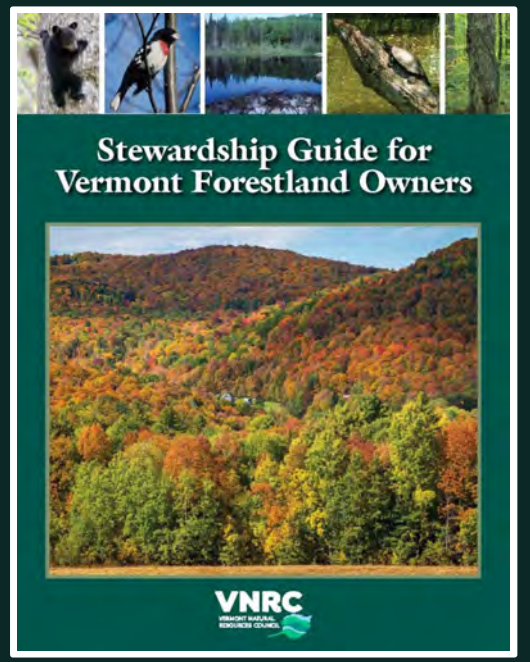
Understanding Your Forest Management Plan (FMP)

March 24, 2026

Vermont Forest Landowner Outreach Webinar Series



Find the full guide at
www.vnrc.org/forestlandowners/guide

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Roadmap

A simple path from “What is it?” to “What do I do with mine?”

1) What an FMP is

- A written document
- Also a process
- Sets direction + expectations

2) How it gets made

- Inventory & maps
- Goals & objectives
- Prescriptions & schedule

3) How to read yours

- Where to start
- What to verify
- Questions to ask next

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What is a Forest Management Plan?

A plan is both a document and a repeatable decision process.

A Forest Management Plan (FMP) is:

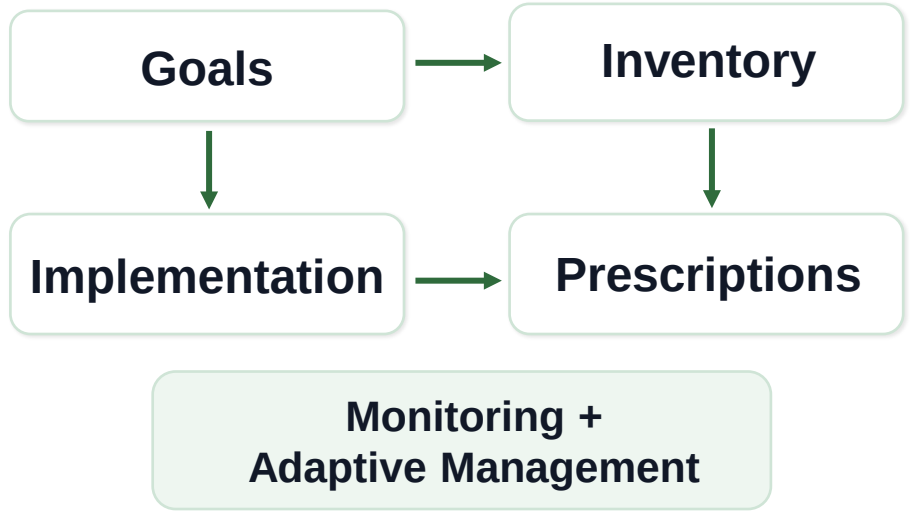
- a written document
- but it's also a **PROCESS**

Good plans tend to lead to good things:

- For the community / owners
- And for the forest

…because they connect today's actions to long-term goals.

The plan as a cycle



…then revise the plan as conditions change.

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Why Have a Forest Management Plan?

It organizes decisions — and helps you avoid expensive mistakes.

Plans help organize and guide:

- What is known
- What is wanted
- What has been done
- What will be done (and when)
- Continuity over time (even as people change)

> *"It is possible to make terrible mistakes in the management of forests. Good management plans help avoid them."*

Typical outcomes of a good FMP:

Clear priorities
So the "next step" is obvious.

Fewer surprises
Because you've looked at constraints up front.

Better communication
A shared reference for owners, foresters, and stakeholders.

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What Makes a “Good” Plan?

Many formats exist, but strong plans share a few core ingredients.

Core ingredients (the classic comprehensive plan):

- Clear statements of purposes and goals
- Descriptive assessments of the forest (soils, stands, water, access, etc.)
- Detailed schedule of recommended activities
- Maps that match the narrative

A practical test:
Could someone new to the property pick up the plan and make a reasonable decision about what to do next?

