



FAW Staff Survey: Forest Habitat Management on FAW Administered Lands

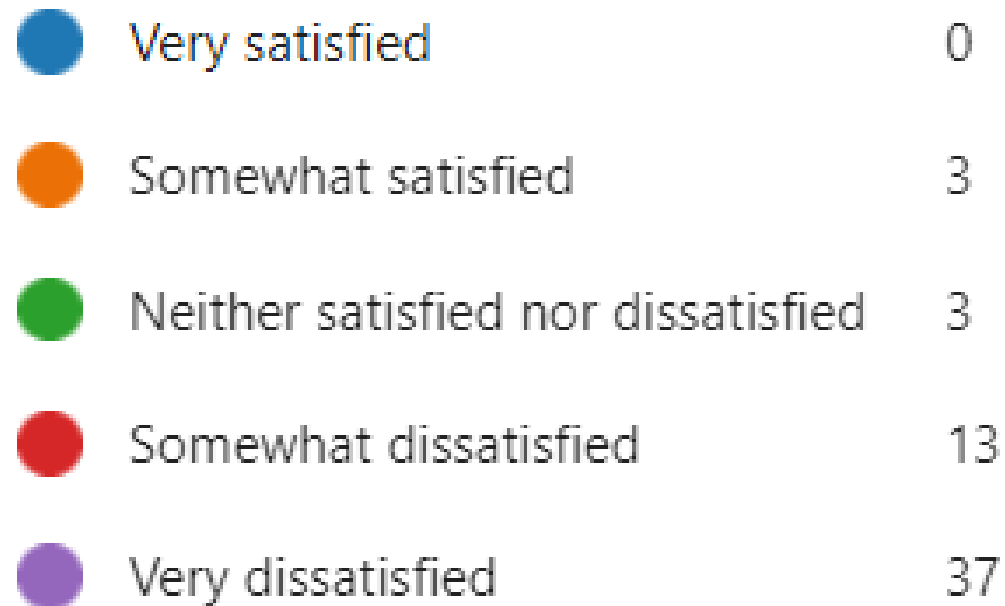
Forest Forum | September 8, 2023 | Brainerd

The survey

As of Sept. 7th, 56 people completed the survey with these questions:

1. How can the department and division better support our managers in utilizing timber harvest for wildlife values?
2. What clarifications do staff need regarding timber sale processes on WMAs?
3. What conflicts concerning timber harvest for wildlife values have you directly dealt with?
4. How have the conflicts concerning timber harvest on WMAs impacted you, your work relationships, and staff morale?
5. What questions do you have about forest management?
6. How satisfied are you with the DNR's handling of forest habitat management on FAW administered lands?

How satisfied are you with the DNR's handling of forest habitat management on FAW administered lands?



How have the conflicts concerning timber harvest on WMAs impacted you, your work relationships, and staff morale?

(50 people answered question)

Themes	Mentions
Lowers staff morale (9 “extreme”)	51
Strains relationships to division of forestry staff	22
Strains relationships to leadership	20
Strains relationships to the public	7
Strains relationships to the resource	5
Fine/good relationships with foresters	11

Now is the time for YOUR words....

Lowens staff morale

“Absolutely. Wildlife staff have been **marginalized and not empowered** to advocate for the benefit of a diverse wildlife and habitat system. We are told to find the harvest needed to support cord targets. We have been described as **uncooperative** when we are simply identifying concerns/habitat needs that are inconsistent with STHI based on our professional expertise. **We feel punished** for our professional perspective, rather than engaged to find solutions. We are given directives rather than opportunities to provide our perspective or discuss our experiences with STHI.”

Extreme experiences

“Extremely stressful to the point of seeking medical help for stress management, panic attacks.”

“The conflict has negatively impacted my mental health. I have a personal history/experience with emotional abuse, and emotionally manipulative leadership tactics are triggering.”

“...it’s been demoralizing to hear our leadership tell us we just don't get it....”

“...take frustration home from the office, defeated and on the verge of just giving up...”

Strains relationships to FOR

“It has caused contention between wildlife and forestry staff. Forestry staff have felt pressured to then in turn pressure wildlife staff to harvest or find replacement acres. We should not be pinned against each other as DNR colleagues. Forestry has their quotas, and point the finger at wildlife when those quotas are not met as a whole, or a certain species quota is not met. This is nonsense. The timber industry has interfered directly with wildlife habitat management practices, on WMAs, because they did not agree with what they observed, and our upper management caved in and gave the loggers what they desired. Is this setting a precedent? I believe so, and not the one we should want as an agency that is responsible for managing lands for wildlife. It is disgusting.”

