

NEWS RELEASE: "Forestry Articles"

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The attached article (*Family Forest Succession*.) addresses two upcoming MSU Extension programs designed to help families maintain their family forest legacy, through communication and selecting the appropriate legal vehicles. The article has about 400 words.

This is the 157th article in a series of monthly articles since May, 1997. Feel free to contact me if you have questions about this article or natural resources and natural resource management in general. I'm also open to suggestions for additional articles, if you have identified a particular need. The entire collection can be viewed on the Michigan Society of American Foresters website [<http://michigansaf.org/ForestInfo/Newspaper/0000-Directory.htm>].

Family Forest Succession

Over the next five years, about ten million acres of family forest land in the United States is expected to change ownership. That's roughly half the size of Michigan's total forest acreage. Or, that's more forest than grows in each of 17 states.

What might this mean for current owners? The forest resource? Society?

If current trends rule the day, then most of that ten million acres will be sold off, probably parcelized, and the proceeds distributed among heirs. Those ten million acres will provide diminished wildlife habitat and fewer ecological services. The multi-billion dollar forest industry will have to work harder to find wood supply and wood product prices may increase. The forest value as a carbon sink will drop. The nation will become less 'wild' by ten million acres.

As a current forest owner, if this scenario doesn't sit right, there are steps that can be taken to increase the odds of keeping the family forest intact for future generations. Rarely does this happen naturally. Effort and planning will be required.

Michigan State University Extension has developed a Family Forest Succession program for current owners and heirs designed continue their family forest legacy, in cooperation with the Michigan DNRE, the USDA Forest Service, and the highly successful national Ties to the Land program. A pair of these of these programs will be offered beginning on 13 May in Cadillac and 1 July in Escanaba.

The program delivery comes in two parts. The first session focuses on family communication and goal setting. This is often the hardest part of the process. Identifying the range of values can be both emotional and surprising. Typically, everybody involved is on a different page, even between spouses.

The second session, held a few weeks later after some homework, reviews the various legal tools available to implement the family wishes. Selecting the appropriate tools, based on family discussions, will be important.

The Family Forest Succession program provides instruction and a workbook with a CD of resource materials. Between the two sessions, participants are asked to have family discussions about the future of the family forest. After defining a vision, various estate planning mechanisms will be presented, each with a set of pros and cons.

More information about these two programs can be found on the calendars for the Michigan Society of American Foresters [<http://michigansaf.org>] or Michigan Forest Pathways [<http://Miforestpathways.net>]. Additionally, some of the MSU Extension and Conservation District offices have flyers, or can obtain them.

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*As an MSU Extension forester, I provide educational programming for the entire Upper Peninsula. My office is located at the MSU Upper Peninsula Tree Improvement Center near Escanaba. The Center is the headquarters for three MSU Forestry properties in the U.P., with a combined area of about 8,000 acres. A collection of these newspaper articles, back to July 1997, can be viewed on the following website: <http://michigansaf.org/ForestInfo/Newspaper/0000-Directory.htm> or under the "Forest Info" button of <http://michigansaf.org>.*

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