

## Wisconsin Council on Forestry: Tuesday, January 27, 2026

Lincoln County Service Center, Lincoln County Board Room, 801 N. Sales Street, Merrill, WI 54452  
and via Zoom – [Register for the Zoom meeting here](#)

Council Members		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tom Hittle, <i>Chair</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Henry Schienebeck	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> William Van Lopik
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Matt Dallman, <i>Vice Chair</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> James Hoppe	<input type="checkbox"/> Brad Dorff
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heather Berklund, <i>Chief State Forester</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> James Kerkman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adena Rissman
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senator Romaine Quinn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Eric Olson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Buddy Huffaker
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senator Jamie Wall	<input type="checkbox"/> Janelle Crocker	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebekah Luedtke
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Representative Jeff Mursau	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jordan Skiff	<input type="checkbox"/> OPEN-Builders
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Representative Lori Palmeri	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Erik Rantala	
<b>Next Meeting:</b> Next council meeting: March 10		

## Agenda

Tuesday, January 27	Notes: <i>Decisions, Action Items, Assignments</i>
<b>9:00 AM</b> Welcome & Member Introductions (Chair Hittle) 20 min	Council extends a welcome to Jake Walcisak, new Division of Forestry Deputy Division Administrator.
<b>9:20 AM</b> Chair Update 10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing to build a relationship with the MN Forest Resources Council, informally can say that we are planning a joint meeting in May.</li> <li>• On March 5<sup>th</sup>, Chair Hittle and Ron Eckstein will participate in Science on Tap Minocqua. The topic is Forests at Risk.</li> <li>• Scott Bowe will be at Science on Tap on Feb 5<sup>th</sup> to discuss forest products in everyday life.</li> </ul>
<b>9:30 AM</b> Operational Guideline Updates (Chair Hittle) <i>Action Item: Approve Updated Operational Guidelines</i> 5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council is asked to approve the draft guidelines that have been circulated.</li> <li>• New version Identifies what a quorum is, clarifies voting, and clarifies public notice needs and open meeting requirements.</li> <li>• Chair Hittle calls to approve the updated operational guidelines.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Motion:</b> [Jim Kerkman] moved to approve the updated operational guidelines</li> <li>○ <b>Second:</b> [Jim Hoppe] seconded the motion</li> <li>○ <b>Opposition:</b> None</li> <li>○ <b>Vote:</b> Motion carries, motion passes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes will be reflected on the website.</li> </ul>
<p><b>9:35 AM</b> Open Forum for Council Members 15 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Question as to if there is an opportunity to form an ad-hoc team to help facilitate better understanding of WisFIRS between DNR and practitioners. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Council could make recommendations based on what the ad-hoc team produces/provides.</li> <li>○ The DNR notes they would support an opportunity to engage, even if it is outside of the Council.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Website views continue trending upwards. A draft analysis will be ready by next meeting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Council is always looking for feedback from members on how to improve the website, though noted that most are happy with how the site functions currently.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Henry Schienebeck: Secure Rural School Funding was reauthorized in late December. A week ago, Henry met with the new USDA Undersecretary Mike Boren. The plan is to get the funding for 2024, 2025, and 2026 paid out by April. The Title II Resource Advisory Committees will need to be renewed, and Title III money is in play also.</li> </ul>
<p><b>9:50 AM</b> Legislative Updates 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updates from Sen. Wall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provided an update on the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund</li> <li>○ Coauthored a bill providing grants to address urban heat islands was put out recently and is supportive though thinks it unlikely that the bill will see any movement.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Updates from Sen. Quinn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continuing to push to move the SAF bill through. There is still movement and many negotiations are happening behind the scenes. Sen. Quinn is bringing an amendment to the aid packet forward. Stresses competition in other states and would hate to see this move elsewhere.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• PFAS Legislation update provided by Leah Kelm from Rep. Palmeri’s office and Cory Bruce from the Mursau office: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The paper industry has concerns with the new proposal. Concerns were addressed in the draft but not all. The Mursau office is continuing to work with DNR, the Paper Council and WMC on middle ground language and hopes to find a path forward.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>10:10 AM</b> State Forester Updates National Forest Updates 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Division is at a 7% vacancy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jake Walcisak is the new DDA</li> <li>○ Going into fire season with some gaps after retirements of Fire Protection Section Chief and three Area Leaders. Also some holes in dispatch staff.</li> <li>○ Greg Edge retired</li> <li>○ Forester and technician recruitment underway.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- Elena Razenkova started her new role as Forest Management & Ecology Research Scientist on 12/01/25. Based out of Rhinelander.
- WI Legislation:
  - **SoyFoam Bill** (SB474/AB488): This bill permits soy foam to be an approved product for fire protection grants. Hearing on Assembly version held in early Jan.
  - **County forest grant administrator** legislation enacted in Dec: Expands the definition of “county forest administrator” to include individuals with a bachelor’s or higher degree in natural resources, conservation, or wildlife and three or more years of experience managing a county forest program, or an associate degree in forestry and three or more years of experience managing a county forest program.
- The [North Central Forest Ecological Landscape Master Plan](#), which includes the Flambeau River State Forest, has completed the public input process. Facilities & Lands Planners are preparing a summary of public comments received and working toward NRB approval of the plan targeted for April.
- Division is identifying needs to put forward as considerations for the department’s budget.
- Forestry Research Webpage launched in December – result of a Dept-initiated effort to share the science being conducted within each Division.
- 2024 BMP monitoring on Non-Industrial Private Forest (NIPF) lands was completed in November. The 2025 BMP report is being finalized and should be available in February.
  - Still looking to fill two seats on the BMP committee: 1 environmental/conservation organization and 1 Industry/Business Landowner/Land Manager > 10,000 acres
- Forest Health
  - 2025 Annual Report is available: <https://wi-dnr.widencollective.com/assets/share/asset/x1x5dikomj>
  - Weed Management Area FGP is live with applications due April 1.
- Forest Products Services:
  - TPO survey will go out to sawmill and pulp mills to collect 2025 data.
  - A series of webinars aiming to educate internal staff as well as external partners is upcoming.
- Reforestation Program:
  - Fire occurred on December 23<sup>rd</sup> at Hayward State Nursery. It destroyed the conifer seed cleaning and seed storage facility at the nursery. The cause of the fire is still under investigation. The seed stored in the cooler was saved and germination tests are underway to assure its viability. We have moved uncleaned conifer cones still coming in from buying stations to Griffith State

