

Lincoln County Forestry, Land and Parks Committee
Minutes of Monday, April 13, 2026 @ 8:00 A.M.
Lincoln County Service Center, Room 156
801 N. Sales St., Suite 106, Merrill, WI 54452 **715-539-1034**

Members Present: Greg Hartwig, Norbert Ashbeck, Ken Wickham, William Bialecki, Andy Zelinski

Absent: none

Members Excused: n/a

Visitors: Luke Williams, Lee Rahlf, Paul Russell, Russell Schreiber, Brent Loka

1. Call meeting to order. The Lincoln County Forestry, Land and Parks Committee met on Monday, April 13, 2026, in Conference Room 156, Lincoln County Service Center. The meeting was called to order by Hartwig at 8:00 a.m.
2. Approve minutes of March 9, 2026. Motion by Wickham, second by Zelinski to approve minutes of March 9 meeting as printed. All Ayes. Motion Carried.
3. Review year to date budget report. The Committee reviewed year to date budget report and placed on file. Motion by Ashbeck, second by Bialecki to approve the report and place on file.
4. Approval of budget modification. Budget modification report was distributed at the start of the meeting. Motion by Wickham and second by Zelinski to approve the budget modifications. All Ayes. Motion Carried.
5. Comments from members of the public or invited guests. None.
6. Loka Land Swap. Williams stated that the appraisals for both properties involved in the proposed land exchange have been completed and that the property currently owned by Lincoln County has a slightly higher appraised value of \$100,880, compared to Mr. Loka's property valued at \$92,000. Mr. Loka agreed to pay the county the difference in value in order to make the exchange an even trade. Discussion followed. A motion to approve the land exchange, with Loka paying the difference between the appraisals and contingent upon corporate counsel review and a title search, was made by Wickham and seconded by Bialecki. All ayes. Motion carried.
7. Wegner Property – Update and Possible Committee Action. Williams stated that his staff has reviewed the property in question and found it to be typical of the New Wood area, noting that the property has been harvested in the past. He also reported that there is a small cabin located on the property. The committee expressed little interest in pursuing acquisition at this time, as there would be no immediate return on investment, the property would not be ready for harvest for another 10–15 years, and it would no longer remain on the tax roll if acquired by the county. The committee indicated that they would only consider the property if it were gifted to the county or offered at a significantly reduced price. No action was taken.
8. Russell Property – Landowner Interest in Selling to County. Williams stated that he had been contacted by a landowner interested in selling property adjacent to county forest to Lincoln County. The property, located in the Town of Tomahawk, includes 233 acres enrolled in MFL-Open and has approximately 125 acres scheduled for harvest prior to 2030. The full 280-acre parcel is wooded and contains a cabin. Paul Russell stated that the property has been in his family for many years and that they would like to sell it to

the county to ensure it remains open to the public. He also noted that the property contains mature timber ready for harvest. Discussion followed. The committee requested that staff take a closer look at the property and report back at the next meeting. No action was taken.

9. Discussion on Forestry Office Location to Proposed Highway Department Facility.

Williams provided an update on discussions regarding the potential relocation of the Forestry Department to the proposed Highway Department facility. He recently attended a Highway Committee meeting to discuss consolidation options and preferred locations. After meeting with forestry staff and evaluating the department's long-term needs, Williams stated that relocating to the new Merrill highway office would be the most suitable option, ideally with a suite-style layout similar to the department's current workspace. He noted that having some garage space for trucks and equipment would also be beneficial. During the Highway Committee meeting, however, members emphasized that the new facility is intended primarily for highway operations and that the Forestry Department already has an existing workspace. Williams acknowledged that garage space is more of a "wish list" item, but expressed significant concern about the long-term practicality of continuing to operate out of the cubicle environment in the upstairs area of the Service Center. He felt it was important to bring this issue to the Forestry Committee so they could advocate for ensuring the department has an appropriate and functional workspace in future discussions. Discussion followed.

