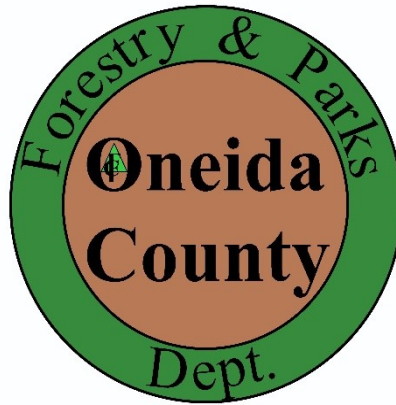


**Oneida County Forestry,  
Land and  
Recreation Department**



**2022 Annual Report**

**To**

**Oneida County Board of Supervisors**

**By**

**Forestry, Land and Recreation Committee**

**Committee**

**Robert Almekinder, Chair  
Jim Winkler, Vice-Chair  
Robert Briggs  
Chris Schultz  
Collette Sorgel**

**Oneida County Board of Supervisors:** We submit, for your approval and adoption, a report of activities of the Oneida County Forestry, Land and Recreation Department for the year 2022.

# 2022 Department Highlights:

- Despite the continued timber market depression, the timber sales revenue met the 2022 budget estimate of \$1,150,000.
- Oneida County continued to see a strong utilization of recreational facilities (campground occupancy, silent sports trail passes, snowmobile recreation, etc.).
- The Forester I position was filled in May 2022, bringing the department to full-staff.
- CDBG Grant to replace two picnic shelters was awarded and the project completed in fall 2022.

# **FORESTRY**

## **Forest Management & Timber Sale Revenue:**

In 2022, the harvesting of timber on Oneida County Forest resulted in gross stumpage revenue to the County of \$1,150,000 meeting the budget expectation. This revenue was realized during a period in which the timber industry was at a historical low, due in part to the closing of the Wisconsin Rapids Verso paper mill which consumed approximately 25% of the state's pulpwood. Additionally, \$10,000 of rental revenue was deposited in the Forestry account for a cell tower located on County Forest in the Town of Woodboro.

The stumpage revenue achieved by the Oneida County Forestry Department in 2022 resulted from the harvest of approximately 26,500 cords of pulpwood and 751,000 board feet of saw logs. Approximately 1,800 acres were harvested among 30 active timber sales throughout the year. Timber sales vary with a 2-4 year contract period and typically span multiple years for completion of timber harvesting.

Factors that will continue to affect timber sale revenues and timber harvesting on the Oneida County Forest include:

1. The shutdown of the Verso Paper Mills in Wisconsin Rapids and Duluth, Minnesota in 2020, resulted in decreases in market demand of pulpwood products. With approximately 25% of the pulpwood market in Wisconsin shut down, mill quotas and timber prices for logging contractors remained significantly reduced. The Duluth mill was purchased and re-opened; however, the Wisconsin Rapids mill remained idle throughout 2022 and is not anticipated to re-open in the foreseeable future. This has resulted in lower bid prices for timber stumpage and less desirable tracts remain unsold.
2. Overall warmer winters experienced in the past several years has hindered the harvesting of timber sales located on wetter ground. Contractors are hesitant to bid on sales located in wetlands due to the uncertainty of the winters and the lack of markets for many wood products.

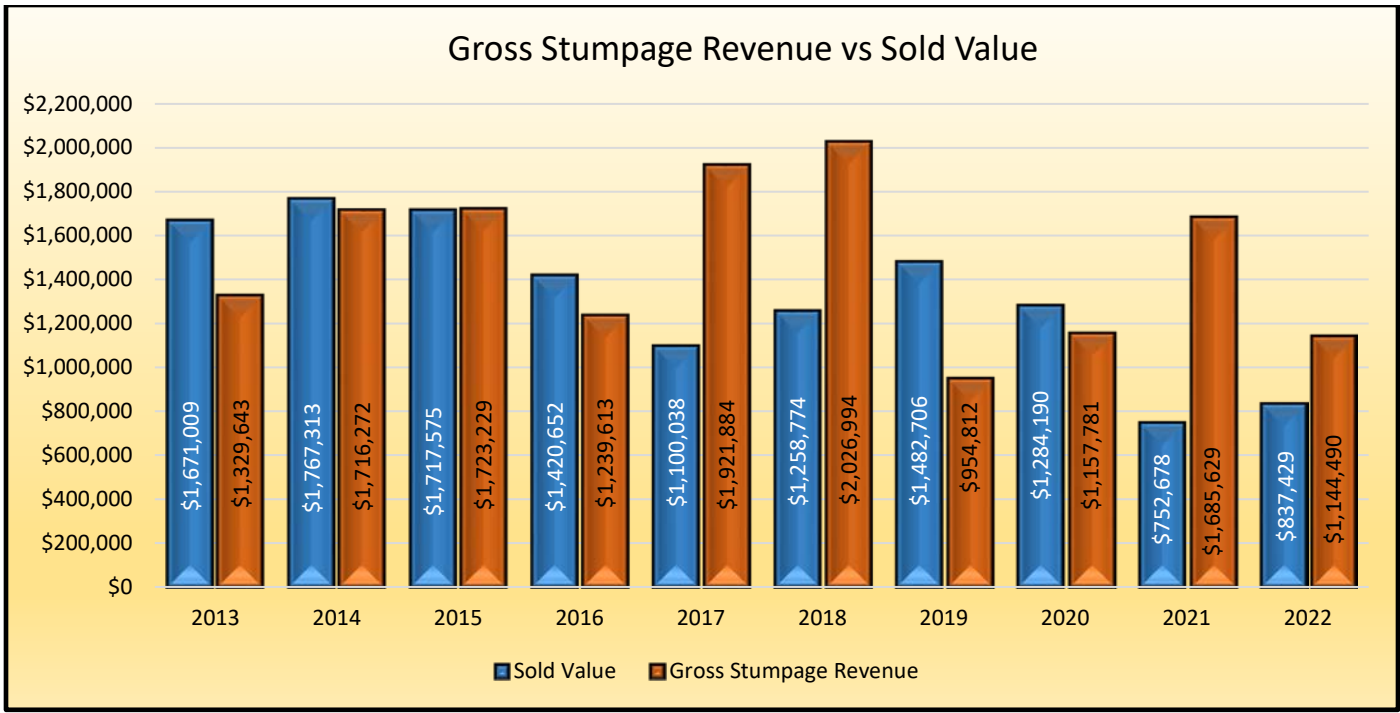
Despite the challenges with the timber markets remaining depressed, the Forestry Department was able to achieve budgeted stumpage revenue of \$1,150,000.

