

***COUNTY FOREST LAW (s. 28.11, Wis. Stats) \****

**28.11 Administration of county forests.**

**(1) Purpose.** The purpose of this section is to provide the basis for a permanent program of county forests and to enable and encourage the planned development and management of the county forests for optimum production of forest products together with recreational opportunities, wildlife, watershed protection and stabilization of stream flow, giving full recognition to the concept of multiple-use to assure maximum public benefits; to protect the public rights, interests and investments in such lands; and to compensate the counties for the public uses, benefits and privileges these lands provide; all in a manner which will provide a reasonable revenue to the towns in which such lands lie.

**(2) Defined.** "County forests" include all county lands entered under and participating under [ch. 77](#) on October 2, 1963, and all county lands designated as county forests by the county board or the forestry committee and entered under the county forest law and designated as "county forest lands" or "county special-use lands" as hereinafter provided.

**(3) Powers of county board.** The county board of any such county may:

(a) Enact an ordinance designating a committee to have charge of the county forests and specifying the powers, duties, procedures and functions of such committee. The members of such committee shall be appointed pursuant to [s. 59.13](#) and may include well-qualified residents of the county who are not members of the county board.

(b) Establish regulations for the use of the county forests by the public and to provide penalties for their enforcement.

(c) Appropriate funds for the purchase, development, protection and maintenance of such forests and to exchange other county-owned lands for the purpose of consolidating and blocking county forest holdings.

(d) Enter into cooperative agreements with the department for protection of county forests from fire.

(e) Establish aesthetic management zones along roads and waters and enter into long-term cooperative leases and agreements with the department and other state agencies or federal agencies for the use of the county forests for natural resources research.

(f) Establish transplant nurseries for growing seedlings, from the state forest nurseries, to larger size for planting in county forests, but no ornamental or landscape stock shall be produced in such nurseries.

(g) Establish forest plantations and engage in silviculture, forest management and timber sales.

(h) Engage in other projects designed to achieve optimum development of the forest.

(i) Enter into leases or agreements, for terms not exceeding 10 years, to explore and prospect for ore, minerals, gas or oil upon any county forest lands. These leases or agreements shall contain proper covenants to safeguard the public interests in the lands involved and to guard against trespass and waste. The county board shall require proper security to ensure that the person engaged in exploration or prospecting fully informs the county of every discovery of ore, minerals, gas or oil and restores the land surface to an acceptable condition and value if no discovery of valuable deposit is made or if county forest lands are not withdrawn from entry under this section. Before a lease or agreement under this paragraph is effective, approval of the lease or agreement by the department is required. If the department finds that the proposed lease or agreement fully complies with the law and contains the proper safeguards, it shall approve the lease or agreement.

(j) Enter into leases for the extraction of valuable deposits of ore, minerals, gas or oil upon any county forest land. If the extraction can be accomplished without permanently affecting the surface of the land, extraction leases may be entered into and extraction may occur while the land remains county forest lands. If the extraction cannot be accomplished without permanently affecting the surface of the land, extraction may not commence until the land is withdrawn as county forest land. Before an extraction lease under this paragraph is effective, approval of the lease by the department is required.

(k) Establish energy conservation projects which permit individual members of the public to remove up to 10 standard cords of wood without charge from county forest lands for individual home heating purposes. The county board shall limit removal of wood for energy conservation projects to wood that is unsuitable for commercial sale. The county board may require a permit to remove wood for energy conservation projects and may charge a fee for the permit to administer projects established under this paragraph. A county board shall restrict participation in projects established under this paragraph to residents, as defined under [s. 29.001 \(69\)](#), but may not restrict participation to residents of the county.

#### **(4) Entry of county forest lands.**

(a) A county may file with the department an application for entry of county-owned land under this section. Such application shall include the description of the land and a statement of the purposes for which the lands are best suited. Upon the filing of such application the department shall investigate the same and it may conduct a public hearing thereon if it deems it advisable to do so at such time and place as it sees fit.

