DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Sustainable Timber Harvest Analysis

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the DNR's decision on the sustainable harvest level?

The DNR will set a goal to offer 870,000 cords per year over the next 10 years. In addition, the DNR will begin an initiative to accelerate the harvest of ash and tamarack in advance of emerald ash borer and eastern larch beetle. This initiative has the potential to result in up to an additional 30,000 cords offered per year over the next 5 years.

Why did the DNR do this analysis now?

In November of 2016, Governor Dayton directed DNR to conduct a new sustainable timber harvest analysis and determine whether harvesting 1 million cords of timber annually off of state lands is sustainable. Forest industry is important and the Governor wanted to make sure that resources are available to support this vital economy in our state.

DNR had an annual target of 800,000 cords of timber each year for the past 15 years. The 800,000 annual offer target was derived from periodic internally prepared harvest analyses, the most recent being prepared nearly 10-years ago. Forests are dynamic and ever-changing, and thus forest management needs to be periodically reviewed.

How was the analysis completed?

The sustainable timber harvest level was based on a multi-faceted approach over 16 months that carefully weighed input from many sources. The DNR formed a project team that included individuals from the Divisions of Forestry, Ecological & Water Resources, and Fish and Wildlife that guided project work. The third-party analysis was done by Mason, Bruce & Girard (MB&G), an established professional forestry firm based in Portland, OR. They understand the economic, environmental, and social goals that DNR strives to meet on DNR-managed forest lands. They have many years of experience in forest resource management and planning, modeling, and sustainable harvest analysis. MB&G has conducted this kind of analysis for multiple federal, state, and private forest landowners in many parts of the country.

A 14-member stakeholder advisory group representing a broad range of interests including forest industry, environmental/conservation groups, academia, and federal and county land managers provided input to help guide the analysis. Public comments on the analysis were received from over 140 people. DNR assessed market trends and economic factors affecting the sale of individual tree species.

The MB&G analysis is different from the DNR sustainable timber harvest level. The MB&G analysis provides a strategic look at the tradeoffs between important forest resource values at various levels of timber harvest.

How is sustainability defined?

State statute directs DNR to "pursue the sustainable management, use, and protection of the state's forest resources to achieve the state's economic, environmental, and social goals" (MN Statutes Chapter 89A and Sections 89.001 and 89.002). Sustainable is defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Additionally, forest resources are defined as "those natural assets of forest lands, including timber and other forest crops; biological diversity; recreation; fish and wildlife habitat; wilderness; rare and distinctive flora and fauna; air; water; soil; and educational, esthetic, and historic values ".

The stakeholder advisory group worked to clarify its understanding of sustainability and included these values in its definition: timber productivity, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, water quality, forest health, and economics. Put simply, sustainable forest management seeks to balance complex, interrelated goals, including commercial harvest, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and clean water, today in a way that doesn't limit future generations' ability to do the same.

Will this change how I experience state forests?

On a landscape basis, most people will not notice the small increase in harvest level spread across the state. The new level represents a nine percent increase compared to our previous offered target and a four percent increase in offered volume compared to our last five year average. Timber will still be harvested throughout the state. No one area of the state will see a significant increase or decrease in harvesting on DNR-managed forest lands.

Which model scenario did the DNR select?

The MB&G analysis is different from the actual DNR sustainable timber harvest level. The MB&G analysis modeled a range of scenarios as a way to demonstrate the tradeoffs between important forest resource values at various levels of timber harvest. DNR did not select one model scenario. Rather, we used several scenarios to determine the harvest level along with stakeholder input, public comments, environmental considerations, economic impacts and discussions with the Office of School Trust.

The MB&G report identifies that DNR must assess and consider operational realities and commercial viability in order to determine the sustainable harvest timber levels. DNR considered multiple forest values, recent and projected harvest levels, market trends, as well as short and long-term implications of harvest to determine the sustainable harvest level.

How was the condition of forests on other ownerships considered in DNR's decision?

Data was not available to do harvest modeling across all forest landowners, but DNR had forest conditions on other ownerships in mind for the harvest level decision. FIA data and statewide forest harvest trends show Minnesota's forests continue to grow older, but that varies significantly across the state.

DNR is obligated to manage state lands for all forest values, and therefore older forests will be maintained for all forest types under the selected harvest level. The sustainable timber harvest level reflects a commitment to maintaining a diverse forest age class structure, including older forest on DNR-managed forest lands.

Does this affect third party certification?

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification will be maintained on DNR administered forests. Forest certification requires that we identify a sustainable harvest level, but does not dictate what that should be. Today, DNR is the largest single FSC-certified land manager in the U.S and remains committed to forest certification.

How was management of School Trust Lands considered in the analysis and decision?

