

Wayne Andersen

2022 Michigan Tree Farmer of the Year

By Josh Shields, Manistee and Mason-Lake Conservation Districts

The Wayne Andersen Tree Farm is a beautiful 113-acre forest in the northwestern portion of Mason County, just a stone's throw from the famous Hamlin Lake. Wayne Andersen purchased 60 acres of this land in 1978, then purchased additional acres after that, resulting in the 113-acre Tree Farm along with water bodies, shrublands, and grasslands.

This Tree Farm, first certified in 2017, is a wonderful mix of habitats. Wayne's land contains a range of forest types, including pine and spruce plantations, upland forests dominated by red and sugar maple, black cherry, and aspen, and lowland forests dominated by red maple, dying and dead ash, birch, and eastern hemlock. Non-forested areas are also scattered throughout the property, adding habitat diversity to the forested areas. These non-forested areas contain a mix of scattered shrubs, wildflowers, grasses, and ferns. There are also two ponds (created by Wayne!) and creeks on the Tree Farm.

As a true environmental steward, Wayne manages his Tree Farm as an ecosystem. Wayne demonstrates balanced forest management by implementing practices that not only result in timber revenue, but also result in enhanced habitat and quality of recreation. His objectives are to manage the forest for long term production wood products, control the spread of non-native invasive species, and improve the habitat for specific wildlife species. Wayne is most interested in utilizing management techniques to create or enhance habitat for white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, woodcock, waterfowl, and songbirds. He uses the land for hunting white-tailed deer, hunting waterfowl, birding, hiking, snowshoeing, and observing nature. His forest management practices have resulted in a range of tree species along with a range of age classes (from seedlings to timber sized trees), thus promoting habitat diversity in terms of species and structure. He also worked with a contractor to create ponds to improve habitat for waterfowl such as dabbling ducks. Wayne also hired the Mason-Lake Conservation District to plant trees adjacent to the ponds. This tree planting project is not only meant to enhance the diversity of tree seedlings, but also meant to serve as an integrated pest management approach to slow the spread of the non-native invasive reed canarygrass, whereby the goal is for the trees to eventually form a closed canopy that will help shade out some of the reed canarygrass. And, as an advocate of managing invasive species, Wayne also implements his own control practices for non-native invasive shrubs by using a combination of mechanical tools and herbicides.

Protection of Threatened and Endangered Species, as well as aquatic habitat and wetlands, are critical components of being Certified in Tree Farm. Lake cress is a State Threatened aquatic plant that has not been detected on Wayne's property but does show up as a potential species according to Michigan Natural Features Inventory database. By following the recommended minimum riparian management zone of 100 feet adjacent to all water bodies, Wayne is protecting both the water and the land next to the water, thus protecting habitat that could eventually be occupied by lake cress.

Wayne participates in several other programs for woodland owners. Wayne's property is not just a Tree Farm; the land is also verified in Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat A*Syst (a habitat verification program) and enrolled in the Qualified Forest Program (a tax reduction program that promotes sustainable forest management). Wayne will also potentially be enrolling the land in a conservation easement to prevent development in the future! He implements many management activities on his parcel and cooperates with numerous organizations to carry out conservation practices. He works closely with professional foresters and loggers and takes special care to ensure that harvesting is being implemented in accordance with the numerous programs to which he belongs.

Wayne is also an active advocate for natural resources in his community. For example, he has served as the chairman for the Big Sable Watershed Restoration Committee, president of the Hamlin Lake Preservation Society, president of the Mason County Fin & Feather Club, and is a member of the Pere Marquette Watershed Council, Michigan United Conservation Club, and Michigan Trout Unlimited. Wayne leads by example and hosted a Tree Farm field day during the summer of 2018 and even paid to have local food provided at the event, without accepting money from the Michigan Tree Farm committee to do so. Wayne was also awarded the "Forestry Stewardship Award" from the Mason-Lake Conservation District in 1997.

In recognition of his exemplary woodland stewardship and advocacy for other family forest owners, Wayne Andersen has been named 2022 Michigan Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year. To quote Wayne – "This forested property provides recreation and exercise each month of the year. 'Looking back, it amazes me how events lined up to enable me to combine three parcels of land into one parcel of property'. 'I have been able to witness the results of good forestry practices on this property that have provided countless enjoyable memories'. 'I am always trying to visualize the future of the forest.'"