10. T033-17 Schreiber Trucking & Logging – Consideration of Sale Closure or Assessment.

Williams reported on the status of timber sale T033-17 with Schreiber Trucking & Logging and requested committee consideration of either closing the sale or assessing a penalty. He explained that the 27-acre sale was established in 2017 but not sold until 2021, and it is set to expire in May. Russ Schreiber harvested the majority of the sale in 2024 but was unable to complete a 4.25-acre tamarack and black spruce clear-cut due to wet conditions. He returned in 2025 but again could not access the area because of persistent wetness and has indicated he does not intend to complete the remaining portion. Rahlf recently cruised the uncut timber and determined its value to be \$1,120.06. The performance bond on the sale is \$2,413.88. Williams informed the committee that they could retain the full bond, retain only the value of the uncut timber, or consider the sale complete. He recommended either keeping the amount equal to the uncut timber or closing the sale without penalty, noting that Schreiber made multiple attempts to finish the work. Following discussion, a motion was made by Hartwig to close the sale without penalty, seconded by Bialecki. All ayes. Motion carried.

11. T-Mobile Grant – Approval of Previously Submitted Application. Williams informed the committee that he became aware of the T-Mobile Small Town Grant Program on March 5, which fell between committee meetings. After consulting with administration, he was permitted to apply and then obtain approval retroactively. He submitted an application for a \$50,000 project to install ADA-compliant fishing piers and access paths on Larson, Ament, and Otter Lakes and secured letters of support from Trout Unlimited, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, the Wisconsin DNR, and the Lincoln County Sports Club. The grant requires no financial match; however, if awarded, the county would provide labor for installation. Award announcements are expected on June 26. Because this is a new grant, it will require a county board resolution, which Williams will draft if the project is selected. Discussion followed. Motion by Zelinski, second by Ashbeck, to approve. All ayes. Motion carried.

12. Garlic Mustard – Discussion on Updated Control Strategy. Williams provided a brief history of garlic mustard control on the county forest, noting that efforts began in 2007. Over that time, significant staff time, cost, and effort have been invested in control work;

however, the invasive has continued to spread, and treated areas do not appear to show substantial long-term reduction even after years of management. After consulting with other counties and the DNR, Williams stated that he believes it is an appropriate time to shift to a new approach focused on high-use and motorized recreation areas, as well as isolated new infestations. This strategy would reduce both time and cost while still addressing priority locations. Because the forestry department has historically committed to broad control efforts, he felt it was important to bring the proposed change to the committee. The committee agreed with his assessment and supported an adjusted, reduced approach. No action taken.

13. LTE Positions – Approval for two Employees (Not to Exceed Original Hour Allotments)

Williams stated that 1,043 hours were budgeted for this position, with the goal of recruiting someone available to begin in early April and work through October. However, the only applicants received were students with summer availability. As a result, he recommended hiring two positions to share the originally budgeted hours for the summer season. Motion by Wickham, second by Bialecki, to approve. All ayes. Motion carried.

14. Discuss and Approve Timber Sale Extensions and Increases. There are 9 timber sale contracts that are set to expire this May that were brought forth to the committee

a. Tract 027-16-8 – Wilson Forestry, LLC

This is a very wet sale with approximately two-thirds of the harvest already completed. Williams recommended a one-year extension with a 0% increase. Staff will obtain an estimate of the uncut timber, and if the sale is not completed within the extension period, the county should charge for the remaining uncut volume and take the sale back. Motion by Zelinski, second by Bialecki to extend for one year at 0% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

b. Tract 032-19-4 –Wilson Forestry, LLC

Williams reported that he spoke with Jim Wilson, who stated that the sale has difficult and wet access. Wilson indicated that he does not realistically plan to cut it and would prefer to return the sale. Williams recommended retaining his bond (\$3,460.09) and advertising the sale in the fall. Motion by Wickham, second by Bialecki, to retain the performance bond and advertise sale in the fall. All ayes. Motion carried.