The following table summarizes the past three years of timber sale activity and provides a projection for 2022.

Year	Acres Sold	Sold Value	Acres Cut	Cords Cut	Board Feet Cut	Gross Stumpage Income
2020	1,300	\$1,284,190	1,000	25,200	265,000	\$1,157,781
2021	1,025	\$752,678	1,800	38,000	1,185,000	\$1,685,629
2022*	2,000	\$837,429	1,800	26,500	751,000	\$1,144,490
2023**	1,500	\$900,000	1,500	30,000	500,000	\$1,080,000

\*Includes forfeited performance bonds of \$53,157

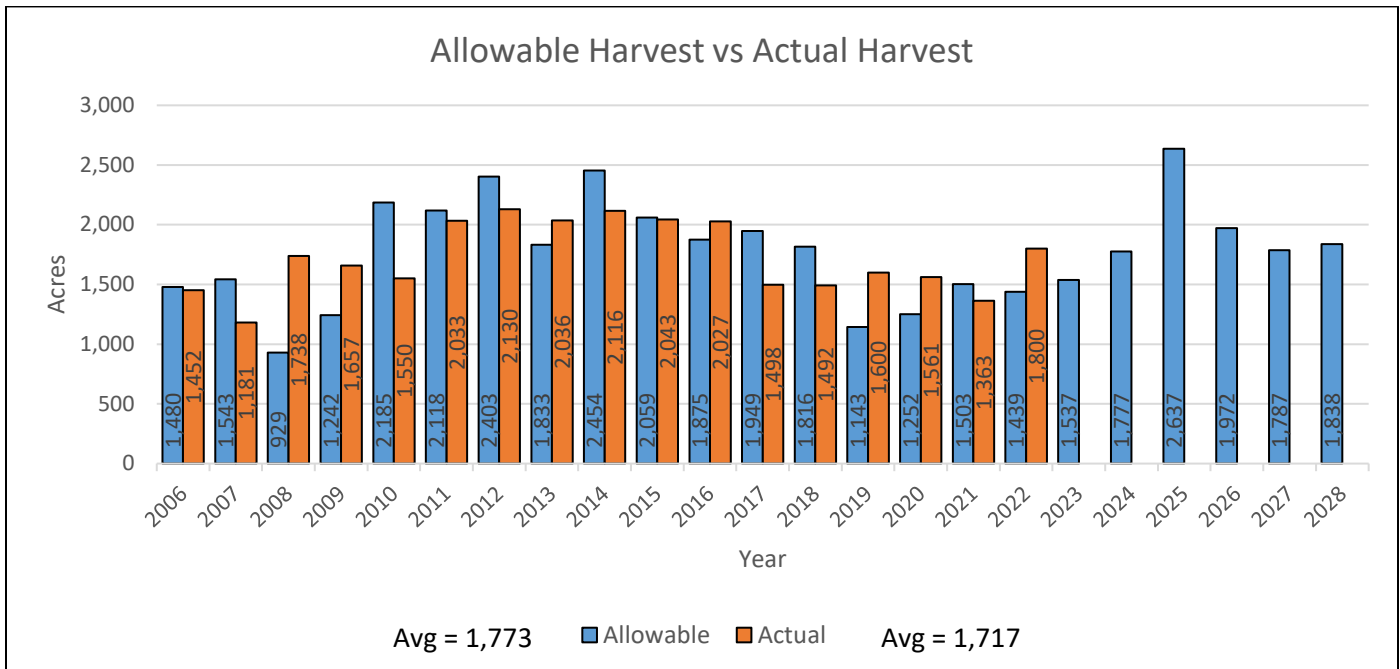
\*\*The 2023 value is an estimate based on projected harvest activity and timber sale acreage to be sold. Estimates are low due to the continued economic situation and the continued closure of the Verso mill in WI Rapids.



**Allowable Timber Harvest Projections:**

Beginning in 2010, the allowable harvest for the Oneida County Forest increased by approximately 33%, and remained at these higher levels for several years. The allowable harvest spike has since begun to come back down and in response, the projected actual acres established for 2023 will be set at approximately 1,500 acres.

It is anticipated that some timber sales may not sell due to the depressed wood market and mill closure; however, it is the intention of the Department to establish and offer for sale the allowable harvest acres.



**Severance Payments:**

As required by state statute, the County returns 10% of the annual gross county forest stumpage revenue to the towns based on the percentage of county forest within each township. In 2015, the County Board approved an additional 2% of the gross stumpage revenue be distributed to towns in which the County Forest lies to assist in the maintenance of town roads that are vital to the transport of the timber products harvested from the Oneida County Forest.

2022 Gross Stumpage Revenue	\$1,091,333
Less 10% Town Severance Payments	\$ 109,133
Less 2% Road Severance	\$ 21,827
2022 Net Stumpage Revenue – OC	\$ 960,373
Plus Forfeited Performance Bonds	\$ 53,157
2022 Total Stumpage Revenue – OC	\$1,013,530

**Forest Certification:**

In 2004, the Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) began to explore the possibility of entering into a third party certification system. The purpose of this certification is to ensure forests are managed in a sound, sustainable manner. In 2005, the WCFA entered third party certification through two certification programs: The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Oneida County elected to become certified under the SFI program at that time. Oneida County has since had two full, on-site audits completed by the SFI auditors. Results of these audits concluded the Oneida County Forest is managed on a sound, sustainable basis. In 2016, with the urging of the wood using industry and logging contractors, Oneida County opted to become certified under the FSC program as well.

