

Illinois Forestry Association Baseline Strategic Plan – 2015-2019

Purpose Statement from Articles of Incorporation

The Illinois Forestry Association is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan group organized for the purposes of providing a statewide voice for common interests of Illinois forestry; to act as a clearinghouse of information on important issues related to rural and community forests and forestry in Illinois; connect people to available technical and forestry management training; facilitate a cohesiveness among local forestry groups and their activities to make a greater impact on forestry programs in Illinois.

The Illinois Forestry Association is organized exclusively for charitable, agricultural, educational, scientific, research, professional, commercial, industrial, or trade association purposes as set forth in Section 103.35 of the General Not for Profit Corporation Act.

IFA Mission

The mission of the Illinois Forestry Association is to act on issues that impact rural and community forests and to promote forestry in Illinois

IFA Vision

The vision of the Illinois Forestry Association is to be a highly effective, “go to” community of well-informed property owners who are managing their trees and forests and are influential with their peers and government.

Five Goals

1. Promote forest management and help landowners manage forests
2. Educate members and the general public
3. Policy advocacy for IL Forests
4. Understand/engage members and increase membership
5. Efficient and Effective IFA Governance

Goals, Strategies, and Actions for 2015-19:

GOAL 1: Promote forest management and help landowners manage forests.

Lead IFA Committee: Technical Advisory

Strategy 1.1: Utilize existing technical resources – expertise, print media, videos, etc.

Action 1.11: Maintain an active IFA Technical Advisory Committee.

Action 1.12: Maintain a current library of relevant informational resources on the IFA website.

Action 1.13: Utilize available literature of interest to our members, including but not limited to Call before you Cut, Selling Timber, Forest Trees of Illinois, and Forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Illinois.

Strategy 1.2: Identify gaps in existing resources and develop new tools to fill them.

Action 1.21: Engage landowners on the board in identifying needs/gaps.

Action 1.22: Conduct simple member surveys via email, post webinar, and/or during events to assess member needs.

Action 1.23: Identify useful programs/publications from other states and adapt to Illinois.

Action 1.24: Develop original publications and presentations as time and funding permit.

Strategy 1.3: Deliver helpful information in a variety of formats appropriate for the material.

Action 1.31: Solicit and review original articles for the quarterly IFA newsletter.

Action 1.32: Develop content for bi-weekly email blasts to members.

Action 1.33: Develop timely press releases on newsworthy topics as they arise.

Action 1.34: Recruit experts and conduct webinars on topics of interest to our members.

Action 1.35: Inform members about other events, resources, and webinar opportunities that may be of interest.

Action 1.36: Provide direct experiential learning opportunities via workshops, field days, and the Annual Meeting.

GOAL 2: Educate members and the general public

Lead IFA Committee: Marketing

Strategy 2.1: Develop effective messaging that brands IFA as a recognizable source of valuable and credible information about the trees and forests of Illinois.

Action 2.11: Develop consistent taglines, boilerplate language, mastheads, and templates that effectively convey IFA as a professionally run organization.

Action 2.12: Improve the IFA website layout and design to make it more visually appealing and user friendly.

Action 2.13: Diligently use these tools to deliver information and market IFA events.

Strategy 2.2: Develop and deliver content that results in a more complete and accurate popular understanding and appreciation of forestry and forest management.

Action 2.21: Begin by describing what “forestry” means through the Profiles in Forestry project.

Action 2.22: Utilize the profiles collection to visually convey the practices and management approaches that lead to healthy forests.

Action 2.23: Continue to collect and tell the stories that will advance forest management efforts while inviting membership in IFA.

Strategy 2.3: Communicate regularly and in a variety of ways to share useful information with members and the public.

Action 2.31: Send an email blast to IFA members every other week on a topic of interest.

- Action 2.32:** Maintain an active Facebook Page, posting weekly content of interest to members and others who follow the page.
- Action 2.33:** Develop an introductory IFA PowerPoint presentation that will provide an overview to target groups of interest.
- Action 2.34:** Establish a YouTube channel for IFA so that videos can be posted as they become available.
- Action 2.35:** Develop an IFA Calendar that features colorful photos and helpful tips for well-timed activities associated with forest management.
- Action 2.36:** Develop press releases on timely topics that local newspapers will find interesting and relevant to their readers.
- Action 2.37:** Develop public service announcements on topics with widespread appeal for use on radio and TV.

Strategy 2.4: Encourage rural and urban audiences to observe Oak Awareness Month in Illinois.

- Action 2.41:** Work with a coalition of groups to secure a Governor’s Proclamation and Joint Resolution.
- Action 2.42:** Utilize the newsletter and email blasts to write about oak decline, restoration and management strategies.
- Action 2.43:** Plan an “Oaktobefest” event near Springfield.

Strategy 2.5: Prioritize target audiences and communications efforts to maximize growth in IFA membership while making the best use of scarce resources.

- Action 2.51:** Assess the time commitment associated with various target audiences, in terms of content development, format, and delivery.
- Action 2.52:** Adjust/limit activities that take away valuable time from serving our core rural forest landowner audience.

