

**Project Name: WI Forests FIRST (Forest Industry Roadmap and Strategies for Tomorrow)**

**Timeline: July 2025 to December 2027**

**Project Goal: Closely examine Wisconsin’s forest industry and its role to support and enhance the state’s ecological, social and economic well-being for future generations.**

This will be accomplished through the development of a strategic planning process that will examine critical forest industry components. The effort will be supported by a coalition of stakeholders and led by the Wisconsin Council on Forestry (CoF), the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLTPA) and the Wisconsin Paper Council (WPC). The planning effort will result in the development of a comprehensive, industry-driven strategic plan and actionable roadmap to be delivered by December 2027. The strategic plan will represent a statewide vision for an environmentally sustainable, economically robust and diverse forward-looking industry built on an assessment of Wisconsin’s strengths and capacities and future market opportunities. We aim to develop practical solutions enhancing current business, attracting new wood using industries and creating family sustaining jobs to ensure forest health for future generations.

**Guiding principle** – a healthy resilient forest industry is critical to maintaining healthy functioning forests for the benefits they provide to people and nature. It is essential that Wisconsin’s established environmental standards and sustainable forest management remain uncompromised in all project components, analyses, and outcomes, even as adjustments are considered.

**Why This, Why Now?**

**Situation:** Wisconsin’s forest products industry is one of the leading manufacturing sectors, representing over 11 percent of the state’s total manufacturing jobs with a \$37.8 billion contribution to the economy. In addition to the economic contributions directly related to the harvesting and manufacturing of forest products, a healthy forest industry is also critical to our ability to sustain vibrant and resilient forests, which provide clean air, clean water, abundant recreational opportunities, and wildlife and game habitat, all essential to supporting Wisconsin’s nearly \$11 billion outdoor recreation industry.

A Comprehensive Forest Industry Strategic Plan and Roadmap will: 1) closely examine Wisconsin’s existing industry to understand it’s strengths and limitations, 2) analyze conditions that may be impeding continued development, 3) assess Wisconsin’s available supply and future access to raw forest materials, 4) review global markets and provide clarity on how new market development can occur without compromising existing business, 5) examine workforce and worker training needs, and 6) utilizing the study findings, generate necessary actionable items that will support, diversify and further develop Wisconsin’s forest products industry for the 21st century.

**Complication/Opportunity:** Wisconsin’s forest industry is facing significant challenges, raising concerns about the state’s economy, the well-being of rural communities, and the health of our forests. Rapid changes in forest product markets have had widespread impacts, including mill closures in Wisconsin. However, new innovations offer promising opportunities in addition to current wood consuming markets. Products such as laminated timber, sustainable aviation fuel, biochar and other wood-based products are potential opportunities to attract new businesses while sustaining forest health.

**Proposed Resolution:** Other states are aggressively engaging with stakeholders to determine strategies to support, develop, and diversify their state’s forest industries, which also includes promoting their state as a home for new industries. Wisconsin risks irreversibly falling behind, while other states move forward with support for their forest product industries.

An “Industry Strategic Planning Steering Committee”, established by the Council on Forestry, and working with GLTPA/WPC will secure a study consultant(s), manage the study process, and develop recommendations. Upon completion of the study, the Council on Forestry, following Steering Committee and GLTPA/WPC review and advisement, shall provide a report detailing the study’s outcomes and recommendations to the Governor and appropriate standing committees of the legislature.

**Scope:**

This project will lead to actionable items that ensure Wisconsin’s forest industry will be successful into the future, allowing it to be a leader regionally and globally. The strategic plan and roadmap components for documentation, research, and analysis are envisioned to include those that are required to support final project recommendations (for example, necessary resources, infrastructure, stakeholders, environmental considerations, regional national and global market opportunities, etc.), and that are integral to the overall scale of Wisconsin’s multi-billion-dollar rural and urban forest products industry.

**Out of Scope – This Project is not:**

An effort that will address the vast array of topics and considerations for the management of Wisconsin’s forests is not within the scope of this project. It will not venture into topics, such as approaches to forest management, silvicultural and forest health issues, pests and pathogens, climate impacts and invasives. Although, these topics may be addressed if it is determined there is influence to fiber supply or other industry strategic planning issues.

**Deliverables**

1. Assessment of wood fiber availability now and in the future.
2. Assessment of the regulatory and permitting process.
3. Identify Wisconsin Forest Industries Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.
4. In addition to individual project component reports and easily digested summary documents, a final project report summarizing project components, and detailing conclusions, recommendations and needed actionable items to address recommendations designed to achieve the desired future state for the WI forest industry and ultimately promoting a Healthy Forest Industry, Healthy Forests and Healthy [Rural] Economies.
5. Recommendations for implementation to maintain momentum and the roadmap as a workable, revisable and effective means of supporting Wisconsin’s forest products industry well into the future.