The benefits of certification by a third party are many. A financial benefit is the wood products produced by the Oneida County Forest are able to be sold as “certified wood products”. Certified wood products command a higher price in the open market and provides logging contractors preference for selling wood products harvested from Oneida County timber sales to mills requiring a certain percentage of wood purchases be certified. Additional benefits include: reassuring the general public that Oneida County does take into consideration other forest values such as wildlife habitat, watershed protection, cultural resource protection and recreational pursuits during the management of the forest.

**Future Desired Conditions of the Forest:**

The Oneida County Forest is made up of a diverse array of plant communities. It is the intention of the Forestry Department to maintain the acreages of the existing plant communities at or near their current acreage. Due to the recent discovery of Emerald Ash Borer (see Forest Health Issues), it is anticipated that in the future, the White Ash and Black Ash components of the forest will decline and possibly disappear. These species will be replaced naturally or through planting/seeding with other suitable native species.

Many Red Pine plantations are reaching the age and size class in which their economic value begins to decrease. These plantations will be regenerated through over-story removal and replanting Red Pine as they reach this stage. This process requires budgeting additional funds to prepare the sites for planting (site prep). Site prep may include spraying herbicides to reduce competition and/or creating furrows in which the seedlings will be planted. Following site prep, contract crews are hired to hand plant the seedlings. Follow-up treatments may be required to reduce competition from undesirable plants. Bids were solicited for the site preparation on approximately 50 acres in 2022; however, no bids were received. Oneida County joined forces with Lincoln, Langlade and Marathon Counties to solicit bids again in late 2022. It is anticipated that an acceptable bid will be received and site preparation completed in 2023. Oneida County has approximately 80 acres due for site prep in 2023.

## **Forest Reconnaissance (Recon.):**

Oneida County staff and DNR foresters are responsible for performing Forest Reconnaissance activities to ensure a healthy, vibrant, sustainable forestry program. In 2022, a total of 14,523 acres of the Oneida County forest were examined and recon data updated. The target acreage for reconnaissance is approximately 5,500 acres per year; however, a concerted effort between the County and DNR to reduce the backlog of older recon data was successful in 2022. As the County and local DNR remain at full staff, recon updates should continue at or above the target acreage.

## **Forest Health Issues:**

In 2021, Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) was found on the Oneida County Forest in the Town of Enterprise. This infestation has begun to spread as signs of EAB have been located approximately two miles from the original site. Regardless of control measures, it is anticipated EAB will continue to spread throughout not only the County Forest, but the entire County.

The EAB quarantine that was imposed on Oneida County when the first instance of EAB was found in the county, has been expanded to the entire state. This allows Oneida County to ship hardwood from our timber sales to mills anywhere in the state year round. The Forestry Department is working with the DNR and WI Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection on this matter. Additionally, the Forestry Department will begin to target more ash stands for harvest (primarily Black Ash) in anticipation of the spread of EAB. As the infestation progresses and becomes more defined, an action plan will be developed.



Garlic Mustard patches were again monitored, sprayed and/or hand pulled to help control the spread. These areas will continue to be monitored and treated as needed.

Additionally, the increase in dumping of yard waste by the general public, significantly increases the risk of invasive species spreading throughout the county forest.

## **Forestry Automotive Equipment:**

Each year funds (typically \$25,000) are budgeted into the automotive equipment line item within the Forestry Department. These funds are used to purchase new and replacement equipment. The size and specialized nature of some of the equipment and/or vehicles used by the Forestry Department can be rather expensive to purchase. Accordingly, the automotive equipment account is non-lapsing. This allows the Forestry Department to build up sufficient funds within the account over a period of years, so when an expensive piece of equipment requires replacing, the necessary funds are available.

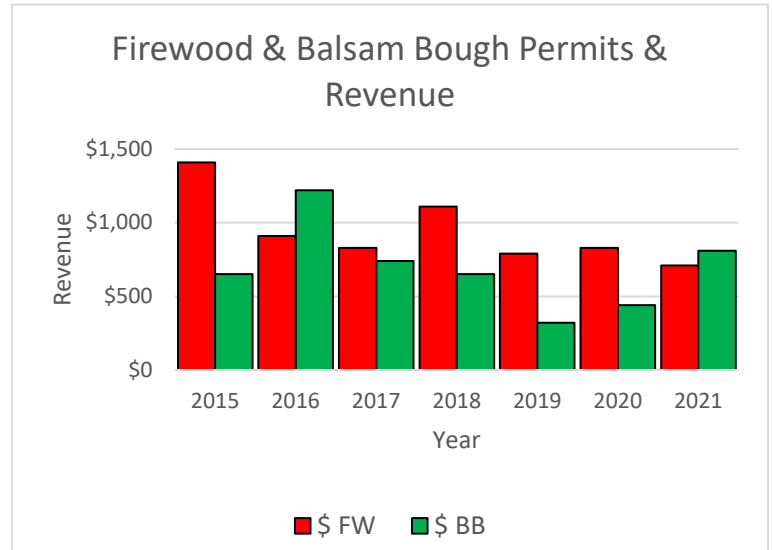
In 2022, \$40,000 was budgeted for forestry equipment purchases. The department anticipated purchasing a new truck in 2021; however, the auto industry stopped producing fleet vehicles. Alternative options led to selling the old truck and purchasing a replacement truck in early 2022. A similar situation occurred again for a planned truck replacement for 2022. Bids were received on two separate solicitations, but had to be rescinded due to manufacturers halting fleet vehicle production. The department will continue to pursue additional options to replace a truck in 2023.

