

## **INFORMATION AND EDUCATION**

The state forests and forest recreation areas provide opportunities for people to learn about natural and cultural resources, and their management. All state forests and forest recreation areas will have a program to provide information, education, demonstration, and/or interpretation of natural and/or cultural resources to the public. There is considerable flexibility in the direction these programs can go, based on the resources and abilities available at each property. These will be outlined in the Five-Year Information/Education Operational Guide to be developed by each property. There are some components that will be common to all properties. These are described below.

### **Good Neighbor Program**

The Good Neighbor Program is designed to better inform property neighbors of major activities occurring on the state property that could be disruptive to the neighbors. The first step in this process is the creation and maintenance of database listing all forest neighbors. The Access database format has already been developed and distributed to all properties. All properties are to use this database to store their neighbor information. All properties are to have the Access databases for their property completed by January 1, 2000. These databases will receive periodic update, with the whole database revised every five years.

The database will be used to contact neighbors of particular portions of the property where major management activities are planned, prior to the activity beginning. Major activities are anything non-routine or nonbasic, or that involve heavy equipment. Examples major activities that would require neighbor contact are new trail construction, reconstruction of existing trail with bulldozer, timber harvest, marking new property line. Examples of routine activities that do not require neighbor contact are renewing existing property line markings, clearing existing trail of downed trees and brush, timber inventory, and mowing fire/access roads.

The neighbors to be contacted prior to any activity are determined by the location of the activity. All neighbors adjacent and closely adjacent to the tract in which the activity occurs will be contacted about the activity.

The neighbor database will be used for other informational mailings that may be done by the property. This includes information on property open houses or field days, or a property newsletter.

The property may wish to expand the neighbor database or create a similar database to include interested individuals or groups from the surrounding communities that are not technically neighbors.

## **Signs**

Signs are the most common informational tool used on the state forests and forest recreation areas. The most numerous signs are along roads and in recreation areas. Wood signs should conform to DNR sign standards. Signs that provide roadway traffic control must meet the standards of traffic signs, and should be promulgated. Roadway signs that do not meet the standards should be considered there only for informational purposes.

Excellent opportunities for management information signs occur along all public roads and trails that pass through our properties. Because the audience will often be traveling in vehicles, such signs should be simple and easy to read.

Where appropriate, properties are encouraged to use Carsonite-type signs. These have utility for marking trails, property lines, parking units, and other situations. They are relatively easy to install and maintain.

There are several other informational signs used by properties. These are either metal or plastic. They serve a variety of purposes, including timber management information, Land and Water Conservation Fund usage, use of wildlife management funds, and use of Heritage Trust funds.

*Do not nail signs to trees.* Use posts to support signs - metal t-posts, Carsonite-type, or wood. If a sign must be nailed to a tree, the tree should be a species that will not reach merchantable size such as redbud or dogwood, or a suppressed understory tree.

## **Tract Management**

Every tract management guide developed for each property will address the information/education potential of the tract and planned activities in the tract. Some tracts with little or no activity, and limited public use will have little or no information/education development. Other tracts or activities may have considerable opportunity for information development.

All tracts that have a timber harvest will have at least a minimal informational sign installed during and for at least one growing season after completion. The minimum is the green and white Timber Management Area sign which each property has received in the past. Harvest areas that receive high public visitation should be considered for more intensive information presentation. These are likely to be areas along roads or that have trails going through them.

These high traffic areas are the recommended location for the T.R.E.E. (Timber Resource Education Effort) mini-kiosk signs. Each of these mini-kiosks will have the basic information about the activity, a visual "storyboard" section highlighting some phase of management, and information on BMPs.

For other areas, an example of a simple, yet effective system is using a standard sheet of

paper and a post. Develop a simple narrative explaining the harvest activity and the goals and benefits it achieves (use a larger font than 12 point to make it easy to read). Laminate the sheet, and attach it to the post. Set the post along the route most likely used by visitors. More than one of these can be installed depending on the visitation. They are easy to replace if vandalized. And the information can be readily changed as the operation progresses from marking, to logging, to TSI, to regrowth.

Other management activities that provide good information opportunities are timber stand improvement, tree planting, and wildlife projects. Similar projects can readily use generic signs designed for project type rather than tract specifics so they can be reused on later, similar projects.

### **Public Information Exchange**

State forests will provide opportunities for public information exchange and input with the public on major projects at the state forests. This will occur through an annual open house project where the public is invited to planned or on going projects at the properties. The goal is to provide and obtain project specific or property specific information and comments.

Properties will send tract management guides for tracts that will be harvested to the Property Program Director for posting on the Division website to provide project specific information and solicit project specific comments.

Personnel on properties have always and will continue to meet with interested persons regarding information or issues of concern. Personnel will, when possible, meet with interest groups to discuss common interests.

### **Presentations**

Properties often receive requests to make presentations to groups and schools. Properties will accommodate requests as resources and abilities allow.

Often a better alternative is to have groups, especially schools, come to the property for presentations or field days. This allows presentations to reach larger numbers of people.

### **Interpretive Trails**

Properties are encourage to develop self-guided forest or natural resource interpretive trails. These trails allow individuals or groups to learn about resources and resource management without the development of an in-person presentation. The trails can use either descriptive signs at the stops, or posted stops keyed to a descriptive brochure. The descriptive

brochure with keyed stops is the best method for most complex trails as it is easy to update. Even keyed trails with brochures should maintain a minimum level of signs to explain what the trail is about for those who do not have a brochure.

### **Nature Centers and Interpretive Areas**

A few properties have nature centers with interpretive staffing. Some properties have small areas in their lobbies for limited interpretive displays. These are excellent opportunities to reach the public with information on forest resources and the value of forests. Displays in the centers and areas should include information on forest resources and resource management. Contact the Property Program Director for assistance in developing these displays.

### **Section Bullet Summary**

- Properties will develop a Good Neighbor Program to inform neighbors of upcoming major activities.
- Properties will develop and maintain a neighbors database.
- Signs on properties provide information, such as about facilities and traffic control.
- Signs or narratives, such as T.R.E.E., are used to help interpret forest management activities.
- As resources allow, properties will make presentations to groups, either on-property or off-property.
- Properties should develop self-guided interpretive trails.
- Properties with nature centers or interpretive areas will include displays on forest resources and resource management.