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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership
Recognized as Innovative Conservation Initiative**

*Collaborative efforts preserve the integrity of Minnesota's northern forests.
Partnership wins 2008 Environmental Initiative Award.*

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (May 28, 2008) – The Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership, an innovative partnership that is helping preserve the integrity of “working” forest landscapes in northern Minnesota, has been recognized for its work by winning the 2008 Environmental Initiative Award in the category Natural Resource Protection and Restoration.

The Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership uses conservation easements to keep large tracts of working forest that are privately owned from being sub-divided and sold into scattered parcels that can no longer function as wildlife habitat, as places for forestry or for recreation. Since 1999, more than 400,000 acres of forest in northern Minnesota have been parcelized into smaller tracts and sold. The Partnership's efforts have provided an alternative to this process while at the same time keeping these properties in private hands, on the tax rolls, and under sustainable management that maintains them as healthy ecosystems and working forests.

To date, the Partnership has already placed over 52,000 acres of forest into conservation easements in Itasca and southern Koochiching Counties, including the largest working forest easement in Minnesota's history. This successful effort has been made possible only through the collaboration of many partners, notably the Blandin Foundation, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota Deerhunters Association, The Nature Conservancy, the Trust

for Public Lands, The Conservation Fund, and numerous other private donors and advisors.

The Environmental Initiative Awards were established in 1994 to honor collaborative projects that demonstrate the tremendous advancement that can be made through unique and innovative partnerships, and that can serve as models of success to encourage similar efforts to improve Minnesota's environment. More than 65 different projects competed for recognition in the 2008 awards. Finalists and award winners were chosen by panels of independent judges, each expert in the award category they reviewed. A celebration held on May 15, 2008 honored the award winners and finalists. This annual event is hosted by the Minnesota Environmental Initiative (MEI), a nonprofit that builds partnerships to develop collaborative solutions to Minnesota's environmental problems. "Tackling environmental issues is not easy," says MEI Executive Director, Mike Harley. "These winners have displayed remarkable resolve to put their individual agendas aside and work together to solve Minnesota's environmental problems."

To view a complete list of Environmental Awards winners and finalists, visit:

www.mn-ei.org/awards/finalistswinners.html.

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Photo 1: Image of MEI award.

Photo 2: The Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership was represented at the awards ceremony in Minneapolis by (left to right): Art Norton, The Nature Conservancy; Becca Nash and Susan Schmidt, Trust for Public Land; Jim Hoolihan and Becky LaPlant, Blandin Foundation; Laurie Martinson, Minnesota DNR; Peggy Ladner and Jonathan Wilmschurst, The Nature Conservancy.