Additionally, the department shared the expense of purchasing a dump trailer with the Buildings & Grounds Department at a cost of \$5,250 (50% share). The non-lapsing equipment fund had \$43,900 available at the end of 2022.

## **Miscellaneous Forest Product Permits:**

### **Firewood Gathering Permits:**

The Firewood gathering permit system allows the public to gather up to ten cords of firewood for personal home use from designated areas on the County Forest. Firewood permits are generally issued for closed out timber sale areas and allows the collection of any tops and limbs remaining after logging activities have been completed. The permit fee for Oneida County Residents and/or Oneida County landowners is \$20. The permit fee for non-resident individuals who do not own land in Oneida County is \$30. In 2022, the Forestry Department issued 30 Firewood Permits, which generated \$610 of revenue.



### **Balsam Bough and Christmas Tree Permits:**

Similar to the firewood permits, balsam bough and Christmas tree permits allow the public to gather boughs and harvest Christmas trees from the County Forest for the holiday season. Balsam bough permits are offered as home use permits or commercial permits (resident and non-resident). In 2022, four bough permits were sold generating \$410 of revenue.

Christmas tree permits were offered in 2022 for \$5 per tree with a maximum of two trees per address. Nineteen permits were sold and 25 trees were harvested for a total of \$125.

## **FOREST ACCESS**

### **County Forest Roads:**

The Forestry Department currently maintains 38.85 miles of forest road located in isolated areas of the county forest. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WDOT) formally classifies these roads as "County Forest Roads". By definition, County Forest Roads must be a minimum of 16-feet wide, have an improved gravel surface, and must be seasonally maintained (i.e., the WDOT does not require this type of road to be plowed in winter). The primary purpose for maintaining these roads is to aid in the removal of timber products from the County Forest. Secondly, these roads provide the public with vehicular access routes into otherwise isolated areas of the County Forest.

The funds needed for maintaining the County Forest Road system are primarily obtained through the WDOT. Annually, the WDOT pays County Forest Programs \$351 for each mile of County Forest Road maintained. As a result, the Oneida County Forestry Department road aid payment for 2022 was (38.85 miles x \$351) = \$13,636.

In addition to the County Forest Road Aids received from the WDOT, Troute revenue of \$4,935 was received from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in 2022. The term TROUTE is defined by the WDNR as a hybrid between a (tr)ail and a road r(oute) that is open for use by both off-road vehicles (i.e. registered ATV's and UTV's) and motor vehicles (i.e. registered cars and trucks and street legal motorcycles) for the purpose of connecting two trail segments. All of the above described road aid received by the Oneida County Forestry Department in 2022 was deposited into the County Forest Roads Account.



The County Forest Roads Account is non-lapsing, meaning the funds deposited into the account remain in the account until they are spent. Accordingly, this allows deposited revenues to accumulate over time, thus allowing funding for large-scale expensive road projects.

A \$50,000 contract to crush 15,000 tons of gravel and 400 tons of breaker run rock in the West Zimmer Pit was awarded to Michels Materials, Inc. in 2021. The crushing was completed in 2022; however, due to the lack of crushable material on site, a total of only 5,161 tons of material was crushed. This gravel and rock will be used for general county forest road maintenance in the Town of Enterprise.

In 2022, the Forestry Department conducted general road maintenance work throughout the county forest road system. Some of the routine road maintenance activities include: grading, widening, signing, wash-out repair, spot graveling, brushing, shoulder mowing, small culvert installation, storm damage clean-up, vandalism repairs, and garbage collection. DNR equipment operators worked to widen and clear the right-of-way and the McNaughton Prison Crew performed brushing and pruning of trees on Zimmer Road to improve safety and maintenance operations.

## **LAND**

### **Land Purchase Program:**

This is another non-lapsing account within the Forestry Department budget and any funds deposited remain in place and intact, year after year, until the funds are spent and/or utilized for their intended purpose. As the account name infers, these funds are utilized for expenses related to the acquisition of new or replacement County Forest land.

The land purchase account had a balance of \$13,826 available at the beginning of 2022. This is the remaining revenue received in 2019 for the withdrawal of ten acres for the Oneida County Solid Waste demolition site 4 and is designated for land purchases to replace the withdrawn acres.

An isolated, land-locked 40-acre parcel located in the Town of Enterprise was offered for sale in 2022. Two bids were received and the parcel was sold for \$35,301 to an adjacent landowner. The proceeds of this sale were placed in the land purchase account leaving a balance of \$49,055 at the end of 2022.

## **WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT**

### **Wildlife Habitat Management:**

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides county forest programs with an annual allotment of funds that are to be used exclusively for wildlife habitat improvement projects on county forest land. The formula used to calculate payment for each eligible county is as follows: Number of County Forest Acres x \$0.05 = Payment. Oneida County received \$3,870 in 2022 for nickel an acre wildlife habitat funds including a pro-rate of 93.4%.

All state funds received by Oneida County through the above-described program are deposited into a non-lapsing, State Aid Wildlife Habitat Management Improvement Account. The non-lapsing account provides the Forestry Department with the flexibility to build up state funding over a period of three years to pay for larger, more expensive projects, use the entire allotment of funds annually or a combination of the above-described methods.

In 2022, the Forestry Department expensed \$1,512 to the WDNR for mowing of wildlife openings within the Town of Enterprise. An additional \$650 was utilized for seeding wildlife openings leaving a balance of \$4,329 at the end of 2022.

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION**



## **Parks Program:**

In 2022, the Forestry Department maintained two day-use parks for picnicking, swimming, family gatherings, and general recreation.

