

Minnesota Forests for the Future Program (Forest Legacy) Fact Sheet 1/25/09

The Issue: The Minnesota Forest Resources Council, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership (MFRP), the Governor's Task Force on the Competitiveness of Minnesota's Primary Forest Products Industry, and the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources have all identified forest parcelization (the subdivision of larger parcels of forestland into smaller blocks of forestland with additional owners), along with subsequent development, as a critical issue threatening the benefits received from intact forestlands. The loss of this working forestland through parcelization has been linked to adverse impacts on timber availability, wildlife, water quality, land cover, and recreational opportunities. These impacts will most likely have effects on local economies and put additional pressure on public land.

The Minnesota Forests for the Future Program (MFF) was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 2008 (MS84.66) to identify and protect private, working forests for their timber/economic values, recreational values and habitat values using conservation easements, fee title and other tools.

Geographic Scope: Projects will focus on working forests within the forested regions of the state to protect large blocks of forestland, prevent forest fragmentation and encourage sustainable forest management—outcomes consistent with MS 97A.056 (Outdoor Heritage Fund; Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council).

Long-term Target: The 25-year target of MFF is to protect up to 530,000 acres (500,000 acres in the Laurentian Mixed Forest; 30,000 acres in the Eastern Broadleaf Forest). Primary method is a conservation easement, also fee title and other tools.

Project Selection: Projects are reviewed and prioritized by an advisory committee who consider the following criteria: project size; strategic location; recreational opportunities, timber and other economic benefits; ecological and habitat values; other considerations (e.g. availability of matching funds).

Easement terms: Conservation easements are individually negotiated from a standard template. Typical conservation easement terms include:

- Restrictions on commercial/residential development
- Restrictions on divisions
- Provisions for traditional public access (hunting, fishing, etc)
- Requirements for sustainable forest management practices (forest management plans and adherence to BMPs)

Easement Valuation: is based on fair market appraisals by 3rd party appraisers.

Before Value (unrestricted by conservation easement)

(-)After Value (with restrictions)

Difference = Value of the Easement

Conservation easement stewardship and monitoring:

- Conservation easement monitoring is a standard practice for the program.
- All easements have baseline property reports and monitoring plans.
- Easements are monitored regularly using DNR staff to conduct the monitoring.

Program Advisory Committee: The MFF Commissioner's Advisory Committee consists of ten stakeholder representatives, DNR's Deputy Commissioner and the State Forester. This Committee provides strategic guidance for the program's implementation and evaluation.

Related Plans and Programs: Federal Forest Legacy Program; Forest Stewardship Program; DNR Subsection Forest Resource Management Plans; Minnesota Forest Resource Council Site-level guidelines and Regional Landscape plans; DNR Division of Forestry Land Asset Plan; Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership Action Plan, Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, and the Minnesota Habitat Conservation Partnership.

Program Accomplishments: 1999-2008

Projects and Costs:

- 26 projects totaling 65,864 acres (ranging from 20 acres to 51,163 acres per project)
- 25 projects are conservation easements (65,736 acres); 1 project is a fee title donation (128 acres)
- Total Cost of Acquisitions \$20,962,840 (Funding Sources: Fed. 29%; State 44%; Pvt. 27%)
- Average Cost per Acre \$318 (Bargain sales have reduced average purchase price by 12% or \$42/acre).

MFF and the Forest Legacy Program: MFF is the overarching Minnesota program for identifying and protecting private, working forests using conservation easements, fee title and other tools. The "Forest Legacy Program" refers to the federal program that was created by Congress in 1990. This program guided the early successes with forest conservation easements in MN and continues to serve as a funding source for the MFF.

- Easement values have typically ranged from around 30% to 60% compared to full fee values.

Public Benefits:

Recreation

- 97% of easement acres have provided public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, etc.
- Large easements have negotiated right to use private roads/trails for snowmobiling, atvs, etc.

Habitat

- Easements restrict development and parcelization thereby keeping larger blocks of forest intact.
- Preserved lands contain habitat for a wide range of species including game, non-game, as well as rare and endangered species.
- All easements require the use of site level guidelines and other best management practices to maintain and protect soil and water resources, wildlife habitat, riparian areas, cultural resources, and rare species.
- Conservation of working forests is an important strategy for mitigating climate change and its effects.