School trust lands were assigned economic based model assumptions and silviculture treatments in the analysis. Less restrictive model runs display the biological potential of forests on school trust lands. Other scenarios did not exclude trust lands from participating in more restrictive model runs.

The sustainable harvest decision assumes trust lands on both forestry and wildlife administration will be managed based on economic criteria to meet DNR's responsibility to secure long-term revenue while considering sound natural resource conservation. We anticipate School Trust lands will see an equal increase of harvest as DNR general forestry lands.

How was climate change addressed?

Climate change was considered in the MB&G analysis and DNR decision process. To incorporate climate change, the MB&G analysis changed forest cover type over time. Trees predicted to be "climate change winners" were increased over the long term. DNR manages for diverse forest conditions to support a forest more resilient to climate change impacts. This will continue to be stressed during SFRMP planning as we implement the new sustainable timber harvest level.

Warmer winters may impact when and how harvesting is done in the future, as most harvesting occur during frozen conditions when there is less impact to soils and plants. A shortened winter season is currently being dealt with through operational adjustments, like using different logging equipment or logging companies working additional crews during frozen conditions. Seasonal climate considerations were deemed out of scope for the MB&G analysis, but DNR will continue to monitor and adjust practices.

DNR recognizes that changes to stand exam lists may be necessary to address future conditions from large-scale tamarack and ash mortality, natural disturbance events, and increased wildfires.

What does the new sustainable timber harvest level mean for old growth?

The harvest level decision will have no effect on DNR's network of designated old growth. Additionally, this decision has no effect on Scientific and Natural Areas, State Parks, and other areas not open to timber harvest by statute or policy.

There are 5 million acres of DNR-managed forest lands. About 2.75 million of these acres are actually available to be managed through timber harvest. Most are within state forests and wildlife management areas, and about ½ are comprised of School Trust lands. The new sustainable harvest level will result in about another 3,500 -5,000 acres harvested each year (about 1/10th of 1 percent of DNR's 5 million acres of forest land).

How did the analysis and DNR decision consider the future DNR decision on the designation of Lowland Conifer Old Growth?

This analysis did not model or predict any amounts of lowland conifer old growth (LCOG). The analysis did examine the relative availability of acres ready for harvest and displayed a window of time to operate while the DNR considers LCOG designation. The harvest range for lowland conifer forest types provides the flexibility for DNR to complete its LCOG designation process by the end of 2018. Depending on the level of LCOG designation, harvest levels may be affected after the next 10 years.

What assumption is included about harvest levels on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)?

The 870,000 harvest level provides the flexibility to manage WMAs different from Forestry administered and School Trust forest lands. This could mean longer rotations or thinning intervals and different stand management prescriptions on some forest types. Trust lands within WMAs did not receive management assumptions to reduce harvest levels.

Will there be adequate older forest, especially older aspen, in the next 10 years?

Most forest cover types show adequate older forest on DNR lands in the next 10 years. Previous to 2017, there was an abundance of older-aged aspen on DNR forest lands. DNR has worked to adjust the amount and age of aspen on the landscape by thoughtful harvesting. As a result, we now have a more balanced distribution of aspen age-classes.

Harvest into the future cannot be sustained at the levels of recent years, when we were attempting to reduce our excess inventory. Over the next 10 years, DNR will gradually reduce the amount of aspen offered for sale by 10 percent in order to minimize the impact to forest industry while providing flexibility to maintain a limited amount of older-aged aspen forest on DNR lands to support environmental and habitat considerations. The 10 year transition period will allow other landowners with significant aspen resources to put more of their wood on the market and will also provide mill owners with an opportunity to adjust their species mix. Longer term, all of the model scenarios indicated that aspen harvest from state lands will likely continue to decline after the initial 10 year period. There is abundant mature aspen available on private and federal lands, according to Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data from the U.S. Forest Service.

Why is the DNR targeting additional volume from ash and tamarack?

DNR recognizes a short-term opportunity to accelerate harvesting ash and tamarack, followed by reforesting to other tree species, in advance of the spread of the deadly emerald ash borer and eastern larch beetle. Eastern larch beetle is estimated to have already killed almost half of the state's tamarack and emerald ash borer is expected to kill all ash trees in its path. This initiative will help industry in the short term by making use of a

resource that would otherwise be lost and give DNR the best chance to make sure the land stays productive in the long-term through thoughtful reforestation work.

How will DNR help ash and tamarack forests remain forested?

The DNR will rely on field managers to make sound management decisions to properly manage these sites. Effective reforestation methods will need to be considered as part of the planning and implementation for the ash and tamarack initiative in order to reduce risk of invasive species establishment (like reed canary grass) and help ensure a healthy, diverse forest ecosystem in the long-term. Doing this work as part of a management initiative will help focus resources to attain success.