### **Almon Park:**

Almon Park is the largest and most popular day use recreation area managed by the Oneida County Forestry Department. Located just five miles south of Rhinelander, Almon Park offers a combination of highly developed recreational facilities and undeveloped natural areas. This area is primarily utilized in the summer months for swimming, picnicking, family gatherings and general recreation. An 18-hole disc golf course is also located on the property. Historically high water levels at Buck Lake has caused issues at the park. The wetland boardwalk on the nature trail remains partially submerged during much of the summer and the water level at the beach continued to breach the top of the retaining wall for part of the year; however, water levels began to fall in late summer of 2021 and continued to drop through the summer of 2022. Retaining wall and wetland boardwalk repair needs will be assessed in 2023.



*Retaining Wall and Beach Area: Almon Park, Town of Pelican*

In late 2020, a grant program was presented to the County allowing public entities to receive funding to upgrade facilities to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) specifications. This grant is known as the CDBG-CLOSE grant and presented an opportunity for the Forestry Department. The Department conferred with the Oneida County Economic Development Corporation and was able to apply for \$85,200 to replace two picnic shelters by the beach area and create ADA compliant access paths to each shelter. The grant was approved and finally bid on in late fall of 2022.



*Old Picnic Shelter*



*New Picnic Shelter*

Two old shelters were demolished and hauled away by the Oneida County Highway Department and the new shelters were constructed by Ellis Construction Company located in Stevens Point. The paved ADA paths to the shelters were also completed in late fall. A total of \$133,027 in grants funds were used on this project along with \$8,425 in non-reimbursable expenses from the parks improvement account.

**Perch Lake Park:**

Perch Lake Park is located five miles west of Rhinelander on the north shore of Perch Lake. The diversity of recreational opportunities available in the Perch Lake area make this park a popular year-round destination. During winter months, the facility serves as a trail head for a large network of winter silent sport trails. During spring, summer, and fall, Perch Lake Park is popular for picnicking, fishing, hiking, and biking. Some noteworthy attributes of Perch Lake include its largely undeveloped scenic shoreline, and the depth, clarity, and temperature of the lake, which makes it one of the few lakes in Oneida County capable of supporting trout.



*Perch Lake high water shoreline and ADA accessible fishing pier*

**Park Shelter Rental Program:**

The Forestry Department allows the public to reserve the Rudolph Shelter at Almon Park and the Judy Swank Shelter at Perch Lake Park for private events such as family reunions, graduation and birthday parties, weddings, and similar gatherings.



Each shelter can be reserved for a fee of \$125/day, which includes a refundable security deposit of \$50 if the facility remains clean and undamaged.



In 2022, the Rudolph Shelter was rented fourteen times resulting in \$1,050 of revenue, and the Judy Swank Shelter was rented eight times resulting in \$600 of revenue. The Park Shelter Rental Program generated \$1,650 of revenue in 2022. All revenue generated from the Park Shelter Rental Program is deposited into the Forestry Department Parks Account.



### **Townline Lake Park:**

In 2021, a group of dedicated local citizens convinced the County Board to retain ownership of the park and beach as a portion of the property had previously been approved for sale to offset the cost to the County for the 231-acre Gillette-Wickham property in the Town of Enterprise.

This group formed a non-profit organization, Friends of Townline Lake Park (FTLLP), and contracted with the County to resume general maintenance and upgrades at Townline Lake Park and beach area. In late 2021, FTLLP began clean up of the park and beach area including: raking, trash pickup, brushing, mowing and tree removal. The group provided the department with a long-range plan for the park and beach in hopes of bringing it back to a welcoming and regularly used park.

The group continued with basic park maintenance throughout the spring, summer and fall of 2022. FTLLP donated and placed several picnic tables in the park. In addition, a portable restroom was available for the season. The park is beginning to see an increase in use and with further projects planned by FTLLP, this increase is likely to continue.



*View of Gillette Lake*

### **Gillette - Wickham Lakes Property:**

In 2018, Oneida County purchased 231 acres of land containing two lakes: Gillette Lake and Wickham Lake utilizing Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Grant Funds. Approximately 1,200 red pine seedlings were planted in open areas on this property. Future plans for the property include the construction of an access path to the lake, installation of a small fishing/boat pier and picnic tables to enjoy the serenity of this beautiful area.

Improvements of the access road and parking lot were completed in 2021 with the aid of a County Conservation Grant administered through the WDNR.

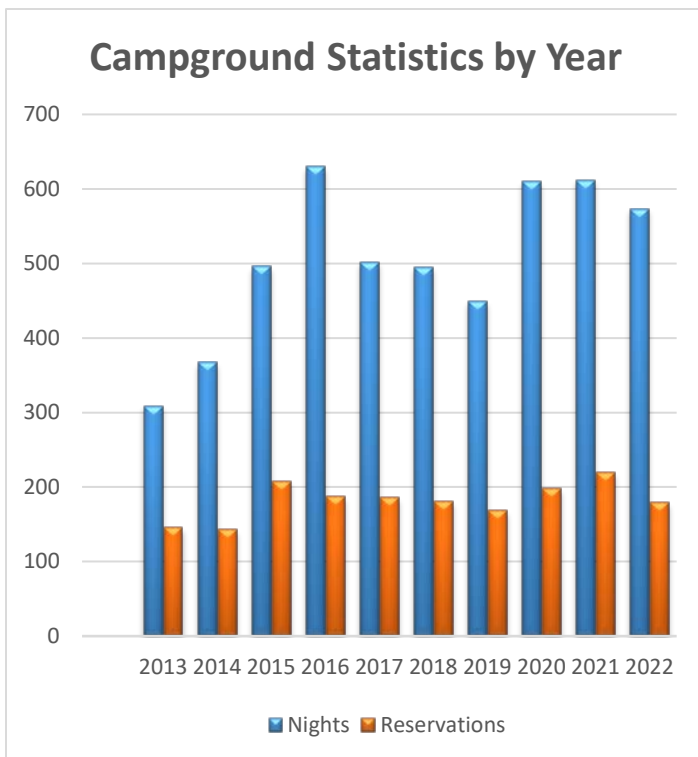
Due to the difficult terrain and anticipated expense to construct an ADA compliant path to the lake, the path and pier project have been tabled.

