



**BECKER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**RESOLUTION 03-24-1C**

**BECKER COUNTY OPPOSITION TO**

**TRANSFERRING STATE OWNED TAX FORFEIT LANDS WITHIN THE WHITE EARTH  
FOREST TO THE WHITE EARTH BAND OF THE MINNESOTA CHIPPEWA TRIBE**

**WHEREAS**, Becker County cooperatively manages tax forfeited public forest lands with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in the White Earth Forest for forestry and public recreational purposes;

**WHEREAS**, the transfer of State managed forest lands to the White Earth Band would restrict legal access to Becker County managed tax forfeit lands;

**WHEREAS**, the access to public and privately owned lands and lakes would be restricted if State owned public lands were transferred from public ownership to the White Earth Band.

**WHEREAS**, the transfer of State managed lands from public ownership will reduce recreational and business activities that occur on or adjacent to those lands such as hunting, hiking, picnicking, snowmobiling and ATV use, maple syrup operations, forestry and logging, boating, canoeing, fishing.

**WHEREAS**, the transfer of state managed lands will significantly reduce the number of tourists to the region resulting in a detrimental impact on the local and regional economy specifically resorts, restaurants, gas stations, recreational dealerships, and small, family-owned businesses.

**WHEREAS**, the transfer of state managed lands would result in loss of Payment in-lieu of tax funding to local county and townships governments will result in higher tax levy or reduction in services such as public safety, road maintenance, and other emergency services.

**WHEREAS**, the maintenance and access to lands and lakes over State managed and maintained Forest Roads, Forest Trails and Lake Accesses will be restricted, impacting the ability of local emergency responders to respond to requests for aid.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED.** That the Board of County Commissioners of Becker County, Minnesota hereby urges our legislative representatives and the Governor to not support Senate File 3480 and House File 4304 which would transfer State owned tax forfeit lands to the White Earth Band, modifying the disposition of tax forfeit lands, and eliminate the White Earth Forest.

Duly adopted this 5th day of March 2024, at Detroit Lakes, MN.



## **Becker County Board of Commissioners - Resolution 03-24-1C**

Becker County opposition to transferring State owned tax forfeit lands within the White Earth Forest to the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.

Becker County opposes Senate File 3480 and House File 4304 for the following reasons:

- Mandating that the White Earth Band must be offered the first right to purchase tax forfeit lands before lands can be offered for sale to the public will cause a hardship to the County and local units of government that rely on property taxes to fund their units of government by minimizing their ability to recover unpaid property taxes.
- The transfer of state-owned lands to the White Earth Band would be detrimental to the local and regional communities because:
  - Property owners that currently access their lands across state owned lands may no longer have legal access to their properties if the White Earth Band receives the state lands in fee simple title without being subject to easements.
  - Future lake assesses could be restricted by the White Earth Band at their discretion.
  - Visitors and recreational users of public lands within the White Earth Forest would be adversely impacted when the ownership of State public lands is turned over to the White Earth Band, which is not subject to Minnesota Statutes and Rules.
  - There are 34,634 acres of State and County managed tax forfeit lands in Becker County. These lands are managed using forestry best management practices and to enhance recreational experiences for the benefit of the public across the state. Recreational and commercial activities within the White Earth Forest support the local, regional, and statewide economy. Examples of recreational uses include hunting, hiking, picnicking, skiing, snowshoeing, biking, bird watching, boating, canoeing, fishing, snowmobiling and ATV use, etc. These recreational activities support local family ran businesses such as logging, construction, restaurants and stores, resorts, hotels, guiding services, and recreational dealerships.
    - State Managed Lands within the White Earth Forest – 6,941 acres.
      - Eagle View Township                    600 acres
      - Round Lake Township                2,786.7 acres
      - Forest Township                        3,554.97 acres
    - County managed State lands in the White Earth Forest – 27,693 acres.
    - Becker County Recreational cabin leases within the White Earth Forest – 16
    - Public water accesses – 6
    - Snowmobile trails within the White Earth Forest – 38.5 miles of trail.
    - County maintained Forest Roads – 17.8 miles of roads.
    - State maintained Forest Roads – 12.6 miles of roads.
    - Township maintained roads – 37.5 miles of roads.
    - North Country Trail – 8.4 miles public hiking trail with parking areas.
    - Becker County Tax Forfeit Old Growth/Preserve Forest – 196 Acres.

- Local units of government rely on State tax in lieu payments to pay for local infrastructure & services that support the White Earth Forest for public use would be adversely affected by the loss of state aids. Local units of government that would be impacted by loss of state payment in-lieu tax's (PILT) are as follows:

**2024 Proposed tax levy and 2023 PILT payment**

<u>Tax District</u>	<u>Tax Levy</u>	<u>State PILT Payment*</u>
▪ Eagle View Twp	\$70,000	\$1,870.87
▪ Forest Twp	\$60,000	\$10,677.26
▪ Round Lake Twp	\$81,728	\$7,625.89
▪ Becker County		<u>\$181,573.86</u>
	<b>Total State PILT payment</b>	<b>\$201,747.88*</b>

