

*Vilas County Forestry, Recreation, & Land Committee
2015 ANNUAL REPORT*



Red Oak Shelterwood – Claire Fire Lane – Vilas County Forest

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2015 ANNUAL REPORT

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Reporting Period: 1 January 2015 – 31 December 2015

As of 30 June 2015 the Vilas County Forestry, Recreation, & Land Department supervised and managed the following County owned lands:

41,011.42 acres – County Forest (County Forest Law)
101.27 acres – County Forest Special Use (County Forest Law)
41,112.69 acres – Total Acres Entered Under County Forest Law

TIMBER SALES

2015 Sales Sold Value

<u>Species</u>	<u>Tons Sold</u>
Aspen	6,025
White Pine	3,840
Red Pine	6,780
Jack Pine	1,620
Mixed Hardwoods	2,085
Spruce	2,680
Oak	80
Red Maple	1,555
Tamarack	1,385
White Birch	80
Balsam Fir	<u>378</u>
Total:	26,788

<u>Species</u>	<u>MBF Sold</u>
Red Oak	96
Hard Maple	5
Red Maple	20
White Birch	4
Mixed Hardwoods	<u>4</u>
Total	129

In 2015 there were 11 tracts of timber sold, affecting approximately 806 acres. The total estimated value of all sales sold is \$648,829.90.

Timber Type	Total Acres Scheduled for Harvest Treatment	Total Acres Set-up for Harvest Treatment	Total Acres of Reconnaissance	Total Acres Deferred or Rescheduled (Explanation)	Total Acres Treated for Harvest and Reconnaissance
Aspen	235-acres	196-acres	476-acres	46-acres	672-acres
White Pine	76-acres	30-acres	304-acres	46-acres	334-acres
Red Pine	396-acres	298-acres	177-acres	60-acres	475-acres
Jack Pine	32-acres	32-acres	399-acres	0-acres	431-acres
Balsam Fir	0-acres	0-acres	42-acres	0-acres	42-acres
White Birch	4-acres	0-acres	0-acres	4-acres	0-acres
Black Spruce	92-acres	98-acres	114-acres	40-acres	212-acres
White Spruce	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres
Tamarack	19-acres	13-acres	23-acres	0-acres	36-acres
Oak	96-acres	94-acres	156-acres	0-acres	250-acres
Northern Hardwoods	119-acres	84-acres	331-acres	38-acres	415-acres
Hemlock	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres
Red Maple	0-acres	0-acres	36-acres	0-acres	36-acres
Cedar	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres
Keg	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres	0-acres
Totals	1069-acres	845-acres	2058-acres	234-acres	2903-acres

County Forest 2015 Timber Harvest Schedule and Reconnaissance

2015 Sales Closed

<u>Species</u>	<u>Tons Closed</u>
Aspen	3,169
White Pine	105
Red Pine	996
Spruce	813
Jack Pine	653
Mixed Hardwoods	1,273
White Birch	113
Tamarack	515
Balsam Fir	<u>1,133</u>
Total:	8,770

<u>Species</u>	<u>MBF Closed</u>
White Pine	36
Red Pine	31
Mixed Hardwoods	2
Sugar Maple	5
Spruce	<u>11</u>
Total:	85

The total value of timber sale contracts closed in 2015 is \$150,884.17. There were seven (7) timber sales contracts closed affecting approximately 261 acres. As of 31 December 2015, there were 22 open timber sale contracts on Vilas County lands.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

The Vilas County Forest participates in the County Forest Certification Program as overseen by WDNR. The purpose of the program is to verify through a third party that forest management practices are sustainable, which directly corresponds to sales of forest products and jobs in Wisconsin. The verification is accomplished by an audit of management practices and comparison to the standards of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). Vilas County Forest has an annual reconnaissance goal of 2,000 acres. Vilas County Forest prioritizes the reconnaissance goal by targeting the oldest data. To remain in compliance with the SFI standards, reconnaissance data must not be more than 20 years old. It is also important to maintain current and relevant information on each stand to assist in the planning process. In 2015 with the aid of the Summer Forestry LTE position filled by Beth Spedowski, completion of field reconnaissance and stand inventory took place on 1,499 acres of forestlands. In addition, editing of 2,679 acres of forest stand data or stand boundary updates occurred in the Wisconsin Forest Inventory & Reporting System (WisFIRS). The Summer Forestry LTE completed surveying and monitoring of 1,092 acres of plantations for survival and competition.

In 2015, Superior Forestry Co. of Tilly, AR planted seedlings on two sites totaling 40 acres with 35,000 Jack Pine. The total cost of planting including tree seedlings, transportation, and labor for hand planting was \$7,059.50 or \$176.49/acre. It is very important to note Vilas County receives a 50% discount from the retail price of bare root seedlings from the Wisconsin DNR nursery program.

The Lowther Tree Planter was not requested for use by any private landowners in 2015. The tree planter is available for the planting of fields at \$10.00/acre. Also, as a service to private landowners, the Department stores seedling orders purchased from the Wisconsin DNR nurseries each spring, providing refrigerated storage until seedlings are picked up. A minimum fee of \$5.00 per 1,000 tree seedlings is charged. The Department received \$5.00 in fees for storing private landowner seedlings orders.

Site preparation activities in 2015

Vilas County Forestry Department along with the assistance from the Vilas County Highway Department built an anchor chain scarifier at a cost of \$5,681.58. The Highway Department provided labor to construct the anchor chain in exchange for use and modification of the Forestry Department's Rome disk for use in shoulder grading.



Forestry Department – Anchor Chain Scarifier

Site preparation activities in 2015 only included mechanical treatments. Anchor chain scarification using the Forestry Department's new anchor chain was completed in September 2015 on 15-acres in a White Pine shelterwood harvest to prepare the seedbed for natural regeneration of White Pine. The total cost of the anchor chain scarification was \$2,575.80 (\$171.72 /acre) which includes the County's skidder (DOT Rate), operator Jim's Time/Wages), transportation (\$383.85).