### **Campground Account:**

The Oneida County Forest Enterprise Campground opened for public use in the summer of 2008 and is officially open for camping from May 22<sup>nd</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup>. Although the campground was designed to accommodate ATV/UTV's, the campground is open to all members of the general public, with or without an off road vehicle. The campground offers eleven campsites, two toilet buildings and two hand pumps.



*Campsite #2*



When comparing campground occupancy to 2021, the total number of nights that individual campsites were occupied decreased about 6%; however, the number of reservations decreased about 18.5%. Not surprisingly, the campground’s highest occupancy occurs on Friday and Saturday nights, with Thursday nights a strong runner-up. The length of stay increased approximately 15% over the prior year (average 3.2 nights from 2.8 nights) with many campers spending an average of three nights and returning frequently.

Camping registration fees are currently \$15 per night and reservations are on a first come – first serve basis. Camping registration fees and campground firewood donations resulted in \$8,535 of campground revenue for 2022. Conversely, the operating costs attributed to maintain the campground in 2022 were approximately \$3,375, which resulted in a net campground profit of \$5,158 for the year.

Additionally, in conjunction with the 15-year Comprehensive Land Use Plan update, a dispersed camping permit is available to persons wishing to camp within the Oneida County Forests. The permit fee is \$10 per camping unit for a maximum of 14 consecutive days. The department generated \$110 in revenue for 11 camping permits.

## **Motorized Sport Trails:**

**ATV/UTV Program:** The Forestry Department was responsible for the administration of 46.8 miles of ATV/UTV trails in 2022. Most of the trails are located on county forest land in the south-central and western portions of the county. The Forestry Department contracts out the maintenance of these trails to ATV/UTV clubs. In turn, these clubs receive state reimbursement for their work based on the actual accountable costs they incur, up to a maximum of \$800 per mile. All Oneida County off-road vehicle trails are open to both ATV’s and UTV’s. In 2022, Oneida County distributed \$36,480 to the four ATV/UTV clubs under contract for services rendered. These maintenance funds are provided by several sources including: registration fees, non-resident trail pass fees and a portion of the excise tax on gasoline.

In 2022, the Department was awarded an ATV project grant of \$22,325 to rehabilitate approximately 1.5 miles of existing ATV trail in the Town of Enterprise. This project will be completed in 2023.

Two additional ATV grant projects were completed in 2022. Rynders, Inc. completed the rehabilitation of approximately 5.6 miles of trail in the Town of Little Rice. The second project



*Trail Washout in Lynne Needing Repair*



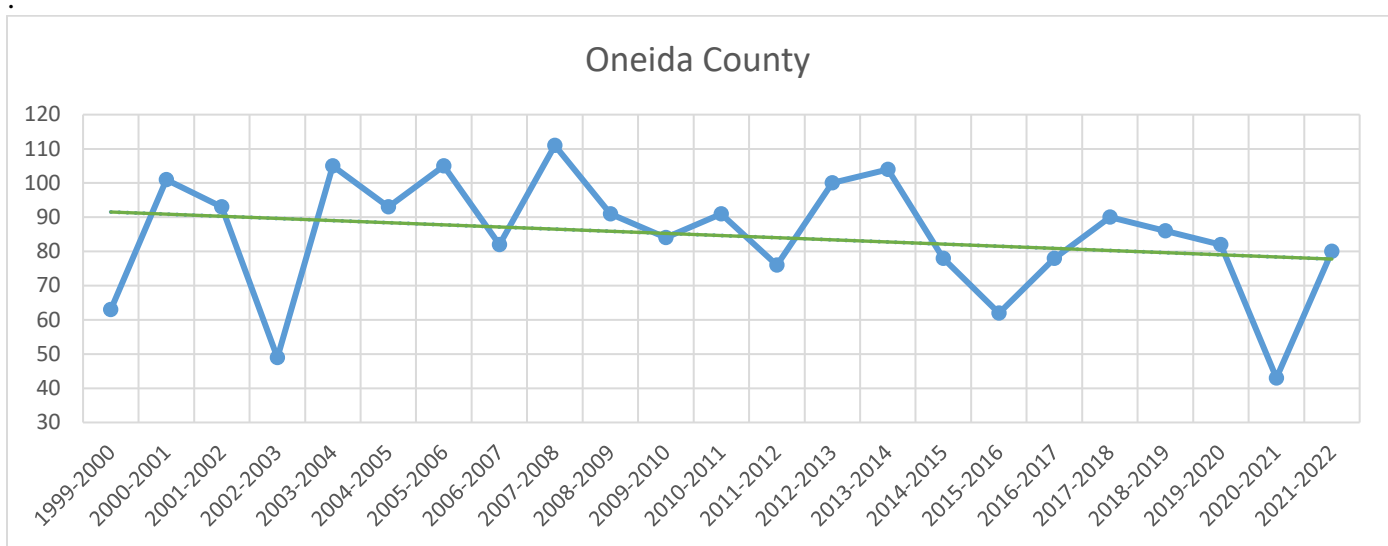
consisted of the Oneida County Highway Department repairing a large washout on a section of trail in the Town of Lynne.

The Monico Connector trail was partially constructed in the fall by Musson Brothers, Inc. and will be completed in the spring of 2023. This trail will add 4.8 new miles of funded ATV trail and will connect to the Forest County trail system.

### **Snowmobile Program:**

The Oneida County Forestry Department is also responsible for the administration and supervision of the county’s state-funded snowmobile trail network. Similar to the ATV/UTV program described above, the Forestry Department contracts out the maintenance of the 427.1 mile trail system to snowmobile clubs throughout the County. In 2022, the Forestry Department distributed \$384,390 to nine snowmobile clubs for maintenance of the state-funded snowmobile trail system located in Oneida County. These maintenance funds are provided by several sources including: registration fees, trail pass fees and a portion of the excise tax on gasoline.

