

## Silviculture Handbook Focus Groups: Summary of Observations

Thursday, April 19, 2018

### Introduction

Our goals for kicking off a review of the Handbook with two focus groups were:

1. To explore questions and issues with the Handbook identified in the Forest Practices Study
2. To learn how foresters are using the Handbook and explore ways it could be improved
3. To guide the development of a statewide survey of Handbook users

### Focus group participants

Group A: Public foresters	Group B: Private foresters
Tribal lands forester (Menominee)	Private consulting forester (small account)
County lands forester	Private consulting forester (small account)
National forest forester ( <i>invited, did not attend</i> )	Private consulting forester (large account)
BCPL forester	Private consulting forester (large account) <i>(invited, did not attend)</i>
DNR tax law forestry specialist	Private industrial forester
DNR service forester	Tribal lands forester (Stockbridge-Munsee)

### Results based on learning objectives

#### **1) To what extent are foresters familiar with the Handbook (HB)?**

There was a wide range in how often participants use the HB, from weekly to a few times a year. The tribal foresters use the HB least often, yet still valued it as a resource.

Participants were familiar with the chapters they use regularly in their work, and had a general idea about other information that could be found in the HB.

#### **2) How do foresters currently use the Handbook?**

##### Most common reasons for using the HB

- As a one-stop-shop for a wealth of Wisconsin-specific silvicultural information
- As a baseline of information on sound, research-based forestry practices, before deciding how to proceed for the stand they are evaluating.
- For details on a wide array of practices and information they can't recall or don't use often, especially for non-typical tree species and forest cover types.
- To back-up and support their forest management recommendations, whether to a landowner, consultant, DNR forester, county board, etc.

### Deviating from the guidance in the HB

Both groups of participants said they feel comfortable, and are regularly successful, deviating from the HB guidance to fit the unique objectives or stands they are managing, as long as they document their reasons with sound forestry.

Most participants approach the HB as a reference guide and informational resource. The exception was the DNR tax law foresters, who more often approach the Handbook as a set of standards they need to follow. They noted they will regularly deviate from the HB on a stand-by-stand basis, but deviating from the HB guidance for a large-scale property plan presents a challenge and a large accountability gap.

Both groups noted that the flexibility of DNR foresters to deviate from the HB depended on the personality of the individual forester. Both groups had experience with very accommodating and flexible foresters and alternatively, foresters who were less flexible deviating from the HB.

### Accessing the HB

Section 3 (forest cover types) was identified as the most utilized part of the HB, while Sections 1 and 2 (ecological tools, silvicultural methods) are typically used as reference material.

All participants use the .pdf web version of the HB; some print out specific chapters for easier reading or reference in the field.

All participants typically use the HB in their office; some access parts of it on their phone or laptop for use in the field (e.g. as justification for their prescription or to share information with a landowner).

### **3) *What information or tools are missing in the Handbook that foresters need?***

Both groups emphasized the need for a chapter on how to manage invasive species, particularly using existing forestry tools, and addressing challenges with regeneration due to invasive plants and deer.

When participants can't find the information they are looking for in the HB, they often look to their colleagues and the U.S. Forest Service as the next best resource.

### **4) *How can we improve on the information/guidance we provide in the Handbook to support foresters' work?***

To improve the HB structure, multiple participants recommended:

- standardizing where similar information can be found in each chapter
- creating a search tool to help them find information in the HB

Participants identified a need for the silvicultural methods to be regularly updated to reflect current research on best practices, and recommended linking to other resources that have information about rapidly evolving issues such as invasive pests and disease.

A few participants in the private group expressed the idea that the HB is not broken, so don't fix it.

### **5) *How can we better integrate landowner objectives into the Handbook to support foresters' work?***

A few participants identified a need for more economic guidance within the Handbook, specifically to provide research-based silvicultural guidance on a broader array of forest products that might be part of a landowner's objectives (e.g. telephone poles.) and providing a decision-support tool that could help foresters decide on the best return-on-investment management scenario. In both groups, a few participants cautioned about over-emphasizing economic objectives in the HB, as their landowners are not driven by economic goals.