(b) If after such investigation the department finds that the lands constitute a well blocked county forest unit or that they block in with other established county forest lands and are otherwise suitable for the purposes of this section it shall make an order of entry designating such lands as county forest lands. All county lands entered under and participating under [ch. 77](#) on October 2, 1963 shall be designated "county forest lands" without further order of entry.

(c) If the department finds that the lands are not suited primarily for timber production and do not otherwise qualify for entry under [par. \(b\)](#) but that they are suitable for scenic, outdoor recreation, public hunting and fishing, water conservation and other multiple-use purposes it shall make an order of entry designating such lands as "county special-use lands".

(d) A copy of the order of entry shall be filed with the county clerk and the county forestry committee, and the order shall also be recorded with the register of deeds.

(e) From and after the filing of such order of entry, the lands therein described shall be "county forest lands" or "county special-use lands", as the case may be, and shall so remain until withdrawn as hereinafter provided.

(f) The department may construct and use forest fire lookout towers, telephone lines and fire lanes or other forest protection structures on any lands entered under this section and the county clerk of such county shall execute any easement on or over such lands which the department may require for forest protection. The general public shall enjoy the privilege of entering such lands for the purpose of hunting, fishing, trapping and other recreation pursuits subject to such regulation and restrictions as may be established by lawful authority.

## **(5) Management**

(a) A comprehensive county forest land use plan shall be prepared for a 10-year period by the county forestry committee with the assistance of technical personnel from the department and other interested agencies, and shall be approved by the county board and the department. The plan shall include land use designations, land acquisition, forest protection, annual allowable timber harvests, recreational developments, fish and wildlife management activities, roads, silvicultural operations and operating policies and procedures; it shall include a complete inventory of the county forest and shall be documented with maps, records and priorities showing in detail the various projects to be undertaken during the plan period. The plan may include an application for aids under [s. 23.09 \(17m\)](#). The application will be considered an annual application for these aids during the 10-year period of the plan. The initial plan shall be completed within 2 years from October 2, 1963 and may be revised as changing conditions require and shall be revised upon expiration of the plan period.

(b) An annual work plan and budget based upon the comprehensive plan shall be prepared by the county forestry committee with the assistance of a forester of the department. The plan shall include a schedule of compartments to be harvested and a listing by location of management projects for the forthcoming year. In addition the plan shall include other multiple-use projects where appropriate. A budget, listing estimated expenditures for work projects, administration and protection of the forest, shall accompany the annual plan both to be submitted to the county board for approval at the November meeting.

**(5m) Grants for county forest administrators.**

(a) The department may make grants, from the appropriation under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bw\)](#), to counties having lands entered under [sub. \(4\)](#) to fund all of the following for one professional forester in the position of county forest administrator or assistant county forest administrator:

1. Up to 50% of the forester's salary.
2. Up to 50% of the forester's fringe benefits, except that the fringe benefits may not exceed 40% of the forester's salary.

(b) The department may not make a grant under this subsection for a year for which the department has not approved the annual work plan that was approved by the county board under [sub. \(5\) \(b\)](#). The department may not base the amount of a county's grant on the acreage of the county's forest land.

**(5r) Sustainable forestry grants.**

(a) In this subsection, "sustainable forestry" has the meaning given in [s. 28.04 \(1\) \(e\)](#).

(b) The department may make grants, from the appropriation under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bw\)](#), to counties having lands entered under [sub. \(4\)](#) to fund the cost of activities designed to improve sustainable forestry on the lands.

**(6) Timber sales and cultural cuttings.**

(a) *Limitations.* The county forestry committee is authorized to sell merchantable timber designated in timber sale contracts and products removed in cultural or salvage cuttings. No timber sale contract is required for wood removed under [sub. \(3\) \(k\)](#). All timber sales shall be based on tree scale or on the scale, measure or count of the cut products; the Scribner Decimal C log rule shall be used in log scaling. All cuttings shall be limited to trees marked or designated for cutting by qualified personnel recognized as such by the department.