What you usually get:

Narrative

Maps

Tables

Schedule

…that all reference each other

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Different Kinds of “Plans”

Not every plan is a comprehensive Forest Management Plan.

Comprehensive FMP

- Purposes & goals
- Forest description + inventory
- Prescriptions + schedule
- Maps

Best when you need a full picture and long-term direction.

Management Guidelines

- Policy statements
- Principles to guide use & management
- Good starting point

Useful for evaluating proposed uses/activities.

Activity / Practice Plan

- Very specific action plan
- Short-term objectives
- Can support long-term goals

Great for a project: a harvest, a trail build, a habitat patch, etc.

Tip: When someone says “we have a plan,” ask which kind — and what decisions it supports.

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How a Plan is Created

A useful simplification: 3 basic steps.

1. **Identify the forest** — What it is now — its nature and potential.
2. **Identify purposes & goals** — What do owners/stakeholders want — and why?
3. **Schedule specific activities** — What needs to be done, where, and when.

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Start with a Forester (and the Right Team)

Foresters integrate disciplines — and help translate goals into workable actions.

Field inventory is the backbone of many plans.

Why start here?

- A forester can bring in other specialists as needed (wetlands, wildlife, cultural resources, recreation).
- They are experienced at integrating constraints: access, soils, water, regulations, markets, and safety.
- They usually have more experience implementing plans — not just writing them.

Quick selection questions

- What similar properties have you planned for?
- How will you gather inventory data and make maps?
- What does plan maintenance / updating look like?

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Step 1 – Identify the Forest

Inventory + maps: understand current conditions and “places within the place.”

Usually involves an inventory that documents:

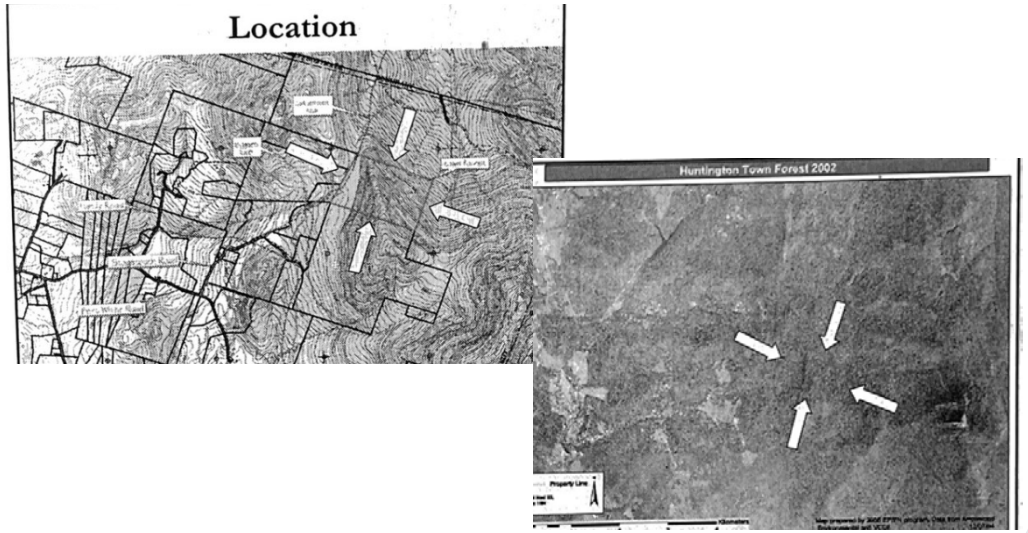
- Geology & soils
- Topography
- Vegetation & stand structure
- Wildlife habitat
- Water
- Trails, roads, and cultural attributes

Consider the place

Delineate “places” within the forest (examples):

- Site types (similar soils/landforms/water)
- Natural communities / special areas
- Stands (similar vegetation & structure)

Maps you’ll commonly see



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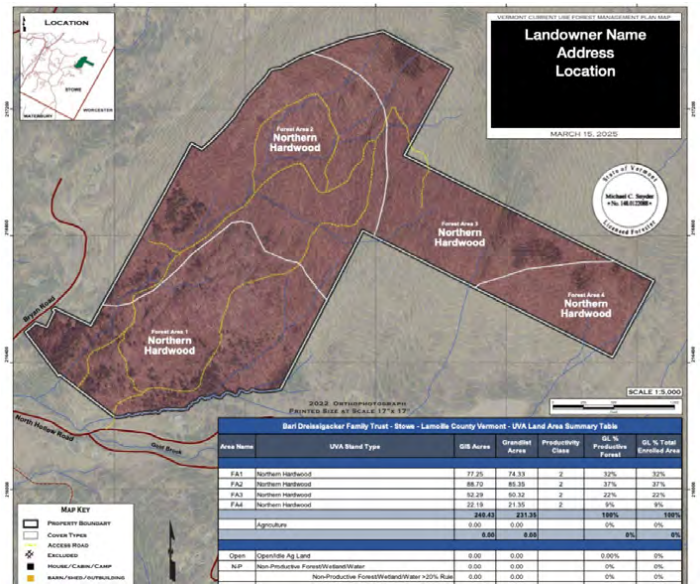
What the Inventory Produces

Expect a bundle of maps, tables, and a narrative that ties them together.

