

# Rusk County Success from the Field

## Growing Forest Products and Quality Wildlife Habitat

### Background

The year is 1900 and Ben Christianson makes an 80-acre investment that would help define his family for over a century. Ben could not have known at the time, but his great, great grandson Steve, now a retired forester, still cares for and grows that investment. Steve followed his grandfather Audie Sr. and father Audie Jr. into the world of forestry. He currently manages the timber on a 200-acre parcel centered around the original 80-acres in the shadow of the Blue Hills in northwest Rusk County. The forest consists of mature oak, rolling pine plantations, sugar bush and an old pasture that is regenerating to northern mixed hardwoods.

### Program Successes

With a background in forestry, Steve has long understood the need to have a plan that includes a set of attainable goals. The Christianson farm is proudly enrolled in the Managed Forest Law (MFL) program with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. MFL requires a stewardship plan so Steve turned to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) to help implement that plan.

Steve's first priority was wildlife habitat. Steve recently told NRCS, "this property is managed for more than just boards and cords, the wildlife is very important to my family and the forest as a whole." With that in mind, Steve planted pollinator habitat and a diverse mix of flowering shrubs through the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Patrick Richter, NRCS District Conservationist for Barron and Rusk counties noted, "It is important to remember that we are all stewards of the land. NRCS offers several programs that provide technical and financial assistance for landowners to install conservation practices, such as tree and shrub planting, to benefit wildlife."

Other improvements on the farm have included forest stand improvement to remove undesired species like ironwood and release sugar maple in the understory. Managing for forest succession, Steve has created patch openings which allow for sunlight to reach the forest floor and create a flush of vegetation that spurs new growth. Managing forest succession is a primary focus for Steve. He is particularly proud of an old pasture that is being regenerated.



Steve Christianson and Jared Elm, of the RGS discuss forest stand improvements that will benefit overall forest production and provide high quality wildlife habitat.



Steve is proud of the diversity found on his land. During a field visit with NRCS, they found edible wild onions (also known as ramps or leeks) growing throughout the hardwood forest.

### Future Plans

Steve plans to continue working with NRCS and RGS to combat some new issues popping up on the farm. Oak wilt has found its way into the timber. This can have stand level implications if not managed. Another threat has recently shown up as well, buckthorn, which is an invasive plant that competes with native trees and shrubs. Steve plans to begin to control buckthorn on the property with a mix of chemical and mechanical techniques designed to target only the invasive pests.