Strains relationships to leadership

“I dread days that I need to work on forestry related projects and procrastinate by doing other work instead. These conflicts strain relationships with foresters, supervisors, contractors and the public. It's a strain to our funding and a struggle to meet deadlines arbitrarily set by auction deadlines and the logger's "needs". Staff morale has plummeted regarding any forest related work. It's exhausting not knowing the rules, then they're changed and we're told we "don't understand modeling" by leadership. We don't feel any support from the top, we don't feel heard and we don't feel appreciated. Leaders need to be much more careful and tactful, even during "closed door" meetings. We've heard some of their comments about us. It's obvious they have no respect for us or our concerns.”

Strains relationships to the public

“As Wildlife Managers, our image and reputation with the public as competent wildlife managers is tarnished when we feel pressures to produce cords on the WMAs and timber sales are done in a way without our full support or influence in decision making.”

Strains relationships to the resource

“Again, my comments are not specific to WMAs, but my answer is that I have seen conflicts have notable effects on morale and staff relationships (within or across Divisions). I myself hit a point where I just decided to give up advocating for certain forest values as it seemed fruitless. Some might call that acceptance of political/administrative reality and not all bad, but I see it as a bad sign for the future.”

Fine/good relationships with foresters

“Has not been a big deal thus far since working over in this area and foresters have been good to work with.”

“Not much. Our local Forestry staff is easy to work with.”

“We have been able to maintain good relations with forestry staff and morale is OK. Wildlife folks would feel better if we had a little more control over harvests on WMAs. Stands are picked by a computer and we have not been able to defer those stands unless we come up with replacement acres.”

Now is the time for MY
words....



- This has not been the way we want the work to be.
- This is not how FAW staff should have felt.
- This has hurt you, both personally and professionally.
- This is why we are here.

Topics for leadership discussion

Based on survey feedback

1. Provide a status update on ongoing USFWS discussions
2. Clarify the ability/authority to decline, defer, or otherwise alter sales and the role of swaps
3. Clarify the role of cord targets, especially on WMAs
4. Considering that we are at the STH mid-point evaluation, please clarify if front end modeling decisions (e.g., model inputs) could be altered to more proactively align forest management with wildlife values
5. Clarify how leadership will clarify communications/direction concerning forest management to help improve relationships between FAW and FOR
6. Clarify what funding is available for pre/post-sale treatments
7. Clarify the role of FAW and FOR at different parts of the process

1. How can the department and division better support our managers in utilizing timber harvest for wildlife values?

(53 people answered question)

Themes	Mentions
Minimize role of cord targets	12
Revise STH model to include habitat and landscape metrics	10
Removing WMA lands from harvest pool/modifying practices on WMAs	11
Host more workshops/training on forest management practices and habitat	5
Better alignment and communication with CMO office and FOR division	18
Prioritize wildlife habitat values over profit/industry	19
Increased time and funding for pre- and post-sale work	6
Increased forestry staff within FAW	4
Increased agency for FAW managers/ability to refuse a sale	25
Leadership to trust FAW managers and field staff's knowledge and decisions	15
Sharing data and resources FOR uses with FAW staff	4
Eliminate the replacement stand requirement	10
More flexibility in timber sales	9
Develop clear policies and guidelines for field staff	9

2. What clarifications do staff need regarding timber sale processes on WMAs? (42 people answered question)

Themes	Mentions
Clarify the ability/authority to decline, defer, or otherwise alter sales	19
Clarify the role of FAW and FOR / Clarify what division is the decision-maker	16
Need formal training	8
Clarify general or whole process	7
Clarify the role or content of policies and guidance documents	7

3. What conflicts concerning timber harvest for wildlife values have you directly dealt with (44 people answered question)

Themes	Mentions
Pressure to meet cord targets	9
STH model conflicts with wildlife considerations and doesn't account for spatial and temporal considerations	5
Lack of communication and understanding with FOR	8
Conflicting management practices with FOR	12
Regeneration efforts don't restore forest properly	6
Rotation ages for harvest conflict with health of forest and habitat	13
Logger issues: slash piles, debris, lack of accountability	9
Negative impacts to adjacent habitats and wildlife	10
Lack of agency for FAW staff/FOR controlling sales and specifications	15
Prioritizing sale over habitat and wildlife	15
Replacement/swap acres requirement	8
Pressure to harvest larger stands because of sale	6