Anchor Chain scarification under Red Pine and White Pine site for natural regeneration

In October 2015, the Wisconsin DNR brush raked 13 canopy gaps on one site encompassing 45-acres of Northern Hardwood forests at a cost of \$465.41. The intention of canopy gap scarification is to prepare the seedbed for natural regeneration of mid-tolerant trees species (Ash, Yellow Birch, Black Cherry, Oak, and Basswood) within Northern Hardwood forests, to move the stand from even-aged to all-aged trees and promote species diversification.

Mechanical release in red pine plantation and oak shelterwood

The Vilas County Forestry Department bid out and awarded only one mechanical release project contract in 2015. The project was located in the township of Conover and encompassed a total of 35 acres in two locations. The picture directly below depicts a crewmember from Northwoods Forestry, Inc. of Eleva, WI, the successful bidder, using a brush saw to release six-year-old red pine from competing vegetation at the first of the two release locations (corner of Hwy K and Pioneer Creek Trail). The competing vegetation consisted mainly of cherry species, red maple, scrub oak, and jack pine. Releasing this red pine plantation at this age will allow greater allocation of resources to each red pine seedling and reduce the likeliness of suppression by competing and economically unviable vegetation. The results will be less mortality from suppression, a decrease in the time implementing a first thinning on this plantation and associated return on investment, and better response to future thinning.



Mechanical release of red pine plantation.

The second location associated with the 2015 mechanical release project consisted of the release of red oak saplings from competing red maple and white pine saplings (depicted below). This part of the project was located in a regenerating oak stand north of the intersection of Muskrat Creek Rd and Fire Lane Rd. Crewmembers from Northwoods Forestry, Inc. used brush saws to complete the release work. The goal of this portion of the project was to promote faster development of an oak dominated saw timber stand. The total project cost that included the mechanical release of two (2) separate sites and 35 total acres was \$6,720 (\$120/acre).



Mechanical release of red oak saplings in shelterwood

Annual County Forest–WDNR Planning Meeting

The Annual County Forest–WDNR Planning Meeting was held on September 14, 2015. The following is a summary of special concern items resulting from that meeting.

Jill Nemec reported that DNR Forestry Staff expect to meet or exceed time standards again this year. Time Standards were recalculated for WDNR Fiscal Years 2014-2018 resulting in Vilas County Forest receiving 866 work hours per year of WDNR assistance. Last fiscal year, the majority of DNR time was spent on timber sale establishment and county forest administration activities. Going forward there will be a little more effort on the DNR with forest reconnaissance and infrastructure (dozer) time. The DNR will assist in editing and updating in WisFIRS the 1,499 acres of field reconnaissance and stand inventory completed in the summer of 2015 and on completed timber sales that the DNR had established.

County Forest staff have a few recreation and forestry dozer projects that planned for 2016 that may require assistance from the DNR to accomplish. The DNR staff will need prioritized list of projects the County Forest would like to see completed throughout the year so DNR Technicians can schedule the projects when they have available time. All DNR dozer time will count toward the county time standards if the project occurs on Vilas County Forest land. The planning group also discussed funneling correspondence/work projects through one central point for each organization – Gagnon with VCF and Nemec for the DNR.

One amendment to the 15-Year Plan was approved in 2015 by the DNR – Chapter 725.3.2 (Designated Horseback Riding Trails) – to authorize the County Forestry Committee to approve requests for designated horseback riding trails on Vilas County Forest lands. There may be another update to the 15-Year Plan this fiscal year if plans for the campgrounds at Torch Lake become more firm. No other updates or amendments are expected.

An update of forest health issues from WDNR was discussed. Linda Williams from the DNR Green Bay office is still covering the Forest Health Specialist vacancy in this area. There is no timetable for filling this vacancy. There was a new discovery of oak wilt in the Conover area in August 2015. The location is on private lands east of Highway 45 in the River Road area. This is only the second known occurrence of oak wilt in Vilas County. A DNR Researcher and his team have already treated the oak wilt pocket and will be monitoring the site for 5 years. In 2015, the WDNR officially declared an outbreak of Spruce budworm. Several reports of infestation have come from the Phelps and Conover areas, as well as a few locations in Land O’Lakes. Because of past management, the Vilas County Forest does not have a lot of balsam fir (the spruce budworms preference) or spruce stands that are considered “high-risk” – only about 100 acres and not all of those stands are merchantable/manageable. Staff will continue to monitor the progress of the Spruce Budworm in 2016. Staff will also assess stands when they come up on the harvest schedule and possibly swap lower-risk stands with a higher-risk stand if necessary.

FOREST BOUNDARIES

There are approximately 252 miles of County Forest boundaries with other landowners, of which approximately 212 miles either have now been established by certified survey or have a line by agreement. In 2015, 1.4 miles of certified surveys were completed on the County Forest, at a cost of \$4,160.00.

The program to establish the boundary of the County Forest began in the early 1980’s. The boundary lines, corners, and witnesses represent a major investment by the County and are vital to the management of the County Forest. The maintenance of these boundary references is accomplished by refreshing blazes on trees and painting. This work must be accomplished on a rotation of 8-10 years to retrace boundary evidence. In 2015, 20.5 miles of boundary with associated appurtenances received maintenance.

LAND ACTIVITIES

In 2015, a new website domain name was purchased by Vilas County called vilascountyland.com. This domain name was purchased in order to establish a real estate website for the sale of tax deed parcels. This new website generated 100 “hits” (meaning number of times someone clicked on the site) per week on average. Tax deeds were taken in 2015 on six (6) parcels for a total of 4.8 acres. There was \$138,433.39 generated through the sale of 17 tax deed parcels. All advertising and administrative costs for real estate transactions are paid from the revenue generated through those transactions. The income and expense is credited to the following accounts:

Income:

Account #18121 Delinquent Taxes (credited to the General Fund)	\$ 40,276.24
Account #48322 Regular Real Estate Sales	138,433.39
Account #48322 Redemption Penalties	-0-
Account #48322 Easements (Deerskin 40)	1,500.00

Account #48322 Environmental Assessment/other reimbursement	<u>1,700.00</u>
Total:	\$ 181,909.63

Expense:

Account #51560 - Routine Real Estate Sale Expense	12199.43
Account #51560 - Acquisition – 6.71 acres for Recreational Trail	<u>39,680.10</u>
Total:	\$51,879.53

County Board Resolution No. 98-49 provides for a maximum beginning-of-the-year balance of \$200,000.00 in the Segregated Land Account. The Segregated Land Account was established for the purpose of acquisition of lands to “block in” or consolidate the County Forest ownership, thus avoiding access, harvesting, and other land management issues. County Board Resolution No. 2015-45 was adopted by the County Board on 28 July 2015, and provides that the expenditure of funds from the Segregated Land Account may now also be used for recreational facilities development on the Vilas County Forest. The FRL Committee within their approved budget must authorize such expenditures.