c. Tract 014-022 – Wilson Forestry, LLC

This sale has already been extended twice, and no attempts have been made to begin cutting. Williams recommended extending the contract for one additional year and assessing a 5% stumpage increase. Motion by Wickham, second by Zelinski to extend for one year at 5% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

d. Tract 022-18-6 – Central Wisconsin Lumber (CWL), LLC

This is an older sale that has already been extended six times, and the stumpage rate is currently very high. The sale was originally designated as a winter sale due to the presence of garlic mustard, although under current practices it would otherwise be considered suitable for summer operations. Williams reported that he spoke with Scott Foth of CWL, who committed to completing the harvest this summer if permitted to operate during that season. Given the age of the sale, the

fact that it would no longer be sold as a winter-only sale, and that the county would receive significantly less revenue if it were resold today, Williams recommended allowing CWL to cut this summer and granting a six-month extension with a 0% increase. Motion by Zelinski, second by Bialecki to extend for six months at 0% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

e. Tract 008-22-2 – Central Wisconsin Lumber (CWL), LLC

This sale has been extended twice and also carries very high stumpage rates. The contractor is currently cutting the sale, and we expect it will be completed before the contract expires. However, in the event a small portion remains, a valid contract must still be in place. Williams therefore recommended extending the contract for one year at a 0% increase. Motion by Wickham, second by Zelinski to extend for 1 year at 0% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

f. Tract 003-23-2 – Central Wisconsin Lumber (CWL), LLC

This sale has been extended twice and is considered summer ground. No attempts have been made to begin cutting. Williams recommended granting a one-year extension with a 5% stumpage increase. Motion by Bialecki, second by Ashbeck to extend for 1 year at 5% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

g. Tract 011-24-1 – Country Forest Products

This is the first extension for this sale. Williams recommended extending the contract for one year and assessing a 5% stumpage increase. Motion by Bialecki, second by Wickham to extend for 1 year at 5% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

h. Tract 014-24-1 – Country Forest Products.

This is the first extension for this sale. Williams recommended extending the contract for one year and assessing a 5% stumpage increase. Motion by Zelinski, second by Ashbeck to extend for 1 year at 5% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

i. Tract 006-24-1 – Smola Enterprises, LLC

This is the first extension for this sale. Williams recommended extending the contract for one year and assessing a 5% stumpage increase. Motion by Zelinski, second by Wickham to extend for 1 year at 5% increase. All ayes. Motion carried.

15. WDNR Report. Groth was absent due to the DNR's shift to a seven-day scheduling model for the spring fire season. He had worked through the weekend and had today off, making him unable to attend the meeting. In his update provided beforehand, he reported that staff have been working on marking a hardwood sale off Poplar and are well positioned to complete their remaining county hours for the year.

16. Review Administrator's written report. Williams asked if anyone had any questions on the report. Discussion followed. Report placed on file.

17. Close timber sales.

Kleinschmidt Logging
Johnson Brothers

T020-24
T040-19

Close and return Letter of Credit.
Close and refund bond.

Williams recommended closing and refunding bonds. Motion by Bialecki, second by Ashbeck to close sales per Williams recommendation. All ayes. Motion carried

18. Set next meeting date. The next Forestry, Land & Parks Committee Meeting is set as follows: Monday, May 11, 2026 at 8:00 a.m., LCSC Conference Room 255

19. The Committee may consider a motion to adjourn into closed session (roll call vote required), pursuant to Wis. Stat. 19.85(1)(c) (c), Wis. Stats. "Considering employment, promotion, compensation or performance evaluation data of any public employee over which the governmental body has jurisdiction or excess responsibility", to wit: Three month Performance Evaluation of the County Forest Administrator.
Motion by Wickham to enter closed session with committee members present, with Williams remaining. Roll call vote: Hartwig: aye, Zelinski: aye, Ashbeck: aye, Bialecki: aye. Motion carried.

20. Reconvene to Open Session – Take any necessary action on items discussed during closed session. Motion by Wickham, second by Zelinski to enter open session. Roll call vote: Hartwig: aye, Zelinski: aye, Ashbeck: Aye, Bialecki: aye. Motion Carried. No action was taken on items discussed in closed session.

21. Adjourn. Motion to adjourn meeting by Wickham, second by Zelinski at 9:31 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Luke Williams