

Caring for your Forest

Your family forest, be it a single stand of trees or hundreds of acres, is an important part of your property. Family forests provide aesthetics, shelter, economic opportunity, wildlife habitat, and biological diversity. Maintaining the value and health of your family forest requires careful consideration of forest management. Some family forest owners wish to do little with their woods and others want to do everything. As you consider your current and future involvement consider some lessons from your fellow family forest owners.

- 1) Get Professional Help. If you are just beginning to manage your forest, seek out trained foresters, wildlife experts, and other professionals. Forestry assistance can be found through Montana Department of Natural Resources and Montana State University Extension.
- 2) Develop your skill set. Consider participating in available workshops and trainings. These include the Montana Forest Stewardship Program which provides several workshops each summer throughout the state. More information can be found at: <http://www.msuextension.org/forestry/stewardship.htm>
- 3) Visit your forest with the goal of “taking stock”. What plant and animal species are present, what forest disease and insects are prevalent, are there access roads, stream and wetlands?
- 4) Determine your goals for your forest. Brainstorm the possibilities and your dreams for the forest. If possible, visit with all who use and enjoy the forest.
- 5) Develop a forest management plan. Once you know what you have and what are your goals developing a plan is straightforward. A plan identifies actions, practices, and timeframe to achieve your forest goals. You should regularly reference your forest management plan to “keep on track” but it should be adaptable to changing conditions.

With a forest plan in hand you now have a tool to help guide the decisions that impact your family forest. This is another time that it is of value to visit with trained foresters, wildlife experts, and other professionals. Montana State University Extension in Gallatin County is happy to visit with you about your forest and your property. We are available to work with you over the phone, at our office, or in person at you property. Please give us a call if you would like to visit.

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