneration. Favorite woody species that white-tailed deer consume include northern white cedar, hemlock, basswood, white pine, yellow birch, sugar maple, red maple, aspen, oaks, white ash, and shrubs such as Canada yew, brambles, mountain maples, dogwood, viburnums, and hazel. Those species which are known to be very sensitive to deer browse include northern white cedar, hemlock, yellow birch and yew. Deer also eat many herbs. These include at least 70 plant genera, not counting the most popular - grasses and sedges (Christoffel, 1998 and Vander Zouwen et. al., 1995).