



# American Tree Farm System

## Community - Recognition - Legacy

CATTAIL LODGE

By Ben Marchant



Some of the most rewarding aspects of being a forester in the Forestry Assistance Program include building relationships with forestowners and witnessing their property goals come to fruition. The forestowners come from diverse backgrounds, each contributing a unique perspective and connection to their woodlands. Among them is the ownership group behind the Cattail Lodge, four lifelong friends whose shared vision reflects a deep appreciation for the land and a commitment to its long-term stewardship.

Located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the 160-acre property features aspen, northern hardwoods, and lowland conifers, creating an ecologically diverse forest typical of the region. The group's management objectives focus on sustainable forestry practices that enhance wildlife habitat, especially for ruffed grouse and white-tailed deer. They also aim to maintain forest health and vigor, protect water quality, and generate periodic income through moderate, well-planned harvests.

The four owners of Cattail Lodge are more than just partners in a hunting camp. They are best friends who have known each other since childhood, sharing more than seven decades of memories and experiences. Their bond is as strong today as it was in their youth. As Harry Erickson put it, "There's probably only been two Thursdays we haven't been at camp in the past year." This weekly tradition has become more than just an excuse to gather. It keeps them closely connected, strengthens their friendship, and fosters relationships within the surrounding community. The land itself holds deep personal significance, as the property where the camp now stands was once farmed by Curt Erickson's mother, linking today's stewardship directly to family history. As Curt reflected, "We grew up poor, worked hard for the property, and want to see it stay."

This shared history led the group to formalize its ownership through a legal partnership, establishing a clear framework for decision-making and long-term stability. The agreement requires unanimous approval for major actions and includes safeguards to discourage impulsive decisions, including the sale of ownership shares. When difficult topics arise, the partners rely on this framework to guide discussions and maintain unity, ensuring that both their friendship and the future of the land remain intact.

Enrollment in the American Tree Farm System recognized the Cattail Lodge owners for the efforts they had already invested in the property and renewed their motivation to continue improving it. They readily admit with a smile that the large green Tree Farm sign was a welcome perk. Their

Thursday gatherings at the camp also became opportunities to review management plans, discuss harvests, and work through program requirements together.

Since enrolling in Tree Farm and participating in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Forest, Wetland and Habitat System, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation (NRCS) Stewardship Program, they have completed a commercial timber harvest, constructed brush piles to enhance small game habitat, and planted numerous native species to increase diversity and cover. However, the process was not without challenges. Finding a logger, negotiating easements, and maintaining compliance with program standards required persistence and coordination. Yet, the results have been tangible. As Harry noted, "We've had a lot more rabbits, better bucks, and more deer." The group's active management and commitment to stewardship programs have enhanced wildlife habitat, improved forest health, and increased property resilience. Their efforts demonstrate that careful, consistent work delivers real results.

Ultimately, the strength of the Cattail Lodge project lies in the ownership group's unified commitment to stewardship. While their shared history brought them together, it is their shared objectives, improving wildlife habitat, sustaining forest health, protecting water resources, and responsibly harvesting timber, that guide their on-the-ground management decisions. Their property serves as an example of how collaborative ownership, clear priorities, and sound forestry principles can work together to achieve balanced, sustainable outcomes. ♣

*Ben Marchant is the FAP Forester for Delta Conservation District and serves as the district coordinator for the American Tree Farm System. Ben graduated from The University of Florida in 2024 with a BS degree in Forest Resources and Conservation while simultaneously earning a certificate in Fire Ecology and Management.*

*Curt Erickson is on the left, and Harry Erickson is on the right.*