COUNTY FOREST WITHDRAWALS & ENTRIES

Early in 2015, a proposal came from the County Board that identified numerous parcels of County land (both CFL and non-CFL) for potential sale. The Forestry, Recreation, and Land Committees held a special meeting to examine each proposed parcel. Out of that meeting, nineteen (19) parcels, including a 40-acre parcel along the Deerskin River that was classified as Special Use CFL lands, were identified for sale. The withdrawal of the parcel from Deerskin 40 from the County Forest Law was approved by the DNR and the County will advertise it for sale in 2016. Three lots (39 acres total) off Deep Lake Road in the Town of Conover and a 28-acre parcel off High Point Road in the Town of Cloverland purchased in 2014 were entered in the County Forest Law as a requirement of the withdrawal application for the Deerskin 40.

COUNTY FOREST ROADS

County Forest Roads are the primary source of access to the Vilas County Forest for management and recreation activities. Due to their importance to the State’s economy for the movement of raw materials for the forest products industry & public recreation, qualifying County Forest Roads receive a maintenance distribution from the Department of Transportation. There are 48.43 miles of County Forest Roads in the Vilas County Forest. The maintenance distribution from the WDOT was \$15,200.95 in 2015, or \$313.87/mile. The 2015 Forestry Department Budget included \$12,400.00 for gravel crushing at the Claire Fire Lane gravel pit. In addition, the Highway Road and Bridge Fund included \$7,600.00 also for gravel crushing for a total road maintenance budget of \$35,200.95.

In May 2015, bids for crushing 3000 yards of gravel at the Claire Fire Lane gravel pit (for use on County Forest Roads) were solicited. Pitlik & Wick was awarded the bid for \$19,500.00 (\$6.50/yard), which is \$500 under the budget for this project. The gravel-crushing project was completed in July 2015.

2015 expenditures for County Forest Road maintenance totaled \$22,884.77. Through an agreement with the County Highway Department, the road system is graded in spring & fall. The cost of grading the 48.43 miles of County Forest Road system two times was \$15,752.97. In addition to grading, gravel is applied each year to portions of roads that do not hold up under use by the public and by trucks hauling wood products. In

October 2015, with the assistance of the Highway Department gravel was applied to Walt's Fire Lane and Decker Lake Fire Lane at a cost of \$7,131.80. A four-inch (4") gavel base, approximately 103.5 cubic yards, was spread compacted and graded on 675 feet of Walt's Fire Lane. This project completed the initial four inch (4") for the entire length of Walt's Fire Lane. Beginning at the intersection of Highway a four-inch (4") gavel base, approximately 483 cubic yards, was spread compacted and graded on 3,150 feet of Decker Lake Fire Lane. Gravel from Claire Fire Lane Pit was used for these projects.



Decker Lake Fire Lane gravel project

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Funding for game and non-game habitat improvement and access comes primarily from both the County Conservation budget and grant sources. The primary grant funding sources are the County Forest Wildlife Habitat Grant program which comes from the State Forestry Mill Tax; County Forests receive monies at the rate of 5 cents/acre for lands entered in the County Forest Law §28.11, Wis. Stats. and County Conservation Aid funding (50% cost share). Both, of which, are administered by the Wisconsin DNR. Additional funding sources come from the Ruffed Grouse Society and Turkey Stamp Funds. Vilas County received \$1,937.56 for the County Forest Wildlife Habitat Grant and \$4,500 for the County Conservation Aides Grant programs.

The Hunter/Hiking Trail System received mowing on 36.88 miles of the 104.4-mile system in 2015. The Units maintained were the Ski Hill Unit, Snipe Lake/Ewald Lake Unit, Mud Minnow Lake Unit, Langley Lake Ski Trail and the Disabled Hunter Access Area. Nineteen wildlife openings received maintenance in 2015. Eleven of these wildlife openings received herbicide treatment in the spring of 2015 to combat invasive

reed canary grass. The Vilas County Forestry, Recreation, & Land Department, renovated and prepared these 11 wildlife openings for replanting in June of 2015. the openings were prepared for planting by disking removing rocks, and sowing certified clover seed around the perimeter of each opening. The interior of the openings were then sowed with a variety of clovers and native wildflowers.



One of Eleven wildlife openings renovated in 2015.

The wildlife openings are used by a variety of wildlife, ranging from deer to turkeys to ruffed grouse to butterflies. Gated trails lead to the openings, so they are accessible to dispersed recreational opportunities such as hunting and hiking.

The Hunter/Hiking Trail System is on a 3 year maintenance cycle to more efficiently maintain its usefulness for access & wildlife. Over one hundred miles of hunter-hiking trails have been developed and closed to motor vehicle access for hunting, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and other dispersed non-motorized recreational activities. These roads were initially created as a result of logging roads built by private contractors harvesting timber on the County Forest, beginning in the early 1970's. Over the years these trails were widened and connected using monies from the County Fish and Game Aids, the Habitat Development Fund Grants and Pittman-Robertson Funds, along with County appropriations. Vilas County Forestry Department has been partnering with the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) on the development and maintenance of The Hunter/Hiking Trail System and wildlife openings since the mid 1980's. This walking system is gated at key access points to aid in its maintenance. Berms have been used at other points where access is not critical and to eliminate costs associated with gates & their maintenance. The mapping of the System is incorporated as a map layer in the Department's Geographic Information System (GIS). The trail systems are also posted with map boards at access points. Illegal ATV use necessitates

