Review of Silviculture Handbook Structure and Format

**Background:**

In the late 1980s, the first edition of the WDNR Silviculture Handbook was created to bring together best available silvicultural information and practice from researchers, foresters, and others involved in Wisconsin forest management. Previously foresters had to rely on scattered and sparse information from Manager’s Handbooks, journal articles, and local knowledge. Over the last 30 years, teams of foresters and other experts have invested significant time in maintaining and updating the Handbook to address changing management needs and incorporate new information. The Handbook has grown to address diverse management concerns, including wildlife and landscape considerations as well as emerging issues, such as invasive species. Cover type chapters have been expanded from less than 10 pages in some cases to well over 50 pages. The continued expansion of this document has sometimes led to inconsistencies in format and presentation. The inclusion of several Wisconsin Forest Practices Study (WFPS) updates provides the opportunity to step back and evaluate overall Handbook structure and format to improve the user experience.

The recent WFPS recommendations and assignments touch on several sections of the WDNR Silviculture Handbook. Among the WFPS assignments are the direction to:

* Incorporate new and enhanced discussion of landowner management objectives and silvicultural prescription writing
* Provide additional tools for foresters to increase understanding and application of chapter information, including tatum guides, assessment tools, and example marking guides

**Direction:**

In light of the WFPS recommendations, the Division of Forestry is proposing a broader review of the Handbook structure and format to holistically address the concerns raised and to improve overall communication of important silviculture concepts. In addition to completing the WFPS assignments, the Division is proposing to:

* Survey Handbook users to investigate potential improvements to structure and format
* Modify the organization and presentation to improve the utility and function for Handbook users
* Standardize chapter structure and citations for all cover types, so all chapters have the same information in the same place

This effort will focus on what information is needed in the Silviculture Handbook generally and how to best provide it, similar to a needs or gap assessment. This effort will not be a review or revision of current handbook language.

**Process:**

Specific to the WFPS assignments, four Ad Hoc Teams will receive the assignments. Three are existing Ad Hoc Teams and one is a new Ad Hoc Team in response to the WFPS request. The Ad Hoc Teams are:

* Bottomland Hardwood Ad Hoc Team
* Northern Hardwoods Ad Hoc Team
* Red Pine, Aspen, and Oak Rotation Age Ad Hoc Team
* Marking and Retention Guidelines Ad Hoc Team (new)

These teams will be given the attached assignments from the WFPS. The goal is for the existing Ad Hoc Teams to complete their work by the end of the calendar year, 2018. The new Ad Hoc Team has yet to be formed and will likely not complete its work by CY2018, but will strive to complete its work within a year of its first meeting.

In addition to the four Ad Hoc Teams, Division of Forestry staff will work with the Silviculture Guidance Team to complete a more holistic review of the Silviculture Handbook. The goal is to have the new structure defined and in place by the end of CY18; however, not all elements will be fully drafted at that point. For instance, the standardized structure for all cover type chapters will be completed and existing chapters transferred to the new structure, but some existing chapters may be missing sections of the new standardized structure, which would require new text to be drafted in the future by an Ad Hoc Team.