2016 Annual Report
WYFP Partners

U.S. Forest Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society

American Bird Conservancy

Pheasants Forever

National Wild Turkey Federation

Wisconsin County Forests Association

The Forestland Group, LLC

Louisiana-Pacific Corporation

Wildlife Management Institute

Wisconsin Society of American Foresters

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
Dear Young Forest Advocate:

It has been truly inspiring to witness the growth of the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership over the past 6 years. From initial discussions among a few individuals interested in improving forest wildlife habitat, the WYFP has grown to include 14 member organizations, touched the lives of hundreds of landowners, and enhanced many thousands of acres of forestland. We move forward toward our common goals only through the knowledge, passion, and commitment of our members. Through our collective efforts, we are having a meaningful and positive impact on golden-winged warblers, American woodcock, and the myriad other wildlife species dependent upon diverse forest communities. The WYFP has grown into a conservation program of which we can all be proud.

The WYFP remains committed to sharing information about the critical role of disturbance in healthy forest communities, and providing interested landowners access to the technical and financial assistance they need to achieve their forest management goals. As ever, outreach remains central to our efforts. Since 2012, we have sent mailings to over 7,000 individual landowners, and this outreach has generated a large pool of interested landowners that fuels our daily conservation planning and implementation efforts.

The importance of young forests, and the interest landowners have in enhancing their wooded acres, allowed the WYFP many new opportunities for growth in 2016. With significant financial support from 5 fellow WYFP members, the American Bird Conservancy received federal funding for the “Improving Forest Health for Wildlife Resources” project, which will bring $5.5 million to enhance young forest habitat across Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. Over 1,800 acres are expected to be enhanced over the next 4 years in Wisconsin alone. Similarly, a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is helping expand outreach efforts and supporting important monitoring of golden-winged warbler and American woodcock response to young forest habitat work. WYFP partners also collaborated on the production of “From Seeds to Sky,” a unique video with which we can effectively promote our healthy forest message. These are great examples of the value of our partnership—by pooling resources, we can do much more than if acting alone.

This report summarizes some of the great WYFP accomplishments in 2016. Enjoy, and please contact our staff if we may provide more information. Thank you for your interest in the health of Wisconsin’s forest communities.

Jeremy Holtz, WDNR
Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership Facilitator
What We Do..... 2016 Accomplishments

Recognizing the importance of engaging landowners who may have little familiarity with forest ecology or the benefits of active forest management, WYFP members pool “time, talent, and treasure” to provide a broad spectrum of services to enhance young forest habitat. Various outreach activities such as presentations and media releases to the general public, training workshops for practicing foresters, biologists, and contractors, and direct mailings to landowners, are an important part of connecting with landowners and generating enthusiasm for sound forest stewardship. Once these relationships develop, our partners also work to provide the financial and technical assistance necessary to help landowners achieve a healthy and more diverse forest community. The figure below suggests the direct impact of WYFP member programs in 2016.
WYFP Partner The American Bird Conservancy Recipient of $5.5 Million RCPP Grant

Successful forest conservation on private lands presents many challenges, including providing landowners with the financial assistance they may need to implement appropriate forest management practices. In 2015, WYFP partner the American Bird Conservancy was awarded a federal grant through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program that will support young forest habitat enhancements through 2018. This exciting project, Improving Forest Health For Wildlife Resources, makes $5.5 million available for forest landowners in northern Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota to enhance habitat for golden-winged warblers, American woodcock, ruffed grouse, and other young forest-adapted wildlife. Collaborators on the grant, which includes WYFP partners USDA-NRCS, Wisconsin DNR, US Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society, Wisconsin County Forest Association, Wildlife Management Institute, and Louisiana-Pacific Corp. provided an additional $6.2 million in support.

“This is exactly the type of meaningful conservation action that’s possible when partners work together to identify issues, and pool resources to address them,” stated WYFP Facilitator Jeremy Holtz. “We greatly appreciate the efforts of ABC staff in coordinating this large effort, and all of the partners who made it possible. These funds will not only support broad-scale forest enhancement across the upper Midwest, but will ensure that active forest management remains a conservation priority for years to come.”

In 2015, ABC field staff provided technical assistance to 72 individual landowners, resulting in 28 NRCS contracts and several referrals to the FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife
Program. In total, 407.4 acres of habitat was enhanced in 2015 as a direct result of RCPP grant implementation. ABC staff were also actively involved in outreach to promote WYFP goals and strategies, providing presentations at nine conferences (attended by a total of 331 individuals) and hosting three separate training sessions for forest plan writers, foresters, and wildlife biologists.

New Video Showcases Importance of Young Forests

WYFP partners The Ruffed Grouse Society and Wisconsin DNR provided support for the production of From Seeds To Sky, a 15-minute film documenting the importance of active forest management to healthy forest communities. The video serves as an effective outreach tool for WYFP staff, and can be viewed online on YouTube or via the Ruffed Grouse Society or WYFP websites. To date, the video has over 1,900 hits on the YouTube channel alone. RGS also provided funding to produce 500 DVDs, which can be distributed directly to interested WYFP landowners to allow them a visually-appealing introduction to forest management. Via creative outreach and educational tools such as this, WYFP continues to break down barriers to landowner engagement in proactive forest management. The video can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmRRalN1GSA.
Adding Capacity: New Staff Join the WYFP Team

The 15 members of the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership constantly seek new means of increasing our collective ability to engage private landowners. Two recent staff positions will greatly enhance our capacity to provide outreach, technical expertise, and financial assistance to landowners seeking to enhance forest diversity on their property. The ability to secure these positions reflects both recognition that private lands forestry is central to achieving mutual forest management goals and the dedication and energy of our partners.

