



# A Hands On Approach to Forest Management

*Gerald Grossman: 20-years of management on his own family forest. Photo Courtesy of Tina Hall*

*Mackinac County - Michigan* If you live in the eastern Upper Peninsula and have anything to do with forestry, you have probably heard of Gerald Grossman, or Jerry, as he likes to be called. Grossman is the owner of Grossman Forestry Company, a company he started in 1990. The successful company, based in Newberry in Luce County, manages over 330,000 acres of forestland and has written over 918 Forest Stewardship Plans for private landowners – large and small. The firm manages the largest Certified American Tree Farm System® Group in Michigan for small landowners with 190 members and 148,348 acres. Members are certified sustainable to the American Forest Foundations Standards of Sustainability.

Jerry and his wife Amy, personally own 560 acres in Mackinac County, west of Engadine. The land was purchased in two transactions (1995 & 2002). Portions had previously been part of a 1,240 acre hunt and recreational club with several cabins, a small pond, and trails.

The property's makeup is diverse and fairly typical of forest and old pasture land that is now growing back into forest. The property is one-third aspen, one-third hardwoods, and one-third spruce-fir-cedar and includes a dense cedar swamp that received damage during a wind event. The soil is glacial till over limestone bedrock with areas of organic muck. The glacial till is generally loam to sandy loam. Given its mix of uses as forest and pasture in the past, the property includes a lot of transitional areas between fields and forests.

**“By developing and implementing a Forest Stewardship Plan, landowners can achieve their goals for forestland ownership through a combination of recreational, wildlife and financial legacy goals.”**

When Jerry bought the property, his ambition was to focus on better forests for grouse, deer and woodcock management. One of his challenges was a high percent of mature aspen and few hard mast producing trees (no oak and the beech trees were dying from beech bark disease). The focus of his Forest Stewardship Plans have been to develop:

1. Three distinct aspen age classes.
2. Plant wildlife shrubs and trees.
3. Oak planting and regeneration.
4. Big tree management and retention.
5. Vernal pond and waterfowl nesting boxes management.
6. Riparian zone retention/protection management.
7. Deer management supplemental plan - mitigate excessive deer browse activity.
8. Participation in NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program
9. Invasive species mitigation work.

### **Understanding the Specifics of the Land**

Jerry developed three distinct aspen age classes on his land. The older aspen – while at risk for being blown down – provide good bud food for grouse. The younger stands, growing thick and almost impenetrable, are good brood habitat and a refuge for grouse from predators.



Jerry Grossman next to one of the oak he planted as an acorn.  
*Photo Courtesy of the Amy Grossman*

Though it was a risk not to do the work all at once, spreading the aspen work out over time worked for Jerry. In 1996, he cut his first regeneration clear-cut of 26 acres. He then held off until 2000, when he did another cut, and then another 30 acre cut in 2007. With considerations to browse caused by the high deer numbers, he cut the last 25 acres of aspen in 2013. The initial 26 acre aspen regeneration unit will be ready for another regeneration harvest in about 15 years.

One lesson he learned from the harvesting involved white cedar found in pockets within the aspen. After leaving individual cedar trees during aspen removal, 100% of the cedar blew down in the first year. What he discovered from this lesson was in areas with limestone bedrock soils, you need to plan for retention pockets for aspen and cedar (big enough to regenerate in the future), so isolated trees don't blow down.

Since 1995, Jerry has planted 1300 oak seedlings and many acorns. Unfortunately, the high number of deer has negatively impacted his efforts and he had to learn to adapt his methods. Jerry found that young, browsed trees could be vigorously regenerated by fencing them and cutting them off at the ground. The next year, the trees grew strongly inside the protection of the cage. Some of his first oak trees planted in 1996 produced acorns in 2016, so some of the trees are now reaching reproductive maturity. Jerry has also planted large number of hawthorn and crab apples for grouse and other birds to eat.

### **Programs Jerry Participated in for Land Management**

In his 20 years of management, he has had three versions of his Forest Stewardship Plan, updating each version as management adapts to the changing conditions of his property. Jerry has also enrolled in several programs that provide tax breaks or cost-sharing on his property:

Qualified Forest Program (QF). The program helps landowners actively manage privately owned forests to encourage and enhance wildlife habitat, help with commercial harvest and improve other non-forest resources. In exchange for the property owner's sustainable practices, the landowner is exempt from the local school operating millage, thus their state property tax is lower – usually by a net of 16 mills.

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) – Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Program. The CSP encourages land stewards to improve conservation performance on a property by providing funds for installing and adopting additional activities, and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities on

agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land. NRCS accepts applications for CSP at local service centers across the state. CSP provides payments to landowners to implement specific practices to enhance their forest land.

### **Lessons from the Field**

Jerry's work has transformed the forest he owns, and he has hosted several field tours, including a Michigan Tree Farm Tour, to showcase what best practices can do. As Jerry learned, there are two important aspects of land management forest owners should understand:

1. Know your site conditions, geology and soils; know what your property has the potential to grow and work with this potential, not against it.
2. Be patient and follow your management plan. Document your steps and actions in implementing a plan; monitor and adapt as needed.

Landforms and soils are the foundation of all land use management decisions. Without a good foundation, all forestry decisions will have problems withstanding the test of time. For any strong forest management plan, know what you have and implement a plan with that knowledge. Jerry's work is an example of what smart management practices, coupled with forestry programs, can produce.

### **More Information**

Michigan Forest Stewardship Program:

<http://www.Michigan.gov/ForestStewardship>

Qualified Forest Program:

<http://www.michigan.gov/qfp>

NRCS – CSP Program:

[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

[https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/mi/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcs141p2\\_024531](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/mi/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcs141p2_024531)