



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON FORESTRY

Tony Evers, Governor

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To:

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Senator Romain Quinn, Chair - Senate Committee on Insurance, Housing, Rural Issues and Forestry

Representative Jeff Mursau, Chair - Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation

RE: Red Pine Reforestation and Industry Fiber Supply Challenges

The Council on Forestry is conveying our concern regarding reforestation challenges and impacts on future fiber availability for our forest products industry. This follows our statutory charge to advise the Department of Natural Resources, Governor and the legislature on a multitude of forestry topics of which “reforestation” is explicitly noted in [statute](#).

Specifically, the Council is aware that both public and private forest landowners are facing challenges with reestablishing red pine. While red pine comprises less than 5 percent of the state’s roughly 17 million acres of forestland, red pine comprises about 12 percent of all harvest removals (second only to aspen) and red pine is the number one removed sawtimber species (16 percent of sawlog volume removals).

Like much of Wisconsin’s forests, the red pine forest type is aging. Forest inventory data dating back to the mid-1950s showed that the majority (64 percent) of red pine acres were in seedling or sapling size-classes. Conversely, today only 5 percent of red pine acres are in the smallest size classes. The average age of red pine plantations in 1983 was 28 years whereas today the average age is 44 years. Red pine forests approaching 50 to 60 years of age are often considered for final harvest followed by replanting.

In the summer of 2025, the Council, along with the Wisconsin County Forests Association and the Wisconsin Paper Council held a [red pine reforestation roundtable](#) discussion with industry, landowner and agency representatives. The consensus amongst the group was that maintaining red pine as part of Wisconsin’s forest was of high concern, noting concerns for industry fiber supply and forest health and diversity. Interestingly, comments were also expressed about overall concern for forest regeneration across other forest types. Participants expressed high concern across all forest types, not just red pine. Issues with oak, 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. Forest Regeneration Monitoring results support this concern having recently shown that half of the 46 counties included in the field survey work have 50 percent or more of the forest stands sampled below regeneration density guidelines.

There are a multitude of reasons why red pine is not being reforested. Red pine, especially red pine plantations, typically require planting after harvest. Planting can be a complex and expensive process to prepare the site, secure seedlings, machine or hand plant and then monitor and address needs for young tree survival. Much of this work is often completed with contracted firms and labor which are presently very limited. This process is especially daunting for private landowners who own over 60 percent of the red pine forest. Consequently, projections indicate that less than 20 percent of red pine owned by small private woodland owners with harvest plans over the next two decades will be replanted with red pine. Similarly, on State and County Forest lands, long-term management plans demonstrate a continued movement away from red pine reforestation, with approximately 30 percent of the existing red pine acreage projected not to be replanted to red pine.

The Council has arrived at three priority recommendations along with several more considerations to pursue to begin to address the potential loss of red pine in our state's forests.

Priority Recommendations for DNR and Legislative Action

1. Increase cost share percentage for red pine reforestation in the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP) and create a new cost sharing mechanism with funding for large private forest landowners and County Forests who typically do not qualify for WFLGP.
2. Establish a new dedicated DNR reforestation position to advance forest regeneration needs and practices, and coordinate and support landowner connections with contractors who provide site prep, tree planting and related services.
3. Establish a low interest loan or other financial support incentive program for investments in forest industry equipment to help build the contractor pool needed to meet current and future reforestation needs.

The Council's additional recommendations for consideration are attached.

The Council is available to continue to explore red pine and general forest regeneration and reforestation challenges and solutions. We see this as a critical topic that needs attention now for the short and long-term diversity and health of our forests and our forest industry.

Respectfully submitted:

Tom Hittle
Wisconsin Council on Forestry Chair

*Please note that due to the nature of their public positions, Council members Representatives Jeffrey Mursau and Lori Palmeri, Senators Romaine Quinn and Jamie Wall, State Forester Heather Berklund, and federal forest representative Janelle Corcker abstain as signatories.

Red Pine Reforestation Recommendations

Seed source

- Raise effectiveness of the DNR seed collection campaign and work on communicating timing and strategies to ensure seedling availability

Coordination

- Organize a brain trust to address forest regeneration issues collectively instead of one-off solutions
- Better connect site prep operators with public and private landowners
- Advance NRCS EQIP support for silvicultural practices and reforestation

Risk Reduction

- Increase pine stand diversity while continuing to grow merchantable pine suitable for multiple markets
- Explore options, including insurance coverage, to address forest loss to offset establishment cost risk
- Advance approaches to minimize soil disturbance and herbicide use

Communication

- Build awareness with DNR forestry and additional DNR staff other than forestry
- Build awareness with MFL plan writers, so landowners are fully informed
- Draft economics example scenarios for better understanding of return on investment
- Pursue media messaging along with a use WI wood campaign for red pine products
- Recognize different needs and messaging for different landowners/audiences
- Pursue social acceptability messaging for even-age forest disturbance, harvesting and regeneration

Data-driven decisions

- More development of silvicultural options that grow red pine suitable for various markets
- Continue to document acreage where treatment is needed so private business can understand need and support investment in equipment and services
- Enhance usability of DNR Forest Regeneration Monitoring to draw conclusions about cause and effect

Alignment with forest certification

- Explore and resolve any forest certification issues related to plantation establishment and management

Labor

- Support visas and transient workers (tree planters) (h2b etc.)