Example map set



Reading tips

- Check date + data sources
- Verify boundaries
- Use legend + scale
- Look for “special areas”

Plans can be… substantial

EXISTING STAND DESCRIPTION

Stand Number: 2 **Acres:** 4.16

Location & Setting:

Stand 2 occupies the higher central-eastern section of the parcel, above the excluded dwelling and barn area, on better-drained upper slopes. It is largely hardwood-dominated with scattered softwoods and a more even terrain compared to Stand 1and is heavily influenced by its proximity to open grass and shrub habitats with mowed paths.

Stand Cover Type: Mixedwood

Age Class Structure: even aged

Site Class: I/II **Site Index or Soil Series:** Glover-Vershire Complex; Buckland Loam

Stand History: This stand has been managed for firewood harvesting over the last 20 years, using a network of woods roads.

Stand Health: Normal. No major insect or disease problems noted. No invasives noted.

Sampling Method: Variable radius prism cruise

Sampling Date: 10/9/25 **Number Points/Plots:** 2 **BAF/Plot Size:** BAF=10

Quadratic Mean Stand Diameter (inches): 9.6

Basal Area (ft²/acre):

Total: 90 **Accentable Growing Stock:** 55 **Unacceptable Growing Stock:** 35

Don’t try to read it cover-to-cover first.

Start with:
1) goals
2) stand map
3) prescriptions + schedule

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Step 2 – Purposes & Goals

This is the “why” that everything else should trace back to.

What is the forest for?

Often: a combination of many purposes and goals.

Common goal categories

- Timber & forest products
- Wildlife habitat
- Carbon / climate benefits
- Recreation & trails
- Education & demonstration
- Water quality & riparian protection
- Aesthetics & scenery
- Cultural / historic resources

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From Goals → Objectives → Actions

Good plans translate values into measurable work you can schedule and evaluate.

A helpful ladder

Goal

→ Objective (measurable)

→ Practice / prescription

→ Schedule + monitoring

When reading a plan, ask:
“Can I trace each action back to a goal we care about?”

Example

Goal	Objective	Indicator
Wildlife habitat	Create 10 acres of young forest by 2028	Acres treated; regen checks
Water quality	Stabilize 3 erosion sites near streams	Photo points; BMP inspection
Recreation	Upgrade 1.5 miles of trail to “all seasons”	Trail condition rating

If objectives aren’t measurable, it’s hard to know if the plan is working.

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Step 3 – Prescriptions & Schedule

A plan becomes actionable when recommendations are organized by place, timing, and priority.

How schedules are typically organized

- By stand / management unit (location)
- By year / season (timing)
- By priority (what matters most)
- With notes on constraints (soils, water, access, permits)

Not just timber

Plans often include:

- Recreation trails
- Educational programs/facilities
- Habitat enhancement
- Access improvements (parking, trailheads, signs)
- Site cleanup / rehab / erosion control

Sample schedule (illustrative)

Stand	Recommendation	When	Priority
3A	Thin to improve growth; retain legacy trees	2026	High
5C	Stabilize skid trail crossing; seed & waterbar	2026	High
7B	Create 2–3 acre habitat patch (young forest)	2027	Med
TR	Trail reroute around wet area; add drainage	2028	Med

Look for: location + constraints + “success criteria.”

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How to Interpret YOUR Plan

A 10-minute checklist for first-time readers.

Start here

- ➢ Who is the owner / decision-maker?
- ➢ When was the plan written and last updated?
- ➢ What are the top 3–5 goals?
- ➢ Where are the maps (boundaries, stands, water, access)?
- ➢ How are stands / units labeled?

Then dig deeper

- ➢ What's the inventory basis (plots, cruise, remote sensing)?
- ➢ What prescriptions are recommended per stand?
- ➢ What's the schedule (next 1–3 years vs. long-term)?
- ➢ What constraints/BMPs are specified (soils, streams, wetlands)?
- ➢ How will outcomes be monitored and the plan updated?

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Then What?

Implement the plan — and stay on top of it.