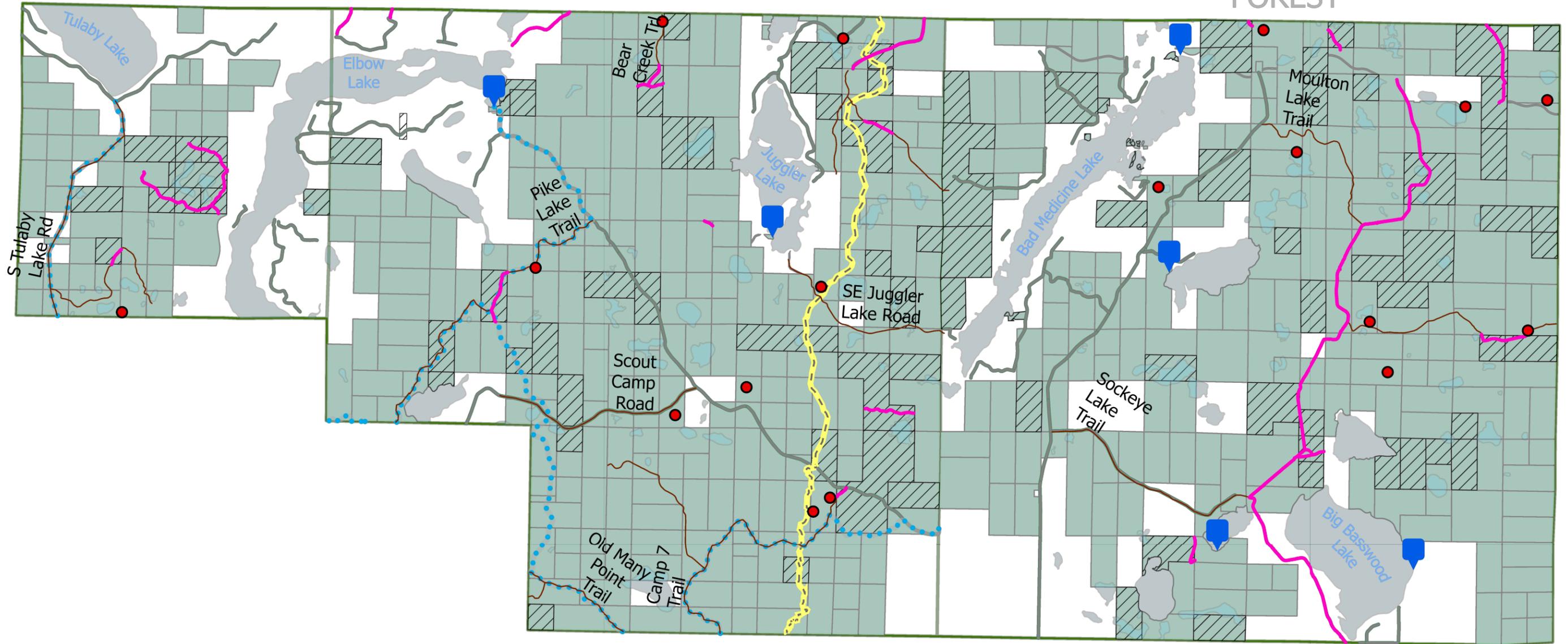
\*State PILT payment for lands within the White Earth Forest.

**Summary:** The transfer of state tax forfeit lands to the White Earth Tribe would result in a detrimental impact to the local townships and Becker County, individuals that live in and around the White Earth Forest, and tourists and visitors that enjoy the use of these public maintained lands. The loss of PILT payments and state-maintained forest roads would result in either an increase in local property taxes or reduction in services and resulting in possible degradation of the upkeep of Township and County maintained roads and trails within the White Earth Forest. The loss of maintained public access to properties and general decline of locally maintained roads and trails will hinder the response time for local emergency response and public safety.

EAGLE VIEW

ROUND LAKE N

FOREST



-  Lake Access
-  Lake
-  Recreational Lease
-  Snowmobile Trail
-  Becker Co Forest Roads
-  North Country Trail
-  DNR State Forest Road
-  Township Road
-  Becker Co PILT
-  Becker County/St of MN as owner
-  Township
-  White Earth State Forest

# White Earth State Forest

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to speak about concerns with SF 3480 on behalf of the Becker County Board of Commissioners. My name is Erica Jepson. I am the Becker County Commissioner for District 1, which makes up the eastern half of Becker County. The White Earth Forest is in my district.

Over the last couple weeks, all Becker County Commissioners have received many phone calls and emails with concerns about this very significant piece of legislation which could severely restrict the use of previously public lands for not just the residents of Becker County but for the many Minnesotans that enjoy this land every year.

The parcels that would be transferred under this bill are currently used by many hunters, snowmobilers, ATV users, hikers, bird watchers, and horseback riders, to name a few. There are long established hunting camps situated near these parcels which are under lease. Hunting camps enjoyed by generations of hunters.

The economic impact of this would be felt throughout the region, not just Becker County. It will decrease the number of people coming to this region. There are many small family-owned businesses, many of them generational, that depend on the tourists and residents that enjoy the White Earth Forest and patronize their gas stations, resorts, bars, and restaurants. These businesses will be gravely affected.

We have provided you with information specific to Becker County including the number of miles of roads, trails, and water accesses in the White Earth Forest. We also included the fiscal implications this would have for Becker County and the townships affected by this including Forest, Round Lake, and Eagle View. This will result in a higher tax levy for the citizens of Becker County or a decrease in services including public safety, road maintenance, and other emergency services.

There are many questions about this legislation that need to be answered: Who will maintain the roads? What about the trails that go through the parcels of land? What will happen with the North Country Trail? What about the private land surrounded by these parcels, will they continue to have access? If it remains public, what does that mean? Will hunting continue to be allowed by everyone? Who will enforce it if it is Tribally owned?

The current policy of the DNR is that non-tribal members are excluded from tribal lands within the White Earth State Forest. Our concern is that will continue to be the policy. We are fortunate to live in an area where we have so much public land for all of us to enjoy. State parks are owned by all Minnesotans. Once they are gone, they cannot be replaced. For these reasons, we ask you