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## Minnesota leads on private forestry management

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*The Whitefish chain of lakes — partially pictured here in October 2020 — is made up of 14 lakes, covering over 10,000 acres with 106 miles of shoreline. The Pine River One Watershed, One Plan prioritizes forestland protection efforts for the watersheds surrounding the Whitefish chain based on input from the watershed’s landscape stewardship plan. Photo Credits: Jim Umhoefer for Crow Wing SWCD*

### U.S. Forest Service recognizes Minnesota partnership as premier partnership in 20-state region for managing private forests for water quality, wildlife, rural prosperity

A public-private partnership working to manage Minnesota’s private forestland for conservation, habitat and economic benefits is receiving national attention.

The U.S. Forest Service’s (USFS) Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) in December recognized Minnesota’s Private Forestry Management (PFM) efforts as a premier partnership in the 20-state east forestry region in its latest five-year review of private forest management programs in each state.



The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) partners with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), USFS, local governments and consulting foresters to guide private forest management (PFM) for multiple benefits. The PFM partnership connects landowners

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— Gary Michael, DNR cooperative forest management supervisor

with financial and technical assistance that promotes forestland protection and sustainable forest stewardship.

“Keeping forested lands forested — especially those on privately owned lands, which are the most at risk of conversion or development — keeps fish in our lakes and wildlife in our watersheds, and provides wood for our mills,” said Lindberg Ekola, BWSR forest stewardship planning coordinator. “Our lakes and rivers tend to be healthier when working forests are protected and kept intact. Private forestlands are key to stacking multiple benefits for our communities and the state overall.”

## Connecting forests and water quality

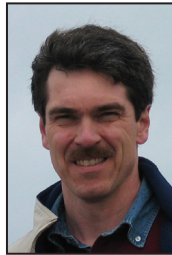
Forests protect water resources by filtering rain and snow, curbing erosion and reducing stormwater runoff. Forests also mitigate the harmful effects of climate change by sequestering carbon through photosynthesis. Sustainable forestry practices such as planting trees, sustainable harvesting and regeneration benefit water quality and help forests sequester more carbon. Forest management creates and supports both rural and metro area jobs and generates income for private landowners.

Nearly half of Minnesota's forestland is privately owned: Minnesota contains 9 million acres of public forestland owned by counties, the state, and the federal government, while approximately 7 million acres are family-owned forests.

“We can manage every tree, every acre on state land to perfection, but you're still only affecting a portion of Minnesota forests,” said Gary Michael, DNR cooperative forest management supervisor. “If we're going to manage for clean water, clean air, habitat, all those benefits forests bring, we can't just look at (publicly owned) forests. We have to look at it all – and that includes private forestland.”

## The Landscape Stewardship Initiative

Landscape stewardship planning — a key tool for managing private forests — addresses multiple conservation challenges through the practical application of science and collaboration. Watershed-based Landscape Stewardship Plans (LSPs) analyze the critical contexts between land cover and water quality in ways that are useful to local water



Ekola



Michael

planning efforts.

As part of the 2008 Farm Bill, leaders from USFS and the National

Association of State Foresters recognized the public and private benefits of planning and managing forestlands across all ownership boundaries, determining that management issues are best addressed through integrated local partnerships. In 2011, USFS published a Landscape Stewardship Guide to help state and local partners develop Landscape Stewardship Plans (LSPs). An LSP follows guidance from the USFS to examine an area of land — such as a watershed — held by multiple owners, identifying potential solutions for resource concerns.

LSPs can contribute to other water planning efforts, such as BWSR's One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program. The 1W1P program offers an alternative to the project-by-project competitive grant process by enabling collaborating local governments to produce comprehensive watershed management plans. These plans prioritize water quality improvement actions to ensure limited resources are spent where they are needed most within

a specific watershed. LSPs include information from the watershed level down to the parcel level. They focus on priority watersheds that can provide detailed insights about land management and resource concerns for other planning efforts such as 1W1P.

“With LSPs, we work with local partners to analyze the interaction between local forestry activities and watershed management goals” said Ekola. “LSPs provide relevant forestry technical information and recommendations on a watershed basis, which can inform and support comprehensive watershed management plans developed through the 1W1P program. It's about coordinating how actions are implemented with a strategic vision in mind.”

## Partnering with landowners

Landscape Stewardship Plans also provide valuable information for planning forest management activities on individual tracts of privately owned land.

Woodland Stewardship Plans (WSPs) are written by approved DNR, SWCD and private consultant foresters. WSPs allow approved plan writers to identify private landowner goals for their property and write a plan that encourages sustainable





*The Mississippi River headwaters region includes ample privately owned forestland. Approximately 7 million acres of forestland in Minnesota is privately owned.*

forest management. The plans aim to improve forest health, wildlife habitat, and often utilize timber harvests as a management tool to accomplish landowner goals while providing some income to the landowner. Having a WSP can make landowners eligible for programs such as the Sustainable Forest Incentive Act, which offers per-acre incentives to participants. Roughly 6,940 WSPs covering 964,000 acres are currently active – but that only accounts for 16%

of private forest lands in Minnesota.

Michael said the PFM partnership is working to develop a framework to better define roles for the multiple partners involved in PFM. DNR Forestry takes a leading role in outreach to landowners and provides program administration and cost-share for WSPs. BWSR helps coordinate PFM efforts by assisting local partnerships utilizing the 1W1P and easement programs, such as the

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program. Soil and water conservation districts help landowners leverage state and federal cost-share opportunities and assist with project coordination and implementation. The USFS provides additional program guidance and funding. Consulting foresters write WSPs and assist landowners with timber harvests and other woodland management practices.

Michael said Minnesota's partnership-focused

approach helped the state's PFM efforts gain national recognition from the USFS.

"The forest service recognizes partnerships. They appreciate those who make a concerted effort to work together to get things done," Michael said. "Last year's recognition was no doubt in relation to our work with BWSR, SWCDs and other partners. Minnesota has always been a leader in private forest management, and we want to stay a leader."