



#FridaysontheFarm: Planning Boosts Forest Health and Management

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Each Friday, meet those farmers, producers and landowners through our [#Fridaysonthefarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This Friday, meet Jay and Mike Carlson, a father-son team working with NRC in the Driftless Area to set management goals that are helping the duo improve the way they manage their forests and its health.

Jay Carlson owns 157 rolling acres in the Driftless Area of Richland County, Wisconsin. His son, Mike, manages their property that has 30 cropland acres and 127 forested acres. "We primarily wanted a place out in the Driftless Area because we wanted the opportunity to manage land for wildlife habitat," Mike explained.

Jay and Mike started by building relationships with natural resource professionals, including USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

John Nielsen, NRCS Forestry Technical Service Provider (TSP), looks at properties and plans for forestry benefits to include what acres will look like 100 years from now with conservation management applied. TSP's provide conservation technical services and expertise, to NRCS customers, in conservation planning and design for a variety of conservation activities.

Forest Management Plan

The first step was to develop a forest management plan. "We heard about the cost-sharing available, through NRCS, to help develop a plan," Mike recalls.

After Nielsen toured their property, they decided to apply for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

"The Carlson's have been proactive and receptive to the information and making good decisions that best meet their management needs for the property," said Nielsen.

"After John produced the plan, I had a full sense of what the wooded portion of our property could be," said Jay.



Understanding Goals

Nielsen worked with the father-son team to identify management goals that would improve the land. They wanted to protect their water, prevent erosion and combat invasives.

Last spring, the Carlson's planted 1,400 oak seedlings and 500 shrub seedlings for wildlife habitat with EQIP financial assistance. They also plan to treat 15 acres of ironwood that grew after the livestock was removed. The ironwood had developed a dense canopy and reduced the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor. That caused the existing oak seedlings not to receive enough sunlight to grow. So the Carlson's cut down the ironwood and sprayed the stumps. This opened up the forest canopy and the oak seedlings so that they flourished.

In addition, they completed a crop tree release in the planted areas. Crop tree release is a silviculture technique where you remove the competing trees nearby selected trees to leave free growing space around the preferred tree crowns. This enhances the performance of individual trees. The Carlson's also completed a tree and shrub site preparation and establishment and brush management practices.

“One of the project highlights for fall 2017 was a direct seeding project on five acres, planting acorns into former cropland. This project will take some of the marginal crop land and put it into trees,” said Nielsen, who worked with the Carlson's to develop a plan for 16 stands of oak.

The father-son team used EQIP to fund 130 acres of the stands. “We also did a timber harvest on eight mature acres of aspen in winter 2016. We wanted to establish and maintain some areas of young forest on their landscape,” said John.

“From a landscape perspective, we talked about songbird habitat because this is a critical area for interior migratory songbirds. Young forest is in short supply, so I wanted them to know the wildlife benefits,” added Nielsen.

“It was a leap of faith, but after one growing season, the young forest looks great and is regenerating,” said Mike.

“The Driftless Area is very responsive to management, so it’s a great area to practice forestry,” added Nielsen.

Wildlife and Pollinator Habitat

“When we talked with John, we put wildlife at the top of the list. It’s nice to see the progress we can make in just a few years,” said Mike.

After implementing conservation improvements, the Carlson's have seen a meaningful and tangible boost in their forest within just four years.



The Carlson's, and NRCS' district conservationist and TSP state coordinator view various healthy tree stands that are part of the restored forest areas on the Carlson's property.

Quality Support

“John brings forth a high level of professionalism as a forestry TSP and he’s been a huge asset for the Carlson's to manage their forested acres,” added Carlton Peterson, Richland County NRCS District Conservationist.

“Landowners having access to NRCS financial assistance programs takes away a huge barrier to developing a plan for management of their forests,” Nielsen explains.

“We wouldn’t have known where to start without a Forest Management Plan,” said Mike.

“These programs give landowners an opportunity to directly work with professionals to benefit private lands. It gave us the confidence to implement conservation practices and do a timber harvest,” said Mike.

“The most satisfying thing in a project like this is to see a landowner who is really happy with the results of their plan,” said John.

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