Nursery for storage. We have also set up an agreement with MN DNR for them to clean the remainder of white pines cones in exchange for sugar maple seedlings. The primary impact to the fire to conifer seeds is that we may have limited availability of jack pine seed for direct seeding in 2027. Joe Vand Hey is reaching out to foresters as they contact him with direct seeding requests and stock projections. Hardwood seed is cleaned at Wilson State Nursery and unaffected by the fire. We are currently setting up a temporary conifer seed cleaning facility in another building at Hayward State Nursery, which includes buying replacement equipment. Unsure of when it will be operational. In addition, prior to the fire, we were already on plans to move the seed cleaning from the building that burnt down to another building, which requires some remodeling. The fire has raised the urgency in completing the remodeling; hopefully by Fall 2026. The remodeling was largely being covered with federal FS reveg funds to support state nurseries and equipment purchases will now be supplemented with insurance funds.

- The new on-line seedling order system has been soft launched. Customers can now place their orders on-line with a live inventory to know what species are still in stock. The new ordering system is accessed the same way as the previous system.
- LeMay stockroom is also going online as work on an eCommerce project begins.
- Urban Forestry:
  - First session of the Community Tree Management Institute (CTMI) VI
  - Tree planting event in Oshkosh with Governor Occurred on Nov. 20.
  - Distributed Urban Forestry grants to 38 applicants. Distributed Catastrophic Storm Grants to three communities following August 9<sup>th</sup> severe storms.
- SFAP Highlights Report was submitted to the Forest service and DNR will be meeting with them next month.
  