<u>State Forest Aid Fund - Expenditures (56102):</u>	
.131 Extra Help (Project Forester/Summer LTE)	\$ 286.52
.164 Allocated Wages (Grant applied to Administrator wages)	37,189.86
.310 WCFA Dues	<u>2,250.00</u>
<u>Total State Forest Aid Fund - Expenditures:</u>	\$ 39,726.38

<u>Other Forestry Expenditures:</u>	
Highway Road and Bridge Fund (County Forest Road Maintenance)	\$ 7,600.00
Severance Tax: Payments to Towns (10% of CFL Timber Sale Revenues)	<u>\$ 65,526.94</u>
Total:	<u>\$ 73,126.94</u>

GRAND TOTAL EXPENDITURES: \$370,632.18

The Townships containing County Forest Land benefit monetarily from scientific forest management. These Towns receive 10% of stumpage revenues from annual timber sales, a total of \$65,526.94 in 2015. These monies were disbursed in January 2016 per the percentage of the County Forest contained in the Town. Payments to Towns for 2015:

Conover - \$38,810.62	Cloverland – \$12,551.95
Land O'Lakes - \$3,488.00	Lincoln - \$1,513.67
Plum Lake - \$9,015.39	Washington - \$118.74
Phelps - \$28.57	

Townships also receive from the State of Wisconsin 30 cents/acre annually for lands entered into the County Forest Law that lie within the Township.

CONSERVATION & WILDLIFE PROGRAM REVENUES

<u>Conservation and Wildlife Funds – Revenues:</u>	
<u>State Grants & Cost Sharing:</u>	
County Conservation Aid (43584)	\$ 4,500.00
County Forest Roads - State Aid (43587- non-lapsing)	15,200.95
Wildlife Habitat Grant (5¢/Acre - 43583 - non-lapsing)	<u>1,937.56</u>
Grand Total Conservation & Wildlife Revenues:	\$ 21,638.51

CONSERVATION & WILDLIFE PROGRAM EXPENDITURES

<u>Conservation Fund – Expenditures:</u>	
Conservation Fund Annual Budget (56104):	\$ 91,139.90
.110 County Forest Administrator (25%)	13,821.87
.164 Allocated Wages (Administration Grant)	(8,782.00)
.112 Assistant Forest Administrator (4%)	1,756.22
.136 Forest Technician (40%)	18,032.25
.122 Administrative Secretary A (10%)	3,388.29

.750 WRS, FICA, INS, etc.	21,631.41
.137 Conservation Congress Annual Meeting	1,038.82
.247 Game Trail Maintenance	1,550.00
.302 Equipment & Vehicle Fuel	2,500.00
.310 Supplies	389.34
.312 Photocopier	50.00
.588 Beaver Control	190.00
.599 State Aid/Co. Forest Roads (56106)	<u>14,554.78</u>
Total Conservation Fund Expenditures:	\$ 70,120.98

Wildlife Fund - Expenditures:

State Grants & Cost Sharing:

Wildlife Habitat Grant (5¢/Acre – 56113)	<u>\$ 2,786.90</u>
Total Wildlife Fund Expenditures:	<u>\$ 2,786.90</u>

Grand Total:	\$ 72,907.88
Conservation & Wildlife Expenditures	

PARKS & RECREATION REVENUES

State Grants:

Snowmobile Trail Maintenance (43571)	\$362,400.00
Snowmobile Trail Development (43572)	43,928.81
<u>ATV Trail Maintenance (47273)</u>	<u>240.00</u>
Total:	\$406,568.81

PARKS & RECREATION EXPENDITURES

Parks Annual Budget (55200)

.110 Department Head Salary	\$29,647.00
.122 Administrative Secretary A (20%)	6,496.00
.135 Summer Parks Interns	31,295.41
.750 WRS, FICA, INS, etc.	25,700.00
.221 Telephone	969.63
.239 Refuse Removal	615.71
.242 Maintenance & Supplies	8,793.90
.243 Boat Landings	6,017.50
.248 Pan Fishing Piers	1,104.86
.302 Equipment & Vehicle Fuel	6,406.16
.311 Postage	152.86
.312 Xerox	60.00
.820 Parks Improvements	<u>48,967.98</u>

Total Parks:	166,227.01
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Snowmobile Program:

Snowmobile Program Budget (Maintenance & Development):	\$562,400.00
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Snowmobile Trail Maintenance (55441):

.110 Department Head Salary	\$19,765.00
.750 WRS, FICA, INS, etc.	11,777.00

.302 Equipment & Fuel	914.54
.310 Supplies	140.30
.311 Postage	23.33
.346 Snowmobile Safety Committee	1,990.00
.405 Trail Maintenance	120,800.00
.406 Supplemental Maintenance	241,600.00
Snowmobile Trail Development (55442):	<u>149,728.74</u>
Total Snowmobile Trail Program:	\$546,738.91

RECREATION

Routine maintenance was performed on the County's 15 picnic areas, 3 swimming beaches, 1 shooting range, 11 boat landings, 13 improved fishing sites, and 4 campgrounds. There are barrier-free pan fishing piers at Deep Lake, Cook's Lake, Dr. Oldfield Memorial Park (Wisconsin River), Upper Buckatabon Lake, and Muskellunge Lake. Major park facilities were cleaned twice each week, with lower use facilities cleaned once per week.

The continued maintenance of these facilities was made possible in 2015 by the Forestry, Recreation, & Land Committee's continued support for hiring a full time employee that works Parks & Recreation April through November and Highway Department December through March. Long-time summer worker Arthur Nass returned once again, and together they comprised the 2015 summer parks maintenance crew.

Combined with the self-pay station at Tamarack Springs Campground, the campsites generated \$880.00. Since the installation of a donation tube at the Shooting Range in 2000 with the explanation that donations would be earmarked for maintenance and improvements to the Range, donations through December 2015 totaled \$17,133.50. Donations in 2015 totaled \$1,320.18 for the year. The donation tubes placed at Eagle Lake, Muskellunge Lake, and Buckatabon Lake Boat Landings generated \$90.28, \$12.25 and \$90.55, respectively.

BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN TRAIL PROGRAM

The Department continues to work with surrounding communities to develop the County-owned abandoned railroad grade between the Towns of Conover and Phelps into a multi-use trail. The Town of Conover in cooperation with the Great Headwaters Trails and the County snowmobile program applied for and was awarded a transportation enhancement grant totaling \$819,830 in 2010. The project was completed in the fall of 2015. The trail surface was constructed with a local product called Trailbond® to reduce maintenance costs and wear from snowmobiles. The project included the construction and installation of two bridges and a culvert. The route of the new trail starts in the Conover Town Park and travels west to the Department of Transportation owned abandoned railroad corridor lying west of STH 45. It also utilizes the County owned railroad grade from Highway 45 traveling east to Muskrat Creek Road. The Department is currently working jointly with the Towns of Conover and Phelps, Great Headwaters Trails and the local snowmobile clubs to develop the 5.5-mile remaining balance of the County owned abandoned grade from Muskrat Creek Road east to Songhill Road.



SNOWMOBILE TRAIL PROGRAM

The fiscal year for the program was 1 July 2014 through 30 June 2015. Vilas County contracted the maintenance for 483.2 miles of State funded snowmobile trails, which provide north-south and east-west corridors connecting population centers and related services throughout the County. Funding for maintenance and development of trails is derived from snowmobile registration fees, motor fuel taxes, and non-resident trail use permits. The Department of Natural Resources administers the program statewide, and mandates that participating counties are responsible for the maintenance and safety of the state funded snowmobile trails within their respective counties. This is accomplished with annual contracts between Vilas County and the Department of Natural Resources. Vilas County subsequently contracts those miles with the eleven snowmobile clubs that are the framework of the Vilas County Snowmobile Alliance, which agree to maintain safe and usable trails. Vilas County inspects the State funded snowmobile trail system at least twice during the snowmobile season to verify contract compliance with grooming, signing, and reasonable attempts to ensure public safety.

The State snowmobile maintenance contract guarantees Vilas County up to \$250.00/mile for the maintenance associated with the State funded snowmobile trails. Club expenses beyond the \$250/mile and up to \$750/mile are eligible for reimbursement through the Supplemental Program which is derived from gas tax formulas and out-of-State trail passes. These costs are documented and sent to the DNR for audit.

Vilas County experienced a winter of plentiful snowfall from early December through March while most of the State lacked rideable snow. This generated heavy use on the Vilas County Snowmobile Trail system resulting in total snowmobile trail maintenance costs for the 11 snowmobile clubs in 2014-2015 reaching \$567,883.58, or \$1,175.26/mile. Due to the lack of significant snowfall throughout most of the State,

there were sufficient funds in the program available to reimburse Vilas County the full request for reimbursement of funds up to the maximum of \$750/mile. Vilas County received 100% of the maximum allowable supplemental reimbursement and a disbursement of funds paid to the 11 Vilas County snowmobile clubs was made as follows:

Club	Funded Miles	Costs Submitted	Cost Per Mile	Total Payments
Arbor Vitae	52.1	\$75,804.64	\$1,454.98	\$39,075.00
Boulder Junction	64.0	\$77,461.35	\$1,210.33	\$48,000.00
Conover	47.2	\$46,784.33	\$991.19	\$35,400.00
Eagle River	55.1	\$59,445.95	\$1,023.17	\$43,575.00
Lac du Flambeau	18.7	\$11,445.90	\$612.08	\$14,025.00
Land O'Lakes	36.1	\$46,254.20	\$1,281.28	\$27,075.00
Manitowish Waters	22.2	\$22,213.50	\$1,000.61	\$16,650.00
Phelps	39.4	\$31,720.79	\$871.45	\$27,300.00
Presque Isle-Winchester	42.4	\$47,059.50	\$1,109.89	\$31,800.00
Sayner	66.5	\$101,580.88	\$1,527.53	\$49,875.00
St. Germain	39.5	\$48,112.55	\$1,218.40	\$29,625.00
Totals	483.2	\$567,883.58		\$362,400.00

The balance of expenditures not reimbursed by the State come from donations from snowmobilers, area businesses and fund raising efforts by each club. Due to a continuing shortfall in revenues in the snowmobile program, the equipment rates paid to clubs for grooming falls short of actual costs to operate. Legislation was passed in 2014 to help address the financial shortfall. In the past, snowmobile registration was purchased biannually at a cost of \$30 for 2-years and non-residents were required to purchase a trail pass at \$35/year. Starting 1 July 2015, the resident registration is now \$30 for a three-year period. The non-resident trail pass was increased to \$50/year. Snowmobiles registered in Wisconsin are also required to purchase an annual trail pass for \$30/year or \$10/year if the owner belongs to a snowmobile club that is affiliated with the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs. The extra revenue that resident trail passes generates could enable the program to increase the equipment rates to reflect current equipment and fuel prices.

The Vilas County Snowmobile Trail Program remains an essential part of Vilas County's economy, and is vital to the winter recreation and tourism industry in this area. Concerns regarding the pending loss of land use agreements with private landowners continue to result in trail relocations. The Department is working with area clubs and state and federal government in an attempt to resolve these issues. When relocations become a necessity, the trend is to focus on public land use. This, combined with ever-growing demands for additional recreational trails within Vilas County, supports the importance of pursuing multi-use recreational trails in the future.

Vilas County currently has 36 recreational bridges on the State funded snowmobile trails. These bridges are paid for and maintained from snowmobile user fees. The bridges are owned, inspected, and insured by Vilas County.

EQUESTRIAN

There has been an increasing demand for horse trails over the past several years. Late fall of 2015 Department staff worked with the Recreational Trails Ad hoc Committee and local equestrian interests to designate over 11 miles of horse trails with a trailhead located approximately two miles south of Conover on River Road. The interest that these trails generated was greater than anticipated. Vilas County installed a well for potable water and graveled the entrance to this facility. With the support of the Vilas County Forestry, Recreation & Land Committee, and grant applications from the equestrian groups, the Department plans on placing toilet facilities at this location and augmenting the gravel placed this past year. Vilas County Forestry, Recreation & Land is working with Tourism and Publicity to promote this facility and increase our user base. A major equestrian event will be held in Vilas County in 2016.