(b) *Procedures.*

1. Any timber sale with an estimated value of \$3,000 or more shall be by sealed bid or public sale after publication of a classified advertisement announcing the sale in a newspaper having general circulation in the county in which the timber to be sold is located. Any timber sale with an estimated value below \$3,000 may be made without prior advertising. Any timber sale with an estimated value of \$3,000 or more requires approval of the secretary.
2. Timber sales shall be subject to presale appraisals by qualified personnel recognized as such by the department to establish minimum sales value. Appraisal methods and

procedures shall be approved by the department.

3. No merchantable wood products may be cut on any lands entered under this section unless a cutting notice on forms furnished by the department is filed with and approved by the department. Any unauthorized cutting shall render the county liable to the state in an amount equal to double the stumpage value of the cut products which amount shall be paid by the county to the state. If the county does not pay the amount of such penalty to the state, the department may withhold such amount from future state contributions to the county.

4. Within 90 days after completion of any cutting operation, including timber trespass, but not more than 2 years after filing the cutting notice, the county shall transmit to the department on forms furnished by the department, a report of merchantable wood products cut. The department may conduct any investigations on timber cutting operations that it considers to be advisable, including the holding of public hearings on the timber cutting operations, and may assess severance share payments accordingly.

**(7) County forest credit.** The department shall set up an account for each county showing the lands entered; the sums previously paid under s. 28.14, 1961 stats.; the sums hereafter paid under this section; the sums previously received in the form of four-fifths severance tax collected pursuant to s. 77.06 (5), 1961 stats.; the sums received as forestry fund severance share under this section; and the sums previously reimbursed to the state on withdrawn lands pursuant to s. 28.12 (4), 1961 stats. Whenever the forestry fund account of any county shows an overpayment of such severance tax or severance share as of June 30 of any year, the department shall return such overpayment to the county. All severance taxes previously paid by any county and deposited in the general fund shall be credited to the forestry fund account of the county. If such credit exceeds the balance due to the forestry fund account from such county, the overpayment shall be credited to the county and applied in lieu of future severance shares due to the state until the county account is balanced.

**(8) State contribution.**

(a) *Acreage payments.* As soon after April 20 of each year as feasible, the department shall pay to each town treasurer 30 cents per acre, based on the acreage of such lands as of the preceding June 30, as a grant out of the appropriation made by [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bv\)](#) on each acre of county lands entered under this section.

(b) *Forestry fund account.*

1. A county having established and maintaining a county forest under this section is eligible to receive from the state from the appropriations under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bq\)](#) and [\(bs\)](#) an annual payment as a noninterest bearing loan to be used for the purchase, development, preservation and maintenance of the county forest lands and the payment shall be credited to a county account to be known as the county forestry aid fund. A county board may, by a resolution adopted during the year and transmitted to the

department by December 31, request to receive a payment of not more than 50 cents for each acre of land entered and designated as "county forest land". The department shall review the request and approve the request if the request is found to be consistent with the comprehensive county forest land use plan. If any lands purchased from the fund are sold, the county shall restore the purchase price to the county forestry aid fund. The department shall pay to the county the amount due to it on or before March 31 of each year, based on the acreage of the lands as of the preceding June 30. If the amounts in the appropriations under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bq\)](#) and [\(bs\)](#) are not sufficient to pay all of the amounts approved by the department under this subdivision, the department shall pay eligible counties on a prorated basis.

2. The department may allot additional interest free forestry aid loans on a project basis to individual counties to permit the counties to undertake meritorious and economically productive forestry operations, including land acquisitions. These additional aids may not be used for the construction of recreational facilities or for fish and game management projects. Application shall be made in the manner and on forms prescribed by the department and specify the purpose for which the additional aids will be used. The department shall make an investigation as it deems necessary to satisfy itself that the project is feasible, desirable and consistent with the comprehensive plan. If the department so finds, it may make allotments in such amounts as it determines to be reasonable and proper and charge the allotments to the forestry fund account of the county. These allotments shall be credited by the county to the county forestry aid fund. After determining the loans as required under [subd. 1.](#), the department shall make the remainder of the amounts appropriated under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bq\)](#) and [\(bs\)](#) for that fiscal year available for loans under this subdivision. The department shall also make loans under this subdivision from the appropriations under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bt\)](#) and [\(bu\)](#).