Snowmobile trails were able to open in early season condition on December 28, 2021 and closed on March 17, 2022. The snowmobile trails were open to snowmobile enthusiasts for 80 days for the 2021-2022 season, almost double from the prior season of 43 days although close to the prior 20-year average of 85 days.



The 2021-2022 snowmobile season did not encompass any project grants; however, the challenge of retaining private and industrial land use agreements continues to increase, resulting in continued trail re-routes due to lost land use agreements from landowners.

### **Silent Sports Trails**

#### **Cross-Country Ski Trails:**

Starting in the mid-1970's the Forestry Department developed and maintained (signed, groomed, and brushed) cross-country ski trails. Over the years these ski trails continued to grow in popularity. Due to public demand, additional ski trail miles were developed and the Oneida County Forest ski trail network evolved into three signed and groomed ski trail systems that total approximately 30.0 miles.

The Washburn Trail, which is the largest and most popular of the three ski trails, is located adjacent to Perch Lake Park in the Town of Woodboro. The Washburn Ski Trail is 12.5 miles long, offering 3.7 miles of trail groomed for tracked skiing, and 8.8 miles of trail groomed for tracked and ski skating. Due to the hilly

topography found throughout the Washburn Lake Area, these trails are best suited for skiers possessing an intermediate to advanced skill set.



The Nose Lake Trail is located in the Town of Woodboro and offers 7.9 miles of trail groomed for traditional tracked skiing. The gentle topography upon which the Nose Lake Trail is located, makes this system very popular with skiers possessing either a beginner or intermediate skill set. Another popular feature of the Nose Lake Trail is that dogs are permitted.

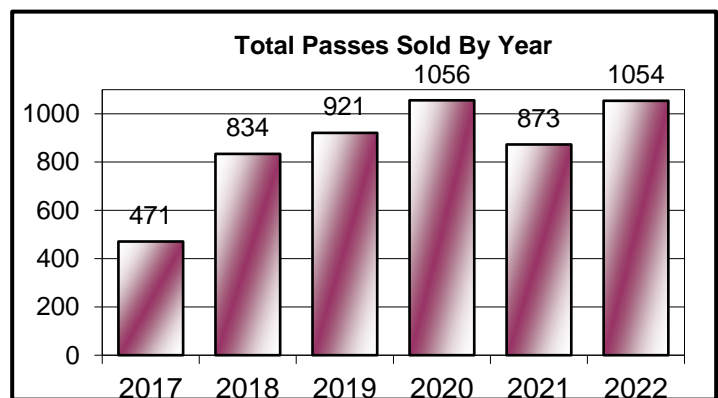
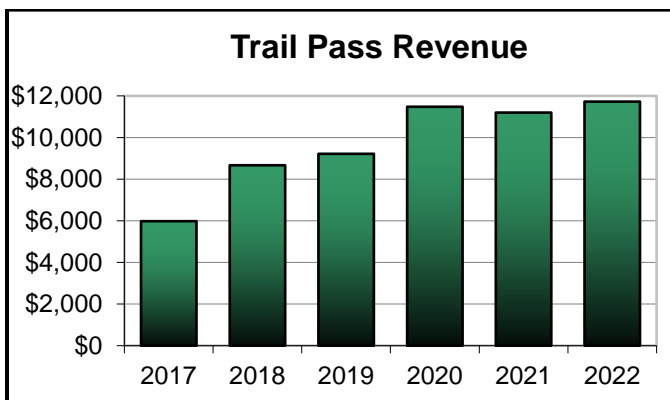
The Cassian Two-Way Ski Trail measures 19.2 miles round trip. As its name implies, the trail is located in the Town of Cassian. The Cassian Trail is located on gently rolling terrain and is designed to accommodate users with a wide range of skills. The Cassian Trail is groomed for traditional tracked skiing. Dogs are permitted on the trail system north of Sheep Ranch Road.

The Enterprise Winter Recreation Trail consists of two one-way loops that together equal approximately eight miles. The trail is groomed for fat-tire biking; however, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are also permitted on the trail.

In an effort to reduce trail maintenance expenses, the department re-evaluated the trail maintenance process. In 2012, the Forestry Department entered into an annual ski trail maintenance agreement with the Rhinelander Area Silent Trails Association (RASTA). Under the terms of the agreement, RASTA is responsible for brushing, signing and grooming the county’s 30-mile ski trail network. In addition to the funds from the County, RASTA utilizes donations, grants and club funds for development and maintenance of the trail systems. By outsourcing these services, the Forestry Department was able to reduce the silent sports trail budget from \$50,000 to approximately \$30,000 annually.

The Forestry Department also requests Recreational Trail Program (RTP) grants provided by the WDNR. These grants provide up to 50% reimbursement of costs attributed to development and/or maintenance of recreational trails. The grants are not guaranteed and are awarded by the WDNR by applying a ranking formula to grant applications received each year. For 2022, the Oneida County Forestry Department received reimbursement for ski trail maintenance of \$11,847 from RTP grants.

Finally, the Forestry Department implemented a trail pass system that requires individuals over the age of 18 to purchase a daily or annual trail pass to use any designated and maintained silent sport trail located on the Oneida County Forest. The annual trail pass fee was \$25 and a daily pass was \$5. The sale of silent sport trail passes for 2022, together with user donations, generated \$11,725 of revenue.



Note: In 2021, annual passes sold increased and daily passes sold decreased; therefore, the revenue reduction was not significant.



**Mountain Bike Trails:**

In 2022, the Oneida County Forestry Department worked in conjunction with the Rhinelander Area Silent Trails Association (RASTA) to maintain approximately 13 miles of single-track mountain bike trails located at the Washburn Lake Silent Sport Trail facility and approximately 25 miles of mountain bike trails lying on the ski trails at Washburn, Nose Lake and Cassian trail systems.