Economic

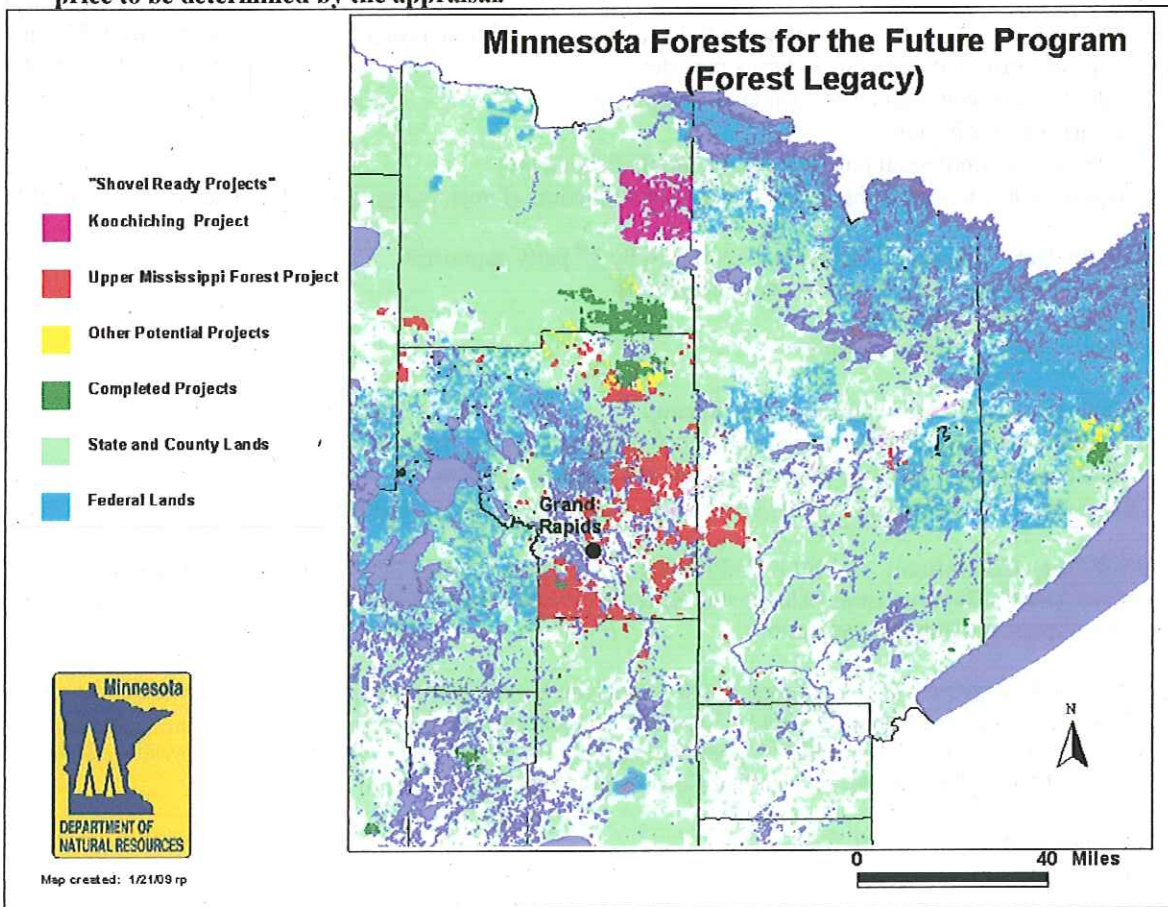
- Easements help sustain the regional timber-based economy by protecting the forest land base and allowing for sustainable forest management.
- Lands remain in private ownerships and on local tax rolls.

“Shovel Ready” Projects: 2 projects with agreed upon easement terms and with appraisals due in February. Closings as early as January 2010 if funds are available. Projects protect large blocks of forest, increase connectivity and protection of wildlife habitats including wetlands, lakes, and streams, permanently maintain public access for recreation and assure ongoing sustainable practices on working forest lands. Both projects have broad partner support.

- **Upper Mississippi River Project** (See map below) – 187,500 acres (\$10 million private match identified) **Additional Funding needs: Up to \$50 million. Final Price to be determined by the appraisal.**
- **Koochiching Project** (See map below) – 76,500 acres (\$3.5 million federal match appropriated; an additional \$3.5 million federal requested for Federal FY2009) **Additional Funding needs: Up to \$8 million. Final price to be determined by the appraisal.**

*\$3,000,000
Bonding
Available*

*\$2,000,000 LEAVE
in S.M.*



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