3. All payments made under this paragraph shall be known as the "forestry fund account".

**(9) County forest severance share.**

(a) Except as provided under [pars. \(b\)](#) and [\(c\)](#), on timber cut from lands entered as "county forest lands" the county shall pay a severance share of not less than 20% of the actual stumpage sales value of the timber. A higher rate of payment may be applied when agreed upon by the department and the county. When cutting is done by the county and timber is not sold or is sold as cut forest products the severance share shall be 20% of the severance tax schedule in effect under [s. 77.06 \(2\)](#).

(ag) The severance share paid by a county to the state shall be credited to the forestry fund account of the county and shall be divided into 2 payments as follows:

1. An acreage loan severance share payment that is equal to the product of multiplying the amount of the severance share paid by the county by the percentage of the balance due in the forestry fund account of the county that is attributable to loans made under [sub. \(8\) \(b\) 1.](#)

2. A project loan severance share payment that is equal to the product of multiplying the amount of the severance share paid by the county by the percentage of the balance due that is attributable to loans made under [sub. \(8\) \(b\) 2.](#)

(am) The acreage loan severance share payments shall be deposited in the conservation fund and credited to the appropriation under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bq\)](#), and the project loan severance share payments shall be deposited in the conservation fund and credited to the appropriation under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bu\)](#).

(ar) Notwithstanding [s. 20.001 \(3\) \(c\)](#), if the sum of the unencumbered balances in the appropriations under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bq\)](#), [\(bt\)](#) and [\(bu\)](#) exceeds \$400,000 on June 30 of any fiscal year, the amount in excess of \$400,000 shall lapse from the appropriation under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bq\)](#) to the conservation fund, except as provided in [subd. 2.](#)

2. Notwithstanding [s. 20.001 \(3\) \(c\)](#), if the amount in the appropriation under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bq\)](#) is insufficient for the amount that must lapse under [subd. 1.](#), the remainder that is necessary for the lapse shall lapse from the appropriation under [s. 20.370 \(5\) \(bu\)](#).

(b) No severance share payment is required if there is no balance due in the forestry fund account of the county. A severance share payment shall not exceed the balance due in the forestry fund account of the county.

(c) No severance share payment is required for wood removed from county forest lands for energy conservation projects established under [sub. \(3\) \(k\)](#).

(d) Of the gross receipts from all timber sales on the county forests 10% shall be paid annually by the county to the towns having county forest lands on the basis of acreage of such lands in the towns.

### **(11) Withdrawals.**

(a) 1. The county board may by resolution adopted by not less than two-thirds of its membership make application to the department to withdraw lands entered under this section. The county board shall first refer the resolution to the county forestry committee, which shall consult with an authorized representative of the department in formulating its withdrawal proposal. The county board shall not take final action on the application until 90 days after referral of the application to the forestry committee or until the report of the forestry committee regarding the application has been filed with the board. The application shall include the land description, a statement of the reasons for withdrawal, and any restrictions or other conditions of use attached to the land proposed for withdrawal.

2. Upon the filing of an application to withdraw lands under [subd. 1.](#), the department shall investigate the application. During the course of its investigation the department shall make an examination of the character of the land, the volume of timber, improvements, and any other special values. In the case of withdrawal for the purpose of

sale to any purchaser other than the state or a local unit of government, the department shall establish a minimum value on the lands to be withdrawn. In making its investigation the department shall give full weight and consideration to the purposes and principles set forth in [sub. \(1\)](#), and it shall also weigh and consider the benefits to the people of the state as a whole, as well as to the county, from the proposed use against the benefits accruing to the people of the state as a whole and to the county under the continued entry of the lands to be withdrawn. The department may conduct a public hearing on the application, if it considers it advisable, at a time and place that it determines, except that if the county requests a public hearing in writing, the department shall hold a public hearing.

3. If the department finds that the benefits after withdrawal of the lands described in the application under [subd. 2](#). outweigh the benefits under continued entry of the lands and that the lands will be put to a better and higher use, it shall make an order withdrawing the lands from entry; otherwise it shall deny the application.

