

Red Pine and Oak Reforestation Roundtable

Summary and Recommendations

Reforestation Roundtable

Tuesday, June 10, 2025, 1:00 to 4:00 PM

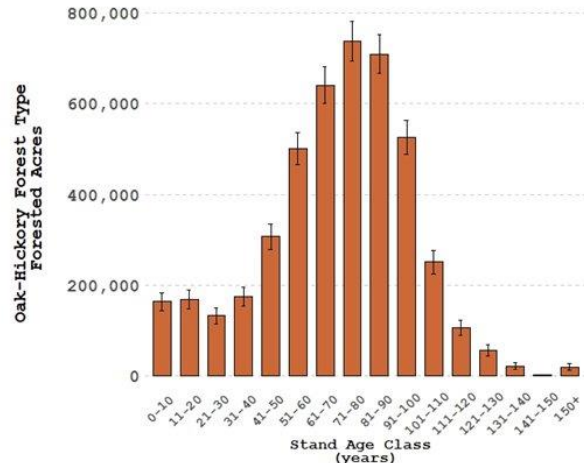
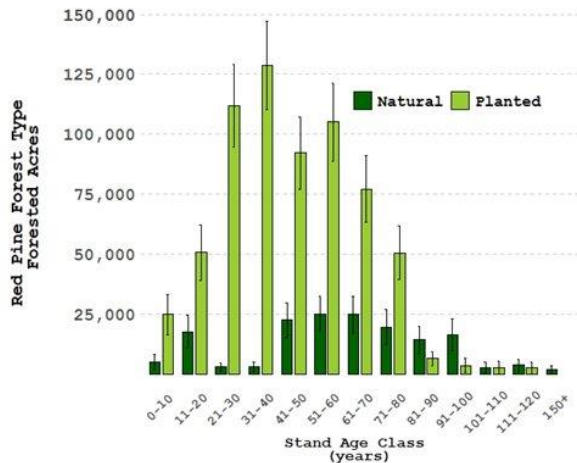
Lincoln County Service Center

Merrill, Wisconsin

Attendees: The meeting was attended by 38 stakeholders including the facilitators with the WI Council on Forestry (T. Hittle, A. Rissman, R. Luedtke) and WI Paper Council (S. Brantmeier). Entities represented included, WI DNR, Chequamegon - Nicolet National Forest, Biewer Sawmill, Bell Timber, Potlatch Deltic, Domtar, Ahlstrom, Billerud, Packaging Corp. of America, Koerner Forest Products, Whispering Pines Tree Farm/WI Woodland Owners Assoc., Futurewood Corp., Oneida County Clean Water Action, USDA-NRCS, UW Extension Forestry, Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, and Chippewa, Marinette, Burnett and Clark County Forests.

A need to act for pine and oak:

Wisconsin's roughly 17 million acres of forest includes about 815,000 acres of red pine and 4.5 million acres of the oak-hickory forest type. The weighted average age of planted red pine has changed from 27 in 1983 to 44 years of age today across all owners. The weighted average of the oak/hickory forest type has remained around the mid 60's for the past 40 years, only 7 percent of this forest type is 20 years old or less.



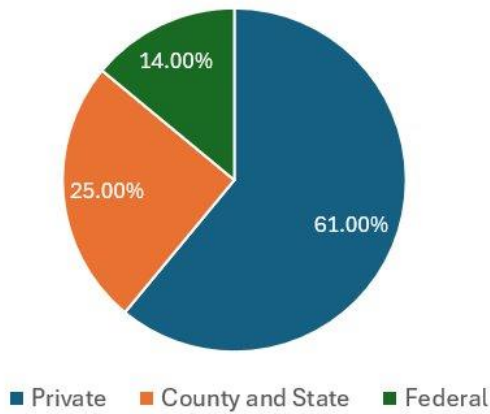
WisFIRS data on public lands indicates about 70 percent of the red pine forest acreage has a management objective to continue as red pine plantation through rotations, while 40 percent of the small private MFL red pine forest type includes a management objective of continued red pine management with planting after rotation. (Not considered here is some gain in plantation acreage from other types being converted to red pine plantation)

There are approximately 20,000 acres of planted red pine with an even-age harvest planned in the next 20 years on state and county forestlands. About three-fourths of this acreage is scheduled to be planted again into red pine.

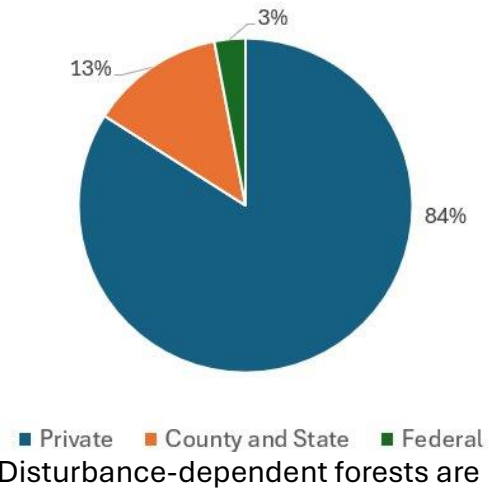
On small private MFL lands, about 18 percent of the nearly 8,500 acres of planted red pine that have an even aged harvest planned in the next 20 years is scheduled to be planted again to red pine. (There are roughly 650,000 acres of large account MFL lands where information for this initial look was not investigated.)