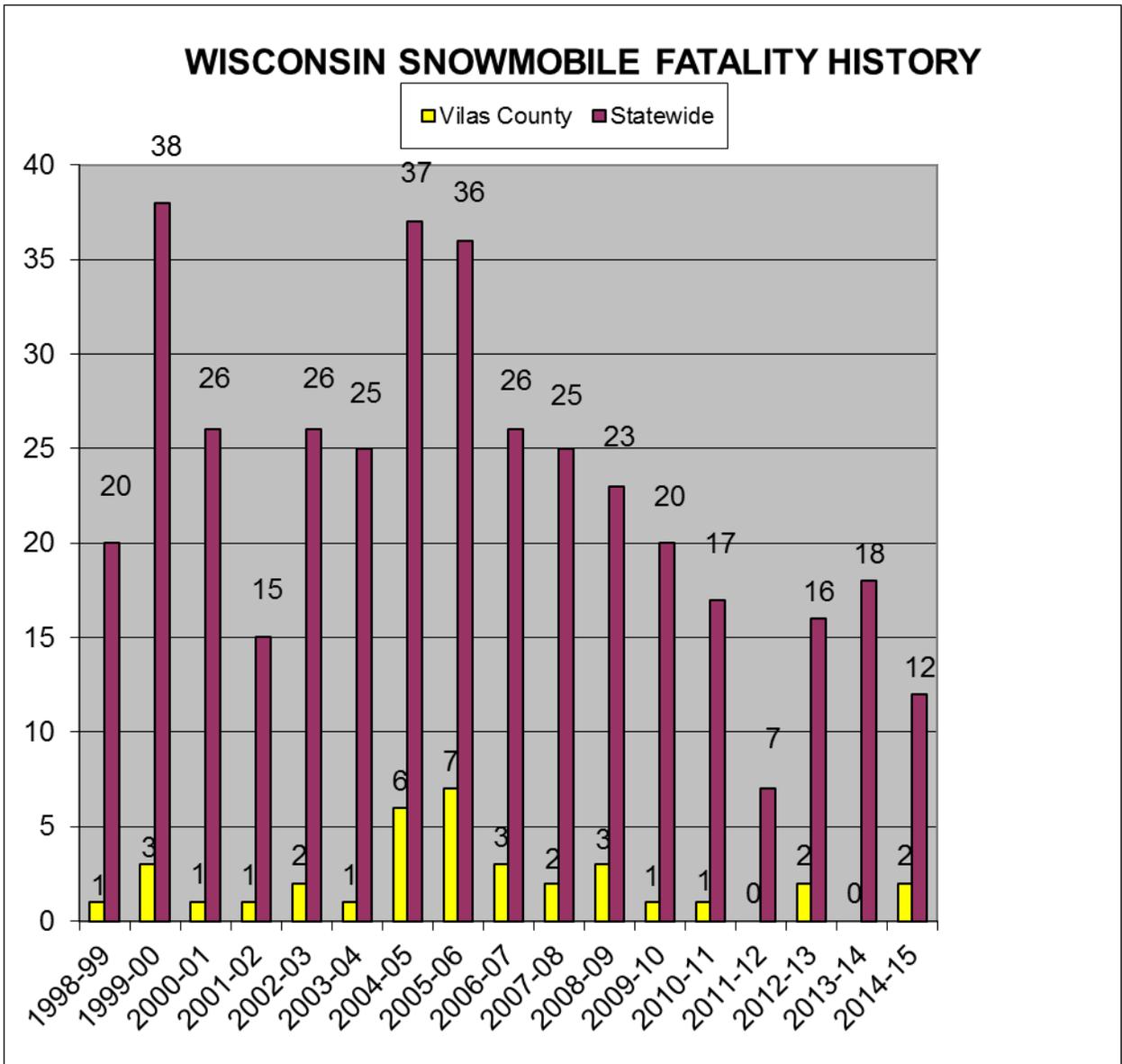


RECREATIONAL TRAILS SAFETY COMMITTEE

Historically in years of plentiful snowfall, snowmobile fatalities in Wisconsin were on the rise. After back-to-back years of record deaths in 2004-06, a 55 mph night-time speed limit for snowmobiles was enacted. During the 2007-08 season, Vilas County had two fatalities. One was a high profile accident resulting in the death of a television news anchor from the Chicago area. His unfortunate death generated negative publicity for Vilas County relative to drinking and snowmobiling. In 2008-09, Vilas County had one fatal accident involving two snowmobiles that resulted in the death of three people.

The Vilas County Snowmobile Trail Safety Committee was established in 2009 to assume proactive efforts regarding snowmobile accident reduction. Early indicators are encouraging, with Vilas County having no fatalities in two of the last four years. The

2014-15 snowmobile season had near record numbers of snowmobiles in the Vilas County area due to the lack of snow throughout the rest of the midwest. There were two recorded fatalities in Vilas County during the 2014-2015 snowmobiling season. Alcohol use was not found to be a contributing factor in either accident.



The Snowmobile Trail Safety committee, in cooperation with Vilas County Snowmobile Alliance (comprised of the 11 local snowmobile clubs) and Vilas County Public Health Department, printed and distributed “Zero Alcohol” posters and produced public service announcements on local radio and television stations as a proactive measure to educate the snowmobiling public. These groups also worked with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to purchase an 8’ by 16’ mobile billboard trailer at a cost of \$14,000. This trailer has been deployed around Vilas County to target

snowmobilers with positive feedback from communities. In the non-winter months, it displays banners for aquatic invasive species, forest fire prevention and hunting safety.

