



Seeing the Forest and the Trees: How to Make the Most of Minnesota's Woods

A project of Blandin Foundation's Vital Forests/Vital Communities Initiative

Study Tours Report
Investing in Productive Forests

January 2009

Executive Summary

Investment in more productive forests. Forestry leaders of diverse professional backgrounds and experiences declared this as their shared commitment following a series of study tours to north central Minnesota, Canada and Scandinavia over 18 months in 2007 and 2008.

Convened by the Blandin Foundation's Vital Forests/Vital Communities initiative, the group articulated and endorsed a vision for productive forests in Minnesota:

Minnesota will increase forest productivity by making the necessary investments to improve the quantity, quality and value of our region's forests and the forest products and benefits they provide.

To achieve this vision, study tour participants ultimately organized themselves into five action teams to pursue the following specific strategies:

- Build regional and state-wide constituencies for investment in the productivity of our region's forests.
 - Use intermediate treatments across all ownerships to advance forest productivity, whether it's for timber, wildlife, recreation, biodiversity and/or biomass.
 - Rationalize ownership and intensify management of school, swamp, and university trust lands consistent with preservation of environmental values.
- Study tour project participants are committed to implementing this agenda; Blandin Foundation staff will continue to provide necessary convening and administrative support. Study participants will meet periodically in 2009 to review progress on project goals and adjust course, as appropriate, to ensure their vision is achieved.
- Develop a forest bioenergy strategy for Minnesota.
 - Appeal to family forest owners by employing existing incentives and creating new incentives that draw them into organization, management, and conservation, using Itasca County as a pilot.

KEY ELEMENTS OF FOREST PRODUCTIVITY

- 1 Quantity, quality and accessibility of harvestable timber
- 2 Quantity and quality of non-timber products available for harvest (including non-traditional forest products and bioenergy inputs)
- 3 Ecosystem integrity (defined as: “capacity to support and maintain a balanced, integrated, adaptive community of organisms having a species composition, diversity and functional organization comparable to that of natural habitats of the region”)
- 4 Ecosystem resilience (defined as: “capacity of an ecosystem to tolerate disturbance without collapsing into a qualitatively different state that is controlled by a different set of processes”)
- 5 Forest health (disease, invasive species)
- 6 The ability of forests to provide social benefits such as recreation and public access



Participant Observation: “Given current demand for forest products in the US, achieving the levels of public subsidy for forest practices we saw in Finland would be hard to justify and hard to sell in Minnesota.”