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Marinette County Tax Data Signals a Need for Change

Town of Goodman leads Marinette County with the highest incentives to convert productive forest land to other uses

An analysis conducted by the Wisconsin Alliance of Forest Owners (WAFO) has found that the Town of Goodman in Marinette County provides forest landowners with the greatest incentives to convert their land to other uses.

Ironically, Marinette County data shows that timber harvests power the local economy. According to Department of Natural Resources figures from 2010, the county's forest products and processing industry generates an output of \$230,000,000 per year, while agriculture, fishing, and hunting together generate just \$75,000,000.

According to Wisconsin Department of Revenue data, 2013 property taxes on productive forest lands in the Town of Goodman averaged \$43.41 per acre. Landowners who convert their woodlands to pasture will save approximately \$42.53/acre, paying only \$0.88 per acre if they allow cattle to graze their woods. If they clear cut their forest land and return it to crop production, their property taxes will average approximately \$3.01/acre.

The Town of Middle Inlet follows close behind, where taxes on productive forest land average \$34.89/acre, whereas taxes on pastured woodland average \$0.80/acre.

Wisconsin property taxes are based first on how land is classified, and secondly on what percentage of the land's Fair Market Value (FMV) is used to calculate the tax bill. Land classified as agricultural in Wisconsin is taxed at low rates in order to encourage agricultural uses. Productive forest land, on the other hand, is generally taxed based on or near 100 percent of FMV. Yet the annual income per acre of productive forest land, where harvests occur only rarely, is extremely low compared to land growing annual crops.

WAFO is an organization of private forest land owners which works with the legislature and agricultural groups towards fair taxation for forest lands, and for regulatory reform to encourage sustainable management of Wisconsin's privately-owned woodlands. WAFO encourages forest landowners to understand how their land is classified and taxed, and to evaluate their property tax options. For county-by-county tax data and tools for assessing your property tax bill, visit the WAFO website at www.wiafo.org, call WAFO at (608) 218-4789, or email WAFO at info@wiafo.org.