Presently, similar information on oak management has not been summarized.

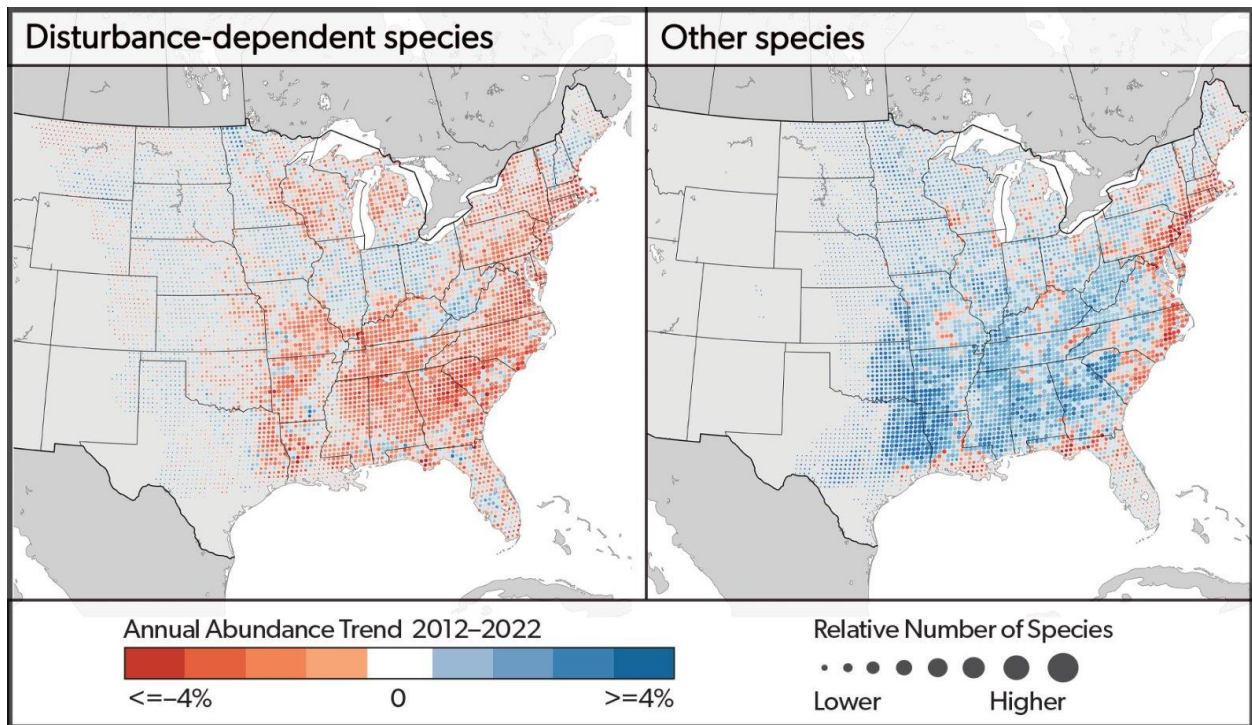
Planted Red Pine Ownership



Oak/Hickory Forest Type Ownership



Disturbance-dependent forests are declining, which negatively impacts habitat for disturbance-dependent species. This chart shows the decline in forest bird abundances is higher for disturbance dependent species, as an example.



<https://www.stateofthebirds.org/2025/eastern-forest-birds/>

Site Preparation Needs – Public Lands

Circa 2023

ACTIVITY	COUNTY FOREST	USFS R9 WI & MI	WDNR	5 YR TOTAL	5 YR AVG
Anchor Chain	2,120.0	1000			
Disk Trench	5,994.0	7300			
Patch Scarification / Bracke	840.0	5200			
Raking	90.0	0			
Roller Chopper	1,440.0	800			
Salmon Blade	845.0	1000			
Shearing	150.0	0			
Mulching/ Fecon	1,275.0	0			
Mechanical TSI	2,230.0	40000			
Aerial Herbicide	2,165.0	0			
Ground Herbicide	4,804.0	0			
5 YR TOTAL	21,953.0	55,300.0	10,400.0	87,653.0	17,530.6
5 YR AVG	4,390.60	11,060.00	2,080.00		
			unable to determine per activity acres		

Attendees were provided with seven questions ahead of the meeting for consideration and asked at the roundtable to provide their perspectives. Results are summarized below.

1. What is your level of concern or interest in red pine / oak forest establishment?

Most participants indicated a **high and immediate** or **high but not urgent** level of concern. Many public and industrial land managers emphasized urgency due to aging plantations, future fiber supply concerns, and limited reforestation of pine on private lands. Some private landowners showed **lower concern**, often planning not to replant and letting land regenerate naturally to mixed forest or other forest types. Of not.

2. What are your main concerns or interests in addressing the red pine and/or oak age class imbalance and reforestation needs?