4. If the application is denied, the county board may, by resolution adopted by not less than two-thirds of its membership, appeal to a review committee. The department shall submit the findings of its investigation and of any hearing on a proposed withdrawal to the committee, which shall be composed of the following members:

- a. One member appointed by the county board submitting the application for withdrawal.
- b. One member who is appointed by the governor, who is from another county that has land enrolled under the county forest law, and who shall be chairperson of the review committee.
- c. One member appointed by the department.
- d. One member appointed by the University of Wisconsin from the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.
- e. One member to be selected by unanimous vote of the appointed members or, if the appointed members fail to achieve unanimity, by the governor.

5. The review committee appointed under [subd. 4](#). shall, by majority vote within 60 days after receiving the findings of the department, do one of the following:

- a. Approve the application for withdrawal if it finds the proposed use to be of a greater benefit considering all losses and benefits to the people of the state as a whole, as well as to the people of the county.
- b. Provisionally deny the application for withdrawal giving specific reasons why it finds the proposal deficient and making any suggestions for revising the application to reduce the conflict of the proposed use with the public interest.

6. If the committee approves a withdrawal under [subd. 5](#)., it shall notify the county board of its approval stating, as necessary, specific procedures to be followed by the county relating to the withdrawal. The county board may then by a resolution approved by not less than two-thirds of its membership, withdraw the lands from the county forest law and shall send copies of this resolution to the department and to the county register of deeds who shall record the resolution.

7. If the committee provisionally denies the proposed withdrawal under [subd. 5](#)., it may

consider an amended application for withdrawal upon presentation of the application and supporting information, or it may require additional investigation of the amended application by the department before reconsidering the application. Any additional investigation shall include additional public hearings if requested by the county, the department, or the committee.

(b) If the application is approved the county shall reimburse the state the amounts previously paid to the county pursuant to [sub. \(8\) \(b\)](#) which reimbursement shall be credited to the county forestry fund account; except that the department may waive all or part of such reimbursement if it finds that the lands are withdrawn for a higher public use or that the amount of such reimbursement is unreasonable when compared to the value of the land. If the department has waived any portion of such reimbursement and if at any subsequent time the land ceases to be used for the purpose designated in the application for withdrawal, the full amount of reimbursement due the forestry fund account on the lands withdrawn shall immediately become due and payable to the department and shall be credited to the forestry fund account, unless the department finds and determines that the lands will continue to be put to another higher public use in which case payments of such reimbursement may be deferred by the department so long as the lands are devoted to a higher public use. If payment is not made prior to the time of the next forestry aid payment to the county, forestry aid payments in an amount to be determined by the department shall be withheld until the amount due the forestry fund account is reimbursed.

**(12) Enforcement.** If at any time it appears to the department that the lands are not being managed in accordance with this section it shall so advise the county forestry committee and the county clerk. If the condition persists the department may proceed against the persons responsible for such noncompliance under [s. 30.03 \(4\)](#).

**(13) Review.** All orders of the department made under this section may be reviewed under [ss. 227.52](#) to [227.58](#).

**History:** 1971 c. 215; 1975 c. 39 s. 734; 1975 c. 342; 1977 c. 29; 1979 c. 34 ss. 723 to 725, 2102 (39) (a); 1983 a. 27; 1983 a. 192 s. 304; 1983 a. 424 ss. 2 to 5; 1985 a. 29 ss. 655ce to 655cg, 3202 (39); 1985 a. 182 s. 57; 1987 a. 27; 1989 a. 31, 79; 1993 a. 16, 184, 301; 1995 a. [27](#), [201](#); 1997 a. [237](#), [248](#); 1999 a. [9](#); 2001 a. [16](#), [103](#).

**Cross Reference:** See also ch. [NR 48](#) and ss. [NR 1.24](#), [47.60](#), and [302.03](#), Wis. adm. code.

*A county forest withdrawal appeal review committee under sub. (11) (a) is not state agency whose decisions are reviewable under ch. 227. Allen v. Juneau County, 98 Wis. 2d 103, 295 N.W.2d 218 (Ct. App. 1980).*

*County boards cannot sell or exchange county forest lands without first withdrawing them from the county forest program under sub. (11). 66 Atty. Gen. 109.*