

1. *Where does tree seed fit within the Foraging Taskforce's deliberations?*

Offrange recently published an article titled "[The Problem with Growing a Forest](https://ambrook.com/offrange/environment/future-forests)" that gives a brief snapshot of the high demand for tree seedlings and the current limitations of nurseries around the country. Across the US, land managers need seedlings to reforest after fires and pest mortality, in addition to typical harvesting and replanting schedules and conservation efforts. However there are too few nurseries, limited capacity, and not enough seed to fill the current need. This is similarly true here in Minnesota. The article includes a section on the Farm and Forest Growers Co-op (FFGC), which is working with UMD on assisted migration research to prepare Minnesota's future forests for the changing climate and produces trees toward The Nature Conservancy's Minnesota Million project.

(<https://ambrook.com/offrange/environment/future-forests>)

While the FFGC is growing several thousand stems, most of our trees come from the state's nursery operation. Many forest seeds are wild collected, meaning humans go into woods and parks to gather them. The MN DNR previously relied on a combination of internally collected seed and community-sourced seeds, however, some of their seed orchards are no longer in use and the population of volunteer collectors is dwindling. As an Extension Forester, I have been working with FFGC, TNC, DNR, and other partners to develop tree seed collection trainings. There is a lot of enthusiasm by potential collectors, but the major obstacle preventing most from actually collecting is land access.

Many potential collectors who have gone through an Extension training do not own land with enough genetic diversity from which to collect, and would rely on public lands. State-managed lands do not have a single policy, rather they are split by parcel type (i.e. you could collect seeds on state forest or WMA lands with permissions or permits, but never on state park or WPA lands). Many larger land managers in the metro area do not allow foraging, and most members of the MN Association of County Land Commissioners (broadly located in central and northeast MN) don't have policies, despite an admitted need for seed. The prohibition is likely because foraging for non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and seed collection are not differentiated within organizations' policies. Expanding permission to collect tree seeds for conservation, assisted migration research, and reforestation is valuable. I hope that if the state carefully separated seed collection from other types of foraging, other public lands might follow suit.

One issue the Foraging Taskforce may be discussing is how to grant permissions to folks foraging on state land. Like hunters are required to prove proficiency, I am working with the DNR to establish a certification for seed collectors (contract still under review). Another point of tension may be differentiating personal use versus economic gain. Though few collectors can turn large profits, they may be paid by the state and other growing organizations for their seed and cones. I recognize that this could muddy the water when it comes to permitting. However, due to the

high demand and collective benefit of more trees on the landscape, I believe payment is a good incentive and acknowledges the effort required to reforest the state.

2. Important biologic considerations of tree seed collection:

Deciduous tree seed collection usually involves collecting seed from the ground (acorns, nuts, samaras), with some other non-destructive techniques, such as picking birch catkins or fruits like cherries off of branches. Cone collection may be destructive, as cones need to be just underripe (unopened) and often grow high in trees, but collection is also achieved by "topping" trees, rather than felling the entire tree, or taking advantage of existing timber harvests.

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"Our living standard can be no higher than the standard of our natural resources," Richard J. Dorer, former DNR Forester in SE MN who started during the Dust Bowl years (1938).