

Goals of the Lebanon Township Municipal Forest Stewardship Master Plan

Lebanon Township received a Plan Conformance Grant from the Highlands Council to create a municipal forest stewardship master plan (Plan). The intent of this Plan is to be a guidance document containing information about the forests owned by Lebanon Township and recommendations on how to better care for them.

The goals of the Plan are a reflection of the critical roles forests play for people and wildlife as well as forest-related concerns impacting township-owned forests. They will also help guide action-oriented objectives and stewardship recommendations for these forests. The eight final goals below have not been prioritized and were retained as individual goals, though individual goals may be combined in the Plan at the discretion of the forester and other natural resource professionals developing the Plan.

- 1) Protect and improve water quality, which includes managing our public forests to reduce erosion, runoff, and pollution into streams and wetlands.
- 2) Reduce impacts of forest pests and diseases like emerald ash borer, beech leaf disease, etc. in our public forests. Any chemical treatment recommended by the forester will be investigated thoroughly and, if applied, will be applied minimally on a case-by-case basis as directed by the forester and/or licensed pesticide applicator.
- 3) Reduce non-native invasive plants like barberry, stiltgrass, mile-a-minute, bamboo, etc. in our public forests. Any chemical treatment recommended by the forester will be investigated thoroughly and, if applied, will be applied minimally on a case-by-case basis as directed by the forester and/or licensed pesticide applicator.
- 4) Increase the ability of water to enter the ground in our public forests and replenish the groundwater supply for drinking water.
- 5) Increase habitat for a diversity of birds and other native wildlife in our public forests.
- 6) Develop trail access for passive outdoor recreation such hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, etc.
- 7) Increase native vegetation diversity to promote local forest resiliency.
- 8) Reduce grazing of overabundant deer in our public forests, which heavily impacts forest vegetation.

These eight goals were initially determined using the results of the forest inventory conducted on township-owned forests, recommendations from the forester, peer-reviewed scientific literature, and goals and/or priorities contained within the multitude of plans pertaining to Lebanon Township. The goals were then endorsed by the Environmental and Open Space Commission, Planning Board, Township Committee, and NJ Water Supply Authority (as a co-owner) and external stakeholder and public feedback was solicited through an online survey.

In total, 310 people completed the online survey about the goals of the Plan, the majority of which were Lebanon Township residents, and most survey respondents agreed with each of the eight goals (see Table 1). The most frequent question/concern overall submitted by survey respondents was the manner in which the goals will be implemented and the cost involved with achieving each goal. These concerns cannot be addressed in the goals, however, because the Plan, a guidance document for public forests owned by Lebanon Township, will likely include multiple methods to achieve each goal based on site conditions, the expertise of the forester and other natural resource professionals, the latest science, and current regulations. Furthermore, because the plan is a guidance document, implementation of any recommended method to achieve the goals in the Plan will not be mandatory. Therefore, any specific methods implemented on Township property, while guided by the

goals and recommendations in the Plan, as well as funding sources used for any implementation, will be decided by the Township Committee on a case-by-case basis for each property.

Specific comments submitted about each goal were considered and five of the eight goals were amended as a result (see below). Specifically, comments were submitted relaying concerns about the use of chemicals to reduce the impacts of forest pests (goal 2) and non-native invasive plants (goal 3), so a qualifying statement was added to each of those two goals. Survey respondents also raised concerns about attracting large mammalian predators with the goal to increase wildlife habitat diversity (goal 5), so the goal was amended to target habitat for birds, which are indicators of forest habitat diversity. Many survey respondents expressed confusion about the intent of the goal to increase passive outdoor recreation (goal 6) as well as impacts related to promoting recreational use, so the goal was amended to only include the development of trail access. The goal to increase vegetation diversity (goal 7) was amended to encompass more than droughts and warmer temperatures. Concerns were also raised by survey respondents about how grazing by deer would be reduced (goal 8). This goal is an important forest-related concern impacting township-owned forests and was not amended to add or exclude specific methods for implementing this goal. Any recommended method(s) to reduce grazing of overabundant deer will depend on site-specific data in each of the Township-owned forests and determined by the expertise of the forester and other natural resource professionals, the latest science, and current regulations.

Table 1. Summary of responses of all respondents for all draft forest goals in order of highest score (most agreement) to lowest score (least agreement). The score is the summary of points based on each response for the specific goal (strongly agree = 2 points, agree = 1 point, neutral = 0 points, disagree = -1 point, strongly disagree = -2 points).

All Respondents (310)		Number of Responses					% of Responses	
Goal	Score	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Protect/improve water quality	529	240	54	12	3	1	94.8%	1.3%
Reduce forest pests/diseases	519	229	64	14	3	0	94.5%	1.0%
Reduce non-native invasive plants	500	215	72	21	2	0	92.6%	0.6%
Increase groundwater recharge	480	207	73	23	7	0	90.3%	2.3%
Increase wildlife habitat	469	193	86	28	3	0	90.0%	1.0%
Increase passive recreation	411	182	76	30	15	7	83.2%	7.1%
Increase vegetation diversity	407	164	92	45	5	4	82.6%	2.9%
Reduce deer browse	317	143	72	66	17	12	69.4%	9.4%