



## #FridaysOnTheFarm: Conservation and the Golden-Winged Warbler

Each Friday, visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Meet farmers, producers, and landowners who are working to improve their operations with

This Friday meet Jim and Katie Matykowski of Marinette County, Wisconsin. The Matykowskis bought 130 acres back in 1989 and started actively managing their forest right away to benefit the natural resources and wildlife that they enjoy on the property.

"It's been such an honor to own this land," Jim said. "I like the peace and quiet, with only sounds of nature out here."

### Managing Tag Alder

Early in the morning, if you listen intently, the distinct song of the golden-winged warbler can be heard on the five acres of recently sheared tag alder on the Matykowski's property. Upon further inspection, a juvenile Warbler is seen scurrying near a nest in the newly thriving habitat. Jim and Katie are ecstatic over the news of creating vital early successional habitat for this near threatened species.

"Some woodland owners don't want to do anything to their acreage, but if you cut and manage according to a plan, you are helping your woods thrive and regenerate and can help wildlife too," explained Jim.

The golden-winged warbler is a sharply declining songbird that prefers shrubby, young forest habitat in the Great Lakes region. Today, early successional habitats are on the decline due to forest succession, development and other changes in land use. That's why USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#), the [American Bird Conservancy](#) and private landowners, like the Matykowskis, have teamed up through the NRCS [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) to create habitat for the species in northern Wisconsin.

The partnership focuses on creating habitat for the near threatened species; the songbird with one of the steepest population declines of all songbirds. According to the American Bird Conservancy, the golden-winged warbler's population has declined by 66 percent in the last 50 years.

The Matykowskis met Jeff Maroszek, Marinette County NRCS district conservationist, at a local field day. Jeff talked to Jim and Katie about their property and learned about five acres they owned of unproductive land covered in dense tag alder.

"The five acres we had were very wet and pretty useless. You couldn't even walk through the area because of the dense alder and excess moisture. We were stumped as to how to make these acres productive and useful," Katie said. "When we talked with Jeff, he told us about technical and financial assistance available to private landowners through RCPP, targeting mature tag alder to create early successional habitat for the golden-winged warbler."

### Worth the Wait



The Matykowskis were excited about the possibility and to show Jeff their property.

“The tag alder was 12- to 15-ft high and it also created greater than 75 percent canopy cover on the site. These characteristics were some of the site conditions we were looking for,” explained Jeff.

The Matykowskis property met site conditions and was approved through RCPP for early successional habitat development through regeneration of mature alder stands. The site was very wet and a challenge to get into without a hard freeze.

“The first winter, we had around 40 inches of snow and everything was very wet,” Jim said. “We had to wait a year until we had a hard freeze to get the equipment in there to shear the tag alder, but it was well worth it.”

Once sheared, the alder was around 6 inches or less in height. Scattered residual trees were maintained for perch trees. The sheared tag alder provides excellent early successional habitat for golden-winged warblers, including food, cover and nesting opportunities.

“We were thrilled to hear we had golden-winged warblers on the acreage, and we’ve seen so many new species ever since the shear, not just warblers. Even just your everyday birds - we are seeing so many more robins and other songbird species too,” Katie said. “We are so thankful we connected with Jeff at that field day and he explained the benefits of how RCPP could work for us.”

“This project could not have gone any better,” Jeff said. “We partnered to create early successional habitat for golden-winged warbler. We actually found the species on-site and they are also using the area to nest in.”

### **Change for the Good**

Jim said that because the tag alder shearing went so well, they are now being proactive in managing their cuttings and other areas on the property.

“You can really see the change for the good,” Katie said. “One season and we see a huge difference. We’ve updated our forest management plan and know what we need to do for the future as well, to continue to actively manage our forest.”

Since adding the early successional habitat, the Matykowskis see more of an abundance in wildlife on the property in addition to the golden-winged warbler. They also added wood duck houses on the pond to increase habitat for waterfowl.

“If I come out here at dusk, you can hear an unbelievable number of songbirds singing - so many diverse species thriving. The sound is constant,” explained Katie.

The Matykowskis plan to continue to keep their land maintained and managed properly.

“Working with the NRCS on active forest management helps us stay on track and be progressive. They have so much knowledge and can help us leave this land better than when we got it,” Katie said.



“Seeing the partners come together to help us do productive things for our landscape shows us we are making a positive difference.”

### **More Information**

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center.](#)

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