

Forestry Zoning Districts in Langlade County

Langlade County is a northern Wisconsin county with a fairly contiguous block of forest and abundant public land. 73% is forested. Over 60% of the forestland is privately owned.



Map copyright
[Wisconsin Online®](http://WisconsinOnline.com)

Background

In 1968 Langlade County adopted a general zoning ordinance which included forestry districts. The ordinance defines a forestry district as an area designated for commercial production of trees, the conduct of forestry practices and related uses on large tracts of land that are well suited to these activities. The intent of the forestry district is to encourage forestry and also to recognize the value of forested areas as a recreational resource.

Revision

Under this original zoning ordinance almost all requests for residential use within the forestry district were approved. In 1985 the County revised the general zoning ordinance to incorporate state wetland and farmland preservation regulations that had come out in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Forestry was an issue during the revision because of the past interpretation of the forestry zoning district, which allowed wide spread residential development.

The zoning ordinance was revised to make the forest district exclusive to forestry use and prohibit residential development except when a



*Example of residential development in a forested area.
(not in Langlade County)*

Conditional Use Permit (CUP) or a rezoning of the property was obtained. Both processes require a public hearing. After this revision, the Board of Adjustment still approved almost all conditional use permits for residential developments in the forestry district on parcels 40 acres or greater. Because of this, residential development in the forest continued.

Compromise

The County Board realized that residential development was still occurring so they again revised the forestry zoning district. The ordinance lists specific standards for the placement of a residential development within the forestry zoning district and makes residential use a permitted use on 35 acre or greater parcels. A property owner can also apply for a conditional use permit for residences on parcels less than 35 acres or have a certified survey map of their parcel approved for a residence in the Forest District by the county Water and Land Use Planning Committee. The changes in this ordinance were mostly influenced by local government officials, but a core group of pro-environment people also followed specific cases.

Reflections on Forestry Zoning Districts

Strengths of forestry zoning districts

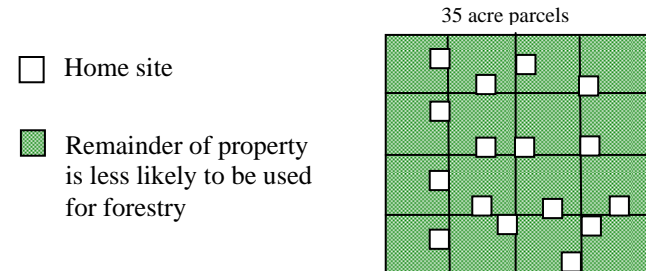
Forestry districts do deter people from building homes on small parcels in the forest. Initially establishing a forestry district was not costly or controversial because it was part of a larger package, the general zoning ordinance. If a Town or County were to implement forestry districts separately the process may take about 6 months. When the ordinance was revised to prohibit wide spread residential use, zoning was more attractive to some of the towns.

Weaknesses of forestry zoning districts

After the 1985 change that prohibited residential development, there was confusion about where the forest zoning applied because each town that was zoned ratified the new ordinance changes at separate times. The 1985 change had the effect of gaining some new towns and losing other towns under the zoning ordinance.

Forestry districts do not directly preserve forestland. The most recent change to allow residential development on 35 acre or greater parcels opens forestland to more houses, which could jeopardize the use of the forest for tree growth and harvest on large tracts of land.

Hypothetical development pattern under Forestry Zoning District that allows residential development



Summary

Forestry Districts would work in an area where forestry is important to the local economy. However, a resource-based assessment should be done first to determine where the Forestry District should be designated.

This case study was written by Bobbie Webster & Lynn Markam

Large lot forestry zoning districts

A number of counties in northern Wisconsin have forestry zoning districts with large minimum lot sizes in an effort to maintain land for forestry purposes. While this approach has the advantage of being relatively easy to administer, it has met with limited success for the following reasons:

- If landowners are allowed to build homes on the large parcels, the result is often large lot residential development, rather than working forest land.
- Local elected officials may approve conditional uses and/or rezoning requests for residential development on smaller parcels in the forestry zoning district.
- The minimum lot size is often reduced to a size that makes forestry uneconomical.

An alternative approach to maintaining large areas of land for forestry purposes is described in the planning and zoning case study from [Jefferson County](#).

For more information:

Langlade County Zoning Department - Becky Frisch, (715) 627-6206, rfrisch@co.langlade.wi.us, [Zoning website](#)