- In 2025, WFLGP awarded 590 awards. 375 of those awards were made possible and funded through the federal grant.
- WI stewardship plan project is in progress. In 2025, WSPP has connected 172 landowners to a completed Forest Stewardship Plan, totaling over 7,800 acres combined.
- Tax Law: Proposal [AB707 \(-4856\)](#) would redirect 100% of MFL transfer fees and withdrawal fees from the Forestry Account into the department's designated forestry recording fees appropriation. The bill would enable the department to cover the recording costs for MFL orders which are currently not provided for in law (withdrawals, open/closed, rescinding, corrections/amendments) and which must be absorbed by Forestry's operating budget when there is a shortfall. No fiscal effect

	<p>to the proposed legislation, and yet it would make a big difference by allowing Department costs for recording fees to be covered with revenue already collected. legislation to redirect some FEEs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall 2025 CPW Training: 19 attended training, 4 have been certified. Trainees have through Wednesday, Feb 11 to complete the two required training plans. Next training tentatively September/October 2026.</li> <li>• Tax Law section is working through several reports and mandatory practice orders. First stepped enforcement letters for overdue 2025 mandatory practices will be going out between January and March.</li> <li>• Fire Suppression: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Wisconsin wildland fires in 2025 1,193 (10 yr avg 886) burned 2,805 acres (10 yr avg 1,825) in DNR protection.</li> <li>○ Division of Forestry saved 737 structures (10 yr avg 555) but lost 71 (10 yr avg 49)</li> <li>○ Suppression cost for the year \$1,004,968</li> </ul> </li> <li>• RX Burn Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fall 2025 marked the official beginning of the <b>Wisconsin Certified Burn Boss Program</b> (Wisconsin CBBP), supported through the DNR, in partnership with the Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council. Six applications are currently in review by the Certification Board within the program. We are currently undergoing the final approvals of our <b>DNR Partner and Private Lands Prescribed Burn Dashboard view</b> – similar to our DNR Burn Dashboard, this version will map and document Special Permit burns throughout the Protection Areas of the state. The additional <b>Partner and Private Lands Data Entry Tool</b> will provide a portal for private businesses, municipalities, organizations, and individuals to document their burns within the Cooperative Areas of the state. The Data Entry Tool allows users to save, query, &amp; manage their mapped burns, as well as confirm their Special Permit burn acreages. Both applications are planned to be released for the public</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Heather is on the NTL association with NMSFA. Have had conversations with the FS chief and leadership in Dept. of Interior. Focus has been on timber management at the local level. Conversations about how states can get more involved in active management on National Forests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ State Tribal Private Forestry funding was zeroed out in the last budget but pieces have been reincorporated into the budget using different mechanisms. Fire funding is stable and some of last year’s delayed budget was received. FY26 stability is unknown.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
10:30 AM Break, 15 min	

<p><b>10:45 AM</b> Sustainable Aviation Fuel Update (Chair Hittle) <i>Potential Action Item</i> 45 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of today’s item is to determine if the Council can refine or advance their position on this. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ No motion was presented during this topic.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Chair Hittle reads the original letter that the Council on Forestry shared initially in October. Notes it is broad but reaches the level of consensus that could be reached at the time of drafting.</li> <li>• Adena Rissman organized, through the Sound Forestry and Policy Committee, a Q&amp;A with Johnson Timber and Futurewood. Adena shared reflections from that Q&amp;A, citing that it was helpful to pose such a wide range of questions from understanding the markets to carbon. Not much new information from a technical standpoint was gained during the meeting.</li> <li>• Council members and meeting attendees share thoughts and perspectives. Both support and concerns were heard. Comments made that little is expected to happen on the bill in the near future and Council could resume discussion at next meeting.</li> <li>• Council’s Next Steps: Council will reconvene in March. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can take a wait and watch approach to see what the amended bill looks like but must continue to engage.</li> <li>• Interest in seeing more information on whether roundwood will be needed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>11:30 AM</b> Red Pine and Oak Initiative Update (Chair Hittle) 15 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed recommendations for Secretary Hyun. Chair Hittle, Vice Chair Dallman, Rebekah Luedtke, Chief State Forester and DNR Staff had the opportunity to discuss this with the Secretary’s Office in a briefing.</li> <li>• Broadly, red pine is not a significantly large part of WI acreage, but it is an important part. Diversity mitigates risk. We will lose 20-30% more of this forest type if we don’t engage. It’s not just a landowner issue, or industry issue. It is a Statewide issue.</li> <li>• Council discusses next steps and what more can be done: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Chief State Forester encourages all council members and constituents to engage and emphasizes that this cannot be solved only in the Division of Forestry.</li> <li>◦ Budgetary recommendations were provided to the DNR, although not yet known what will be taken up.</li> <li>◦ These may need to be part of Council’s budgetary advocacy/recommendations.</li> <li>◦ There are still gaps in what we know and those need to be filled. Council would need more detailed data to confirm scope and scale of the issue, but the Council is limited in ability to research further.</li> <li>◦ Potential to educate CPWs so they can talk to landowners and utilize management plans.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>11:45 AM Lunch, 45 min</b></p>	
<p><b>12:30 PM</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed key findings and results from the WDNR’s <a href="#">“Forest Land Inventory and Report”</a></li> </ul>