Randee Wlodek, WYFP Coordinator

Randee Wlodek has been hired as the new WYFP Coordinator, working out of the Wisconsin DNR Rhinelander Service Center. Wlodek has a B.S. degree in Biological Science from Michigan Technological University, and has previously worked on numerous conservation and research projects, Randee will help lead our WYFP team and ensure that northern Wisconsin landowners receive outstanding service as they engage in management of their forested acres. The position is being supported by a partnership between the Ruffed Grouse Society, Wildlife Management Institute, and Wisconsin DNR.
Valerie Johnson, Forest Wildlife Specialist

Valerie Johnson has accepted the first RGS/AWS forest wildlife specialist position and will be stationed in the Spooner, Wisconsin USDA Service Center. Johnson will work with forest landowners to identify and implement sound forest management practices on their lands, emphasizing those that enhance or expand the young forest habitat base. From initial consultation to practice implementation, she will be able to provide landowners all the technical assistance needed to achieve their forest wildlife habitat objectives and will provide financial assistance via the application of Federal Farm Bill conservation dollars. Valerie’s position is being supported through an agreement between the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service, Wisconsin DNR, and the Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society.

Proven Success: A Landowner Perspective on the WYFP
Condensed from the Fall 2015 Issue of Ruffed Grouse Society magazine

By Todd & Veronica Berg, Minocqua, WI

Valentine’s Day in 2008 was a watershed moment. My wife Veronica, a muse and intrepid bird hunting companion, and I pulled the trigger and purchased a parcel of land plumb in the middle of northern Wisconsin grouse country. Our modest goals at the time included some bird hunting with our flat-coated retriever and some opportunities to harvest a deer or two along
the way. Little did we know what the land, and some great people with their own vision and initiative, ultimately had in store for us.

The purchase of the land subsequently led to the purchase of another adjoining parcel a few years later. Before we knew it, we were into full-fledged habitat management. Working through a managed forest law plan with our county forester opened our eyes to several possibilities for additional habitat improvements that would benefit many species of wildlife. Today, we continue to work on an assortment of those improvements. During the summer of 2014, we received a letter from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). An informative cover letter on official stationary with signatures and state logos detailed a new and exciting program.

The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership is an effort to improve habitat conditions for the American woodcock, golden-winged warbler, and numerous other species of birds and mammals like ruffed grouse and snowshoe hare. After a few calls to Wisconsin DNR biologists, an NRCS representative, and our county forester, we felt the program had great merit and that portions of our property were well suited for young forest habitat work. We signed an application, hosted a site survey, and met with NRCS representatives like Bob Plawski in Medford, Wisconsin, and Jeremy Holtz, the regional biologist with the Wisconsin DNR in Rhinelander. Impressed with the dedication, passion, and skills of these conservation professionals, we waited and hoped. Soon
after, we received great news – our parcel had been accepted into the new program, and habitat work was going to happen!

In mid-December 2014, we contacted yet another wonderful man associated with the Wisconsin Young Forest Project. Gary Zimmer is with the Ruffed Grouse Society (since retired) and also a Wisconsin Natural Resources Board member. The NRCS had provided Gary’s contact information and, suspecting he was a kindred spirit, we called him first. Gary had a wealth of information, and through him we were introduced to a gentleman named Mike Riggle. Mike’s a semi-retired veterinarian with an easy smile, a big heart, a penchant for heavy equipment, and a love of the land. A bird hunter, self-made arborist, and conservation-minded guy who “just wanted to give something back,” Mike showed up before Christmas with a big Terex skid steer and a mulching attachment the size of a Zamboni. The machine is owned by RGS, and Mike provides his time, skill, and effort to do the actual work. Having walked the site previously with us, Mike went to work with the big mulching machine. During two outings totaling about 12 hours, Mike created the beginning of a 5-acre young forest right before our eyes, with contoured edges along a river bank, big trees left for cover, irregular borders, and wide openings in the forest canopy overhead. We marveled at the immediate difference. An area that had been a tangled mess of older growth alder and spindly aspen was open to the general wildlife public! Light penetrated much of this area for the first time in over a decade. In fact, we witnessed signs of deer, grouse, rabbit, and fox tracks in the new cut within 48 hours of its completion, and even got to see a fisher along the
edge of the river on one of the days we worked alongside Mike – a first glimpse for us in the wild! We’re told by Gary Zimmer of RGS that the woodcock will use it right away this coming spring. We’ll hear them sounding their peent calls in the warm April nights, and we can’t wait to watch and listen. We’ve cut 5 acres so far and are hoping to add another 7 to 9 acres this winter, pending NRCS funding. We own 200 acres altogether, and it’s possible that 30 of that could be managed for young forest over the next three to five years.

The warblers, hares, foxes, fisher, grouse, deer, turkeys and others will benefit greatly. In three to four years, woodcock will nest and live in the regrowing young forest; this will help the local population and just maybe do a little bit toward reversing the species’ long-term population decline.

We encourage each and every landowner to investigate the potential for your own involvement in this very fulfilling program. We heartily urge you to do so; you’ll be helping the birds and animals and we downright guarantee that you’ll feel better about yourself and your own sporting heritage.
Looking Ahead to 2017: Increasing our Impact

WYFP and partner staff are already moving forward to accomplish 2017 goals. Field staff continue to perform site visits and provide technical and financial assistance to landowners engaged through previous outreach efforts. New outreach efforts will inform over 1,400 landowners across 8 northern Wisconsin counties of the values of active forest management. These contacts will continue to expand our WYFP family, and broaden our impact on Wisconsin’s forests.

For more information, please contact:

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