Key concerns included:

- **Fiber supply for industry**
 - Of note - one timber industry buyer has been buying red pine for 15 years. He noted that he has observed past places where productive red pine stands are now farm fields, or black oak and white pine and that stands visited and observed for years are gone now. In working with landowners, it was noted

that he has successfully planted only 30 acres in 6 years. Also noted was that the cost for private landowners is so high and that they must have some incentive to keep it in red pine or “it’s never going to happen”. It was expressed by this individual that this trend is going to ruin the industry for certain pine markets.

- Paper mills no longer own vast tracts of land and are owned by international/larger corporations and investors who are concerned about shorter term issues and may not place an emphasis on longer term fiber availability concerns.
- Concerns expressed regarding the State not re-planting red pine.
- **Forest health and diversity**
- **Return on investment (ROI) for landowners, including counties and private owners**
- **Loss of forest infrastructure and economic viability**
- **Uncertainty of future markets**
- **Master plans moving away from plantations** on public lands
- **Labor and cost challenges**, especially for smaller or legacy landowners

3. What is your level of interest or concern in forest regeneration in other / all WI forest types?

Participants expressed **high concern across all forest types**, not just red pine and oak. Issues with **aspen**, **loss of ash**, **conversion to invasive grasses and other species**, and **regeneration failures** were noted statewide. Forest regeneration overall was seen as a broad, systemic concern.

4. What are the most significant barriers to establishing young red pine (plantations) and/or oak stands? And what might a solution(s) be?

Top barriers included:

- **High cost** of site prep, seedlings, and labor
 - Few contractors do site prep and general availability

- Larger planting crews can rely heavily on visas for non-U.S. citizens in spring/fall planting seasons and uncertainty noted for their availability
- **Seedling and seed availability**
 - PRT and other nurseries are often short on red pine and other seed across the Great Lakes. Expressed lack of available seed is a major concern.
- **Lack of ROI for landowners**
 - Nice upland sites with good access could be prime locations for a solar farm or conversion to other uses where landowners could receive a significant income now vs having to invest for income at higher risk much later in time for pine or oak
- **Changing landowner demographics, objectives and parcelization**
 - Few private landowners have timber production or profitability high on their list of objectives
 - It is not cost effective to prep and plant smaller pine and oak stands
- **Limited state capacity and contractor availability**
- **Public perception and master planning priorities**
- **Site variability and regeneration uncertainty**
 - “Do something in one place and it works and do it across the road and it doesn’t work at all.”

Suggested solutions:

- Better coordination among landowners and agencies
- Need for greater funding or cost-sharing: due to federal cuts, EQIP payments for silvicultural practices are down in 2025
- Use more prescribed fire, however fire is extremely expensive with a lot of liability. NGOs wanting to explore utilizing more fire on the ground. However, it was noted that some mills will reject incoming timber if there is any char.
- Cultural trials, and innovation in planting methods
- Improved contractor access and equipment support

- Decision trees for site managers to improve the likelihood of regeneration success. Invest resources 3,5,10 years in advance of harvest to limit the need for site prep and/or artificial regeneration.
- Be proactive in identifying active timber sales where seed could be collected. Picking occurs mid to late August in the south, early to mid September in the fall. DNR is a good resource in identifying ready seed and providing pickers. Could UWSP students be tapped to help (offer a credit to collect cones)?
- Establish a regeneration fund for cost sharing on county forests and private lands.

5. What would you / your organization / your business need to become more engaged in addressing red pine and oak forest reforestation, and/or other forest type regeneration needs?

Needs identified:

- **More funding and cost-share programs**, especially to bridge the gap between actual costs and existing programs
- **Seed supply and coordination improvements**
- **More accessible data and messaging tools** to educate landowners and local officials
- **Clear state or regional strategy** to unify efforts and avoid fragmentation
- Additional labor/operators to run equipment.
- Industry could do a better job on messaging to legislators.

6. Who should be at the forefront of continued efforts to seek and implement solutions? And what needs to be done next?

Suggested leaders:

- **The Wisconsin Council on Forestry**
- **State and county agencies**
 - Having a regeneration/reforestation dedicated staff person within DNR would be hugely beneficial. However, the DNR is currently limited on resources and authority; and has to make the case to invest in forestry and compete for

funding. DNR needs help from others in the industry to make the case. What message would resonate with legislators/ lawmakers?

- **Industry stakeholders** (especially where jobs and mill viability are at stake)
- **Private landowners**, when properly supported

Next steps:

- Develop compelling data and narratives to engage legislators and the public
- Advocate for legislative authority and funding for reforestation initiatives
- Prioritize scalable, coordinated approaches
- Clarify roles across private, public, and industrial land managers

7. What can you offer going forward to the red pine, oak, and/or broader forest regeneration discussions, efforts and solutions?

Offered contributions included:

- **Industry knowledge, equipment, and data sharing** (though competitive concerns remain)
- **Cooperation with pilot projects and site trials**
- **Seed collection and nursery collaboration**
- **Policy advocacy and support for budget motions**
- **Technical expertise and educational outreach**