<p>WDNR Forestland Inventory and Report (Kristin Lambert, DNR Public and Private Forestry Section Chief &amp; Teague Prichard, DNR State Forest Specialist) 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report is completed every 15 years and submitted to the Council on Forestry and legislative committees. More information in the PowerPoint presentation: <a href="#">ForestManagementOnDNRLands_Brief.pdf</a></li> <li>• No action requested or required by the council.</li> </ul>
<p><b>12:50 PM</b> WisFIRS Introduction (Kristin Lambert, DNR Public and Private Forestry Section Chief; Doug Brown, DNR County Forest Specialist; R.J. Wickham, DNR Tax Law Section Chief; Julie Church, DNR Tax Law Specialist) 60 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council hears from DNR Private Forestry and Public Lands staff on an overview of the Wisconsin Field Inventory and Reporting System (WisFIRS) including capabilities, functions, wish list items. View the presentation: <a href="#">WisFIRS Intro Jan 2026 COF.pdf</a>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Division of Forestry invested heavily in WisFIRS several years ago. Now that IT has split from DoF, they are more beholden to IT priorities and capacity.</li> <li>○ The bigger the engine, the more maintenance it needs to keep running at the high level expected. 50% of IT time/resource is spent on maintenance.</li> <li>○ WisFIRS Private came 5 years after Public, mainly to support tax law work.</li> <li>○ No spatial component to WisFIRS private. It is a feature on the wish list, but it will also bring increased complexity.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Council heard from consulting forester and WCFA representatives on how they use WisFIRS. Call for more collaboration on conversations for how to improve WisFIRS.</li> <li>• If this will be taken up for budget advocacy, the Council will need the “hit list/elevator pitch” to tell a story and better communicate with the legislature.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1:50 PM</b> Forestry Program Funding Efforts Update (Chair Hittle) 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recent funding efforts for LEAF and WI Forestry Center did not have much traction in the legislature due to the timeframe. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Representative Mursau has circulated materials and talked to colleagues.</li> <li>○ There may have also been lack of comfortability taking more funds out of the Forestry Account when there are many unknowns.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Jim Hoppe’s COF Budget Committee will get back together to start hearing stakeholder input soon.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2:10 Break, 15 min</b></p>	
<p><b>2:25 PM</b> WI Forests FIRST Update on Steering Committee and Project Manager (Chair Hittle/Project Manager) 45 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair Hittle shared updates with WI Forests FIRST project. View the presentation: <a href="#">Jan 27 CoF WI Forests FIRST Introduction.pdf</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ongoing Executive Committee meetings.</li> <li>○ GLTPA banking has been established.</li> <li>○ Draft working structure, partner roles, and steering committee in place.</li> <li>○ Project Manager was selected: Camoin Associates. Awaiting final touches on the contracts.</li> <li>○ COF Website will be populated with more relevant materials as they become available.</li> <li>○ Next steps: begin every-other-week operations meetings with Executive Committee,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Chair Hittle introduced the project manager contracted for the effort moving forward.</li> <li>● Camoin Associates shared an update on the team and introduced core team of consultants who will work on the project, which includes Eric Kingsley, a partner at innovative Natural Resource Solutions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provided a breakdown of the budget and how the money allocated in the budget will be spent.</li> <li>○ Provided details on their philosophy and how they plan to engage in this process.</li> <li>○ View the presentation: <a href="#">Camoin Associates Slides WI Forests FIRST.pdf</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>● Next steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tori will be the day-to-day contact. All communication can be funneled through her and through Chair Hittle.</li> <li>○ Team encourages participation, questions, and continued engagement through the process.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>3:10 PM</b> Forestry Works Initiative (Stephanie Fuller Johnson, Director of Promotions and Economic Development) 30 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Council heard from Forestry Works Initiative on their program and efforts to help states build up their forestry workforce.</li> <li>● More information in the presentation: <a href="#">2026 ForestryWorks Overview</a>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3:40 PM, Adjourn</b></p>	