

Vital Forests | Vital Communities

Growing Minnesota's Advantage in a Global Economy

Grant Fact Sheet

July 1, 2005

Fund for Conservation Easements on Private Forestlands in the Itasca County Area

Amount Granted: \$6,250,000

Grantee: The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

Purpose of the Grant: The Nature Conservancy received a Blandin Foundation grant of \$6.25 million to support the establishment of a fund designed to purchase conservation easements from willing sellers on up to 75,000 acres of strategically selected parcels of private and industrial forestland in the Itasca County area. The easements will limit development and subdivision while ensuring sustainable forest practices and public access opportunities for a variety of recreational pursuits including hunting, fishing and hiking. Once purchased, the easements will be transferred to the state Department of Natural Resources, which will monitor the legally-binding agreements. This venture will enroll private forestland in Itasca County in the Federal Forest Legacy Program, a joint operation of the USDA Forest Service and the Minnesota DNR.

Importance: Productive private forests are one of the key economic, cultural, and ecological advantages of our region and state, providing significant direct and long-term benefits to our community and to the population. The Minnesota Forest Resources Council, which advises the Governor and federal, state, county and local governments on sustainable forest resource policies and practices, considers the issue of ecological, social and economic impacts of private forestland ownership changes to be the state's top priority forest policy issue. Since 1999, over 400,000 acres of Minnesota's industrial forestland has been subdivided and sold. Moreover, in the last 15 years, 400,000 of Minnesota's roughly 13 million acres of forestland has been converted to other uses and removed from the production base. Given demographic trends and market pressures, the opportunity to conserve large sections of productive forestland will continue to diminish rapidly, and can be expected to disappear entirely in the foreseeable future. Implementation of the activities included in this grant will allow for capitalization on the steadily narrowing window of opportunity to protect a unique natural resource for Itasca County and the state.

Grant Goals:

- Support forest industry related jobs in manufacturing, logging, equipment, and related businesses, as well as jobs in other sectors tied to the resource such as tourism, hospitality, recreation, and special forest products.
- Ensure sustainable forestry, protect wildlife habitat, water quality and guarantee public access on private forestland in Itasca County.
- Leverage the \$6M Blandin investment with \$11-\$20M from other sources to capitalize the fund.
- Stem the recent trend of large-scale forestland sales and subdivisions in Minnesota.
- Span the Upper Mississippi river basin and watershed and connect major tracts of public land.



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