Vilas County continued its proactive recreational efforts in 2015 by hiring a Recreational officer. This position is a deputy within the Sheriff's Department and is devoted to recreational activities such as snowmobiling, ATV/UTVs, boating, etc. and provides a visible presence in the community and on the County forest. As a result of the positive efforts of the Vilas County Snowmobile Trail Safety Committee, this committee was expanded into the Recreational Trails Safety Committee to address other trail user safety concerns. This group is comprised of: Art Kunde, Chair, Kim Simac, Vice Chair, and Steve Doyen all of whom are County Board Supervisors, Dale Mayo, Parks and Recreation Administrator, and representatives from the Vilas County Sheriff's Department – Randy Schneider, Public Health Department – Gina Egan, Tourism and Publicity – Cindy Burzinski, a member of the DNR law enforcement- Tim Price, the President of the Vilas County Snowmobile Alliance – Dennis Horan, four additional representatives from local clubs representing the four quadrants of the County – Jen Beda, Holly Tomlanovich, Stan Guif and Leo Crawley, ATV Trail representative Roger Flaherty, and Bicycle Trail representative Jeff Currie.



The Trail Safety Committee, in cooperation with the Vilas County Snowmobile Alliance and Vilas County Mapping Department, developed and implemented a 3-digit emergency Trail Intersection Numbering System (TINS) on the snowmobile trail grid in the county. In the event of an emergency, this 3-digit number can be relayed to the 911 dispatcher. The emergency intersection numbers and snowmobile trails are incorporated into the computer software at the Sheriff's office. This information is brought up on screen instantly and reduces the response time for EMS personnel by determining the exact location of the emergency and the closest access by roads. This emergency intersection numbering system has proved to be invaluable on several occasions. Vilas County is unique in regards that most of the snowmobilers on our trail system are not from the area and often do not know their exact location in the event of an emergency. The neighboring counties of Iron and Oneida both adopted the same TINS. The

Recreational Trails Safety Committee is currently exploring the logistics of expanding the trail intersection numbering to other recreational trails within the county.

The Committee had a 2015 budget of \$4,000 and received donations from area snowmobile clubs of over \$1,000. These combined funds were utilized to develop Public Service Announcements (PSAs) in cooperation with WJFW Channel 12 in Rhinelander, PSAs on local radio stations, and safety posters to draw attention to the TINS and riding sober. The assistance received from Vilas County Advertising and Public Health continues to be invaluable in these efforts to promote safe riding. The Committee worked with the area hospitals and the Vilas County Sheriff's Department to collect data and work to further reduce snowmobile accidents and portray a family recreational destination. The Recreational Trail Safety Committee continues to support the Vilas County Snowmobile Alliance and other recreational trail groups in their efforts to promote safe and responsible recreation, safer trails and positive public relations in regard to all Vilas County recreational trails.

ALL TERRAIN VEHICLES (ATVs)

There continues to be growing interest and support for ATV/UTV routes and trails in Vilas County. Under the direction of the Forestry, Recreation, and Land Committee, the Department continues to work with local communities, the Highway Department and recreational trail groups to determine the feasibility of future ATV/UTV routes and trails in the County. In 2014 ATV/UTV routes were approved and opened from the Town of Phelps to the Forest County line on County Highway A. In 2015, the City of Eagle River, and the towns of Lincoln, Conover and Land O'Lakes have all approved and opened a combination of trails and routes to provide eastern Vilas County with a trail system. The Department will continue to work with those towns that request our assistance in providing ATV/UTV trails and routes.



The Department continues to administer the 0.4-mile spring, summer and fall ATV/UTV trail in the Town of Land O'Lakes, joining to the Michigan State Trail. The Landover ATV Club is contracted to supply the trail maintenance. Vilas County also applied for and received grants for an additional 8.7 miles of State funding. 7.5 miles from Eagle River to Conover and an additional 1.2 miles of spring/summer/fall/winter trail on the abandoned railroad corridor in Eagle River.

RECREATIONAL TRAILS AD HOC COMMITTEE

With the increasing demands for recreational trails including snowmobiling, ATV/UTV, equestrian and off-road bicycle and pedestrian trails, a Recreational Trails Ad Hoc Committee was formed by the County Board in September of 2014. This ad hoc group is made up of two county board supervisors, the Parks and Recreation Administrator, Forest Administrator, and one representative from each of the following groups; bike/pedestrian, ATV/UTV clubs, snowmobile clubs, equestrian groups and area businesses. The mission of this committee is to develop proactive solutions to route and trail planning and development to maximize recreation, transportation and economic benefits for the communities of Vilas County. This committee met for a period of one year and forwarded their recommendations to the Forestry, Recreation & Land Committee to be brought back to the full county board. The initial findings of this ad hoc committee emphasizes the need to have all the recreational groups work together with compromise and cooperation, focusing on multi-use trails that will accommodate more than one user group's interests. This committee brought the different user groups to the table for face-to-face discussions and has improved the dialogue and cooperation between them to enable future planning of recreational trails. There have been positive results that were directly related to communication between all the user groups and the necessity to be tolerant of other users' needs and desires. The Recreational Trails Ad hoc Committee was extended for another year.

TORCH LAKE CAMPGROUND

With the onset of recent recreational trail development in the Conover area, it became apparent that there was a need to develop a campground facility with direct access to the recreational trails. Department Staff worked with the Forestry, Recreation, & Land Committee to begin implementing the planning and engineering for the Torch Lake Campground. This included visits to surrounding county campground facilities and determining their success. These visits included the Veterans Memorial Park in Forest County, Jack Lake in Langlade County and Smith and Solberg Lakes in Price County. The County campground managers all echoed the same message. The occupancy of these county camping facilities was greatly increased with the introduction of shower accommodations on the premise.



The Torch Lake Campground project will likely be constructed in phases and has the full support of the Town of Conover Board of Supervisors. Letters were sent out to adjacent landowners of the intent to develop the campground. There was very little negative feedback on the project. Any objections were handled in a positive manner with neighboring landowners. The success of the campground is going to be dependent on the proposed recreational trails having access to the facility. The success of the recreational trails will also be directly dependent on the proposed campground.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

In January 2015, the Vilas County Sheriff's Department created a Recreation Deputy assignment within the Department. One full time Deputy was assigned to recreational safety enforcement and duties. The assignment includes, but is not limited to: snowmobile patrol, boat patrol, ATV/UTV patrol, National Forest Campground patrol, County Forest and parks patrol, Recreational Safety classes and other Deputy Sheriff duties.