The Cassian trail and the west loop of the Nose Lake trail were first opened for mountain biking during non-ski season in 2020. Additionally, the east loop of the Nose Lake trail was opened to summer biking in 2022.

**Fat Tire Bike Trails:**

A formally designated and maintained fat tire bike trail was approved on the Oneida County Forest in December 2014. The trail is located within the Enterprise block of the Oneida County Forest and measures approximately eight miles in length. In addition to fat tire biking, the Enterprise Forest Winter Recreational Trail is also open for cross-country skiing and snow shoeing.

A short segment of the Washburn trail was opened and groomed for fat tire biking in 2022 on a trial basis.



**Hiking & Snowshoe Trails:**

In 2022, the Forestry Department maintained two hiking/snowshoe trails at Almon Park that total 2.25 miles in length. These trails travel through a variety of habitats, some of which require the use of wetland boardwalks to traverse. For those snowshoe enthusiasts looking for a more isolated experience, the County also provides 8.0 miles of trail located in the Enterprise Block of the Oneida County Forest. Finally, for individuals seeking a more challenging hiking and/or snowshoe experience, the County provides 15.0 miles of snowshoe trail at the Washburn and Nose Lake trail systems in addition to 11.0 miles of hiking trail at the Washburn Lake Silent Sport Trails facility.

*Almon Park Wetland Boardwalk & Hiking /Snowshoe Trail*

**RASTA Accomplishments:**

In addition to regular maintenance of the silent sports trail systems, minor trail re-routes, corner widening, signing and mowing, RASTA’s focus for 2022 was maintenance and rehabilitation of the current systems:

**Washburn Trail System:**

- Main activities consisted of maintenance and improvement of existing trails. Re-grading, shaping and widening of corners, was completed on numerous trail segments with assistance from DNR dozer operators. Trails were brushed and storm damaged trees were cleared on the entire system with help of the McNaughton crew.



- Three benches provided by the Forestry Department were placed at key points along the trail system.
- Upgraded and replaced signage as needed.
- Held two biking events at Washburn – RASTA Rally and Rock ‘n’ Root. These events draw participants and spectators from all over the state and mid-west.
- Groomed a segment of single-track trail for winter fat tire biking on a trial basis. This will be evaluated and may lead to additional trails and future grooming activities.

#### **Nose Lake Trail System:**

- Expanded the parking lot on Hancock/Oneida Lake Road with partnership from the Forestry and WDNR. With increasing use of this trail system, additional off-road parking was necessary. The expansion should provide parking for an additional five or six vehicles.
- Trail segments were graded and corners widened as needed. DNR dozer operators conducted some of the heavier earth moving projects.
- Storm damaged trees were cleared from all trails and the McNaughton crew assisted with brushing and widening.
- The East Loop was opened to summer biking providing an additional four miles of bike trails.

#### **Cassian Trail System:**

- Activities focuses on re-grading sections of trail and clearing storm damaged trees. This included improvement of “problem” areas and corner grading.
- The wetland boardwalk south of Timber Lake Road was extended 25 feet.

#### **Enterprise Trail System:**

- Brushing and removal of storm damaged trees was conducted throughout the year.
- Leveling and grading of trail segments was completed as needed.
- Numbered sign posts were added to key areas along the trail to improve safety.
- Informational/educational signs identifying forestry, habitat and geological features were added along the trail system.

#### **Disabled Access Trails:**

In 2022, the Forestry Department maintained three trail systems specifically developed to provide disabled users reasonable access to the County Forest. These trails are distributed throughout the Oneida County Forest with one trail located in each of the three County Forest Blocks (i.e. Enterprise, Cassian/Woodboro and Lynne/Little Rice). Uses of these areas include, but are not limited to: hunting, berry picking, bird watching and sightseeing. In order to qualify for a Disabled Access Trail Permit, a person must hold a valid WDNR Class A or B disability identification card as defined by WI state statutes. County Forest Disabled Access Trail Permits are free; however, a \$50 refundable key deposit is required.

#### **Miscellaneous Forest Access:**

The Forestry Department maintained one hunter-hiking trail in the town of Little Rice. This trail, known as the Bird Lane Trail, is approximately three miles long and mowed annually in late summer to provide upland game bird hunters with access to hundreds of acres of the Bird Lane Grouse Management Area.

In addition to the trail opportunities and County Forest Roads described in this report, the Oneida County Forest has hundreds of miles of woodland trails and old logging roads that have not formally been designated with recreational purpose, yet remain open year-round for general public use. The primary function of these woodland trails and old logging roads is to provide public access into the County Forest.

## **SAFETY & TRAINING**

The Forestry Department had one work-related incident reported; however, the incident did not result in lost time or a Worker's Compensation claim.

Permanent field employees of the Forestry Department are provided the opportunity to participate in the County steel-toe work shoe program allowing up to \$100 reimbursement per employee. In addition, the following personal protective gear was available to all Forestry field staff (i.e. temporary & permanent employees): hard hats, helmets, safety glasses, ear protection, chainsaw chaps, rubber gloves, and respirators.

Safety items purchased in 2022 include steel toe boots for three employees, tick repellent, work gloves, and safety glasses.

Four staff members attended a chainsaw safety program and the Forest Director, Assistant Forest Director and County Foresters attended Wildland Fire Safety training.

### **Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA):**

The WCFA is a non-profit, quasi government organization established to provide support to the growing county forest program. Additionally, WCFA provides a forum for the consideration of issues and policies of concern to the committee of the County Board responsible for forestry programs and management, including programs carried out under §28.10, 28.11 and Chapter 77 of Wisconsin Statutes.

Forestry staff and committee members are invited to attend conferences hosted by the WCFA each year. These conferences provide valuable information regarding governmental support and funding of the industry as well as the ability to network with other county forestry personnel.

