

Koochiching Forest Legacy Project

Conserving Large Forested Areas in Minnesota's North Woods

The Challenge

Northern Minnesota contains some of the largest blocks of private industrial forest land in the State—land that is intermixed within a patchwork of county, State, Federal, tribal, and private ownerships. More than 120 species of birds rely on the northern forests for habitat. Wide-ranging species, such as moose, wolf, and lynx depend on large tracts of unfragmented forest. This intact forest helps sustain the forest products-based economies in many northern Minnesota communities and supports nearly 40,000 jobs in the Statewide forest products industry. Industrial forests traditionally have been open to public recreation including snowmobiling, hunting, and fishing. When Boise Cascade sold all of its 309,000 acres of timberlands in Minnesota to Forest Capital Partners, LLC, in 2004, many residents realized that jobs, public access, and wildlife habitat were potentially at risk.

The Solution

In response to the Boise Cascade sale, the Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership was established under leadership of The Nature Conservancy. The Partnership is a coalition of public and private organizations whose goals include raising private funds to supplement public funds, to conserve working forests for their multiple public benefits. Since 2005, more than 127,000 acres of working forest land have been conserved with Forest Capital Partners, LLC, and additional new projects have been discussed. In 2007, the State of Minnesota, working with the Trust for Public Land, protected more than 51,000 acres in Phase 1 of the Koochiching Project. Then, in 2010, the U.S. Forest Service and the State of Minnesota completed phases 2 and 3 of the project, which protected more than 76,000 acres. Phase 4, being protected in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy, will add an additional 22,500 acres to the Koochiching Project by 2012.

The Koochiching Forest Legacy Project will conserve nearly 150,000 acres of working forest in Minnesota's north woods, by 2012.



The Koochiching Project will help keep forests, wetlands, lakes, and rivers intact and safe from development. (Photo: Richard Peterson, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources)

Resulting Benefits

The completion of the Koochiching Project ensures that these important forest lands will be permanently protected from conversion to nonforest uses. The forest lands will be sustainably managed for forest products and wildlife, and will continue to provide public recreation for hunting, hiking, fishing, and trail use.

Sharing Success

Working forest conservation easements have proven to be a cost-effective tool in protecting productive, working forestlands, wildlife habitat, and open space. The State of Minnesota has used \$9,956,000 in Federal Forest Legacy funds, \$9,745,000 in State funds, and \$5,424,000 in private funds, to protect over 127,000 acres of the Koochiching Phases 1, 2, and 3. Funding for Phase 4 will come from State as well as private sources. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Forestry Division will hold and manage the Koochiching conservation easement.

Mention of commercial enterprises is for information only. No endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture is implied.



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