Two habits that keep plans useful:

1) Monitoring

Track whether work happened — and whether it had the intended effect.

2) Adaptive Management

Update prescriptions as conditions, goals, and information change.

Questions?

Bring a map page or stand table from your plan — we can walk through it together.

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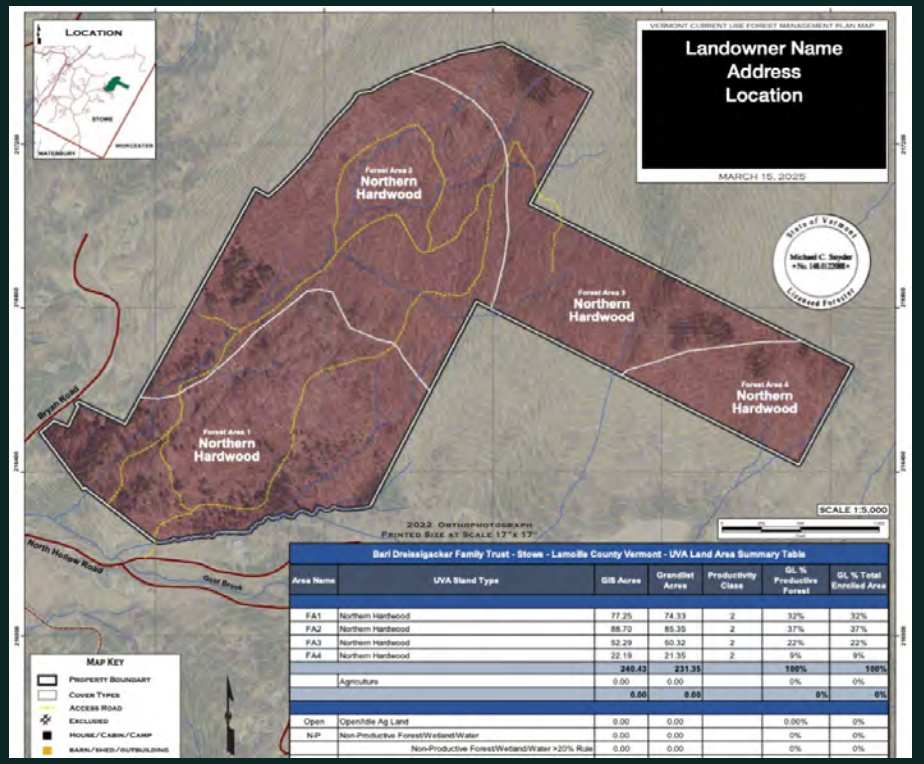
What is a Forest Stand?

What a stand is

Area with similar tree species
Similar age and structure
Similar management needs

Why foresters use stands

Recommendations tailored by place
Prescriptions written stand-by-stand
Makes plans easier to read



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Common Misunderstandings about Forest Management Plans

What a plan is NOT

Not an order to cut trees

Not a rigid schedule

What a plan IS

Decision framework

Reference document

Guide to long-term stewardship

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What Happens Without a Plan?

Typical pattern

Reactive decisions

Surprises about constraints

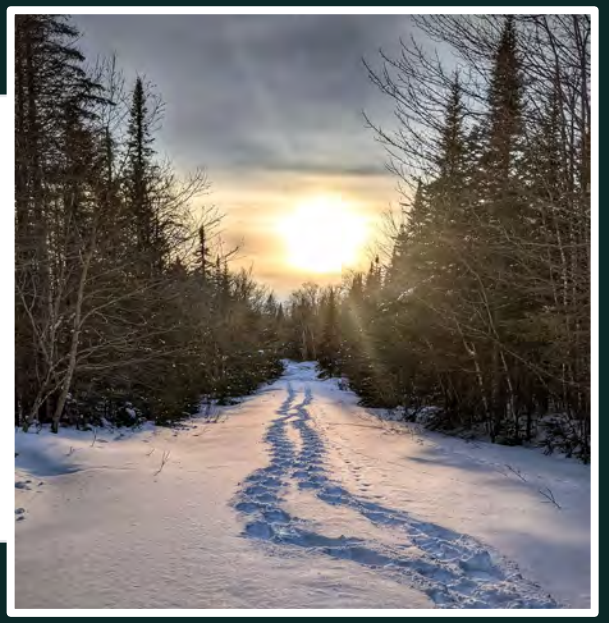
Missed opportunities

With a plan

Clear priorities

Fewer surprises

Better communication



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How to Choose a Forester

What to look for

Consulting forester
Relevant experience
Clear communication

Good questions

How will inventory be done?
How will maps be created?
How will the plan be updated?

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Questions?

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