From January through March 2015, 312.5 hours were worked in the area of snowmobile enforcement (patrol/accidents/complaints). 44 citations and 42 written warnings were issued through snowmobile law enforcement. The Recreation Deputy assisted in putting on two Snowmobile Safety classes in Vilas County.

In May of 2015, Vilas County expanded its ATV/UTV route/trail system to include the City of Eagle River and the Townships of Lincoln and Conover. 186.6 hours of patrol time were spent on town meetings, patrol activity, accidents, and enforcement of State and County laws with respect to ATV/UTV use. 17 citations and 26 written warnings were issued with respect to illegal ATV/UTV use in Vilas County. In the Months of May, June, and July, 29.75 hours were spent patrolling Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Campgrounds, including Anvil Lake, Kentuck Lake, Spectacle Lake, and Lac Vieux Desert Campgrounds. This is done in cooperation with a grant through the U.S. Forest Service.

In the summer months, 150 hours were worked in relation to boat patrol duties on the public waterways of Vilas County. 13 citations were issued for boating violations on Vilas County public waterways. Throughout the summer months, a considerable amount of time was spent patrolling on the Vilas County Forest, including the County-owned parks & other recreation sites on the Vilas County Forest. There were numerous instances of illegal dumping on the County Forest. Early in the spring, vandalism by motor vehicles was occurring on several of the gravel roads which lead into Vilas County recreation areas. Contacts were subsequently made, and that illegal activity ceased.

In the fall of 2015, patrol activity was conducted in and around County timber harvesting operations. Contacts were made with forest products haulers to ensure that they were utilizing the haul tickets system property, and surveillance cameras were used on several sites to monitor compliance. Also in the fall, the Recreation Deputy worked with the County and State foresters to identify illegal tree stands located on County property. One individual who was identified was subsequently cited for placing an illegal tree stand on Vilas County property. Four illegal tree stands on County property were seized by the Sheriff's Department. Multiple illegal baiting violations were also discovered on the Vilas County Forest which were referred to the State DNR.

SUPPLEMENTAL

The Department staff, under the direction of the Committee, continued Vilas County's involvement with the Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA), Society of American Foresters (SAF), Trees for Tomorrow, Wisconsin DNR, Wisconsin Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP), and other County Departments to support sustainable forest management and the wise use of our natural resources.

The Committee introduced 15 resolutions to the County Board, which were subsequently passed. Notable subjects were: Amending Foreclosure of Tax Delinquent Properties Policy; Restoring Funding for County Forest Administration Grant; Increasing PILT for County Forest Lands; Entry & Withdrawal of CFL Lands; Authorize 2015 Real Estate Sales; Amending County Outdoor Recreation Plan; Raising Cap on Segregated Land Account; Conover Recreational Trail Land Acquisition; Support Moving DNR Division of Forestry to NHAL within Vilas County; Torch Lake Campground Project; Annual Forest Administration Grant & Work Plan.

Vilas County received a total of \$4,500.00 through the DNR's County Conservation Aids which is \$1,950.00 more than the normal grant of \$2,550.00. The cost share grant is applied to the maintenance of Wildlife Openings and the Hunter/Hiking Trail System. County Forests are able to obtain from WDNR equipment time at the rate of @28.00/hr. In 2015, the dozer from the Eagle River Ranger Station prepared 45-acres for natural regeneration of Northern Hardwoods. Sincere appreciation goes to the staff of the Eagle River Ranger Station, Vilas County Liaison Forester Jill Nemec, Ranger Jamie Remme, and Forestry Technician Ryan Brown.

SUPPLEMENTAL

Assistance is given to other County Departments throughout the year. The Department Foresters remain involved with the Land and Water Conservation Department in working on the problem of invasive plants. With Justin Meier as acting Chair, the Foresters continued participation on the Steering Committee of the Wisconsin Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP). WHIP continues its relationship with Lumberjack Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc., receiving continued sponsorship and financial assistance. In 2013, Summer Forestry Intern, Andrew Kerecman completed an intern project in cooperation with UW-Stevens Point surveying garlic mustard on private land threatening the county forest in the Town of Land O'Lakes. WHIP successfully applied and received a grant for \$8,800.00 on behalf of the landowners through the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP). In 2015, WHIP coordinated the control of garlic mustard with the private landowners on their properties in the Indian Lake area. By controlling garlic mustard on these private lands and not allowing it to continue spreading unchecked benefits the county forest substantially because the county forest would then incur these types of costs in the future. County Forest Lands are immediately adjacent to the private lands and are currently threatened by garlic mustard. Another herbicide application may occur in 2016 to continue control efforts.



The Forestry Department held a fall field day for a group of international students associated with Northland Adventure Quest. The students learned how to prune the branches of red pine in a plantation and how this practice serves to improve the value of the timber product. The students also estimated the survival success of a recently planted Jack Pine plantation and helped Justin determine the age of a red pine stand to be 107 years (pictured above).

The Sky Barons Radio-Controlled Aircraft Flying Club continues to maintain for the public the flying field and shelter in Conover.

A special access permit was again granted to the Three Bears Dog Sled Race Committee for the use of County Land in the Town of Land O' Lakes. The Race is an annual event drawing many mushers and spectators to the town each winter.

**ANNUAL TIMBER SALE REVENUES OF CO. FOREST LANDS & RESERVE
LANDS**

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TIMBER SALE REV.</u>
1996	\$229,920.53
1997	\$1,407,489.48
1998	\$209,112.18
1999	\$559,532.13
2000	\$553,332.26
2001	\$304,513.71
2002	\$368,664.02
2003	\$255,685.30
2004	\$319,720.84
2005	\$380,035.30
2006	\$605,860.44
2007	\$463,092.90
2008	\$602,801.58
2009	\$297,910.49
2010	\$315,763.15
2011	\$346,309.39
2012	\$396,915.35
2013	\$543,285.43
2014	\$336,690.33
2015	\$655,269.47

Presented to the Vilas County Board of Supervisors by:
VILAS COUNTY FORESTRY, RECREATION, & LAND COMMITTEE
Steve Doyen, Chair
Art Kunde, Vice Chair
Ken Anderson
Willy Otterpohl
Jay Verhulst