Strategy 2.6: Increase landowner awareness of IFA via promotion of the Purple Paint Law.

- Action 2.61:** Conduct events or host booths at retail outlets that sell purple paint and cater to rural landowners.
- Action 2.62:** Prepare and distribute a press release annually reminding landowners of the opportunity to mark their boundaries with purple paint.
- Action 2.63:** Raise awareness of the Purple Paint Law and IFA sign availability through social media.

GOAL 3: Policy advocacy for IL Forests

Lead IFA Committee: Legislative/Policy

Strategy 3.1: Develop position statements on issues of particular concern and review/update periodically with the assistance of the Technical Advisory Committee.

- Action 3.11:** Review existing position statements and modify, as needed, to maintain usefulness.
- Action 3.12:** Prepare new position statements on emerging issues, e.g. state tree nurseries.

Strategy 3.2: Monitor/respond to state and federal legislative activity relevant to Illinois forests.

Action 3.21: Follow and share the legislative updates of partner organizations, including Illinois Farm Bureau and Illinois Arborist Association.

Action 3.22: Make personal contacts with key members of the IL General Assembly and their staff members to register support, opposition, or simply remind them of IFA interests if no particular issue is in play.

Action 3.23: Plan an annual Lobby Day for IFA, or participate in a partner organization's similar event.

Strategy 3.3: Organize a "Power of Ten" IFA member response system for use in supporting or opposing legislation relevant to member interests.

Action 3.31: Develop a contact list of IFA members who will commit to responding promptly by telephone, email, or in person when alerted by IFA.

Action 3.32: Recruit additional members in legislative districts that lack coverage, aiming for at least 10 members/contacts per legislative district.

Action 3.33: Provide each member of the network with contact information for their legislators.

Action 3.34: Invite action alert members to participate in IFA Lobby Day, IL Ag Legislative Breakfast, and other organized activities.

Strategy 3.4: Proactively influence state and federal programs relevant to Illinois forests.

Action 3.41: Maintain effective IFA representation on the NRCS State Technical Committee.

Action 3.42: Participate in formal IDNR opportunities for input, including Conservation Congress and the Trail of Tears State Forest Working Group.

Action 3.43: Participate in Illinois Forestry Development Council meetings and events.

Action 3.44: Diligently monitor, respond to changes, and aggressively encourage appropriate use of Forestry Development Act funds.

Action 3.45: Develop position statements on the state tree nurseries and state forests to encourage their ongoing viability and maintenance.

Action 3.46: Work with key legislators to develop original legislation, as needed and appropriate, e.g. ginseng law

GOAL 4: Understand/engage members and increase membership

Lead IFA Committee: Membership

Strategy 4.1: Assess member needs through interviews and surveys so that we may better serve them.

Action 4.11: Review previous surveys, plans, and reports focused on membership.

Action 4.12: Conduct new surveys to learn about member educational needs and expectations.

Action 4.13: Reach out to members individually to thank them for their membership and talk to them about how IFA can better serve their needs.

Action 4.14 Develop a list of membership needs, topics of interest, etc., for use in recruiting newsletter articles, planning events, etc.

Strategy 4.2: Address lapsed memberships to maximize member retention.

Action 4.21: Contact lapsed members with a personal letter or phone call with invitation to reinstate. Include a survey to learn why they dropped out.

Action 4.22: Revisit and improve content of all automated replies in Wild Apricot.

Action 4.23: Take note of reasons given during personal contacts for refusal to rejoin, and make improvements to avoid such losses, if possible.

Strategy 4.3: Seek opportunities to include IFA recruitment materials in the mailings, events, and other activities of partner agencies and organizations.

Action 4.31: Prepare an annual recruitment letter for inclusion in DNR's IFDA renewal mailing.

Action 4.32: Investigate the possibility of a reciprocal mailing to Illinois Tree Farmers, Walnut Council members, etc.

Action 4.33: Participate in the Tri-State Forest Stewardship Conference, Farm Progress Show, and other opportunities to visit directly with IL landowners.

Action 4.34: Meet with District Foresters to explore localized opportunities to pass information along and engage potential members.

Strategy 4.4: Reach prospective members with information that encourages and facilitates membership and/or financial contributions to the cause.

Action 4.41: Increase the reach of the IFA Facebook page by posting items of interest to members.

Action 4.42: Develop a blog that will encourage more in-depth understanding and following of the issues on the IFA radar.

Action 4.43: Explore the possibility of a free e-newsletter, not to replace our quarterly mainstay, but to reach prospective members legally in accordance with email spam laws.

Strategy 4.5: Provide members with volunteer opportunities to engage more fully in IFA.

Action 4.51: Reach out to members via newsletter articles and email blasts to ask for volunteers.

Action 4.52: Develop lists of specific tasks or skills for use with volunteer requests so that we can match people to the tasks they feel comfortable doing.

Action 4.53: Recruit members with applicable skills and interests to join IFA Committees.

Action 4.54: Recruit members to host/participate in the planning of regional/annual events.

Action 4.55: Encourage members to sponsor, recruit, and mentor new members.

Action 4.56: Investigate formation of student chapters, engagement of student members.

Action 4.57: Host informal potlucks, campfires and other social gatherings simply to have fun, enjoy each other's company, and exchange ideas.

GOAL 5: Efficient and Effective IFA Governance

Lead IFA Committee: Executive Committee, with assistance from Finance and Nominating

Strategy 5.1: Follow the Bylaws and continue to suggest improvements, as needed.

Action 5.11: Hold regular meetings that efficiently and effectively dispense with IFA business.

Action 5.12: Conduct an Annual Business Meeting to facilitate elections, awards, and transition to new leaders.

Action 5.13: Review the By-laws and consider needed amendments, propose accordingly.

Strategy 5.2: Provide for an ongoing succession of leadership and board member service.

Action 5.21: Recruit board members with the potential to step up to leadership roles.

Action 5.22: Revisit and improve upon the list of Roles and Responsibilities handout that is provided to potential candidates by members of the nominating committee.

Action 5.23: Develop a survey for potential candidates that would tell us about their interests and skills, while helping them understand the flexible range of duties and expectations that constitute board member service.

Action 5.24: Develop existing board member capacity to step up to leadership roles.

Action 5.25: Recruit potential board members to committees and/or specific tasks as a gateway to board service.

Action 5.26: Seek the input of District Foresters and consultants in developing a board member, volunteer, field day site prospect list.

Action 5.27: Add value and flexibility to board member service – make it more fun, rewarding, *whatever*, so that people will WANT to serve.

Strategy 5.3: Facilitate board member and member volunteer engagement through committees and other means to carry out the work of IFA.

Action 5.31: Survey board members to determine their interests, skills, and types of tasks they are willing to carry out.

Action 5.32: Maintain committee charters that describe the goals, strategies, and example actions to be pursued.

Action 5.33: Match board members and member volunteers to committees and tasks that will result in their highest and best contribution to IFA.

Action 5.34: Provide incoming board members with an IFA Handbook in notebook or electronic form.

Action 5.33: Develop a Dropbox-type file system that can be accessed by all interested board members to make it easier to find and share IFA documents online.

Strategy 5.4: Develop useful long and short range plans to guide the work and improve continuity of IFA progress over time.

Action 5.41: Prepare a baseline long-range plan that fully captures a highly functional organization.

Action 5.42: Prepare an annual plan that describes specific tasks that will form the focus of board activity for any given year.

Action 5.43: Prepare an annual summary of accomplishments to outline progress and inform the next year's plan development.

Strategy 5.5: Maintain professional management of IFA's Wild Apricot member database, event calendar, and website.

Action 5.51: Recruit and train capable administrators to share responsibilities for various aspects of the Wild Apricot system.

Action 5.52: Secure at least one event manager in each IFA region.

Action 5.53: Provide redundancy in administrative privileges to avoid overdependence on any one individual.

Action 5.54: Conduct an external website review to obtain recommendations for visual design improvements.

Strategy 5.6: Establish a sustainable Executive Director position to fill gaps and provide continuity between meetings and across terms.

Action 5.61: Contract out duties and responsibilities that help facilitate progress and complement volunteer board member contributions to the work of IFA.

Action 5.62: Pursue funding opportunities that serve the dual role of IFA program growth and financial sustainability of the Executive Director role.

Action 5.63: Capitalize on enhanced program offerings to grow IFA membership to sustainable levels.

Strategy 5.7: Secure and manage sufficient funding for a robust, financially sound organization.

Action 5.71: Establish a balanced annual budget that matches expenses to anticipated income.

Action 5.72: Follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.

Action 5.73: Continue to recruit and retain dues-paying members in sufficient numbers to sustain operations.

Action 5.74: Seek grants to fund projects that enhance member benefits, while offsetting budgeted expenses where possible.

Action 5.75: Develop a fundraising campaign and seek donations to support various charitable activities, including the Bob Sloan Memorial Scholarship.

Action 5.76: Develop a capital campaign to raise monies for an endowment fund.

Action 5.77: Organize volunteer service project crews that do forest management work for cost-sharing.

Strategy 5.8: Add value to IFA membership while attracting new members by developing branded initiatives, i.e. workshop series, informational campaigns, charitable service projects, etc., that are recognized as IFA programs

Action 5.81: Develop “Wildlife on Your Place” as a one-day IFA workshop program that can be held in different parts of the state.

Action 5.82: Develop Land Dreams as a major educational program offering led by IFA.

Action 5.83: Build partner relationships and seek funding to support Land Dreams roll-out.

Action 5.84: Explore IFA capacity to carry out service projects for widows and children of active forest stewards.

Action 5.85: Investigate development of a program that targets veterans who own IL forestland.

Action 5.86: Prepare a comprehensive Resource Guide containing descriptions and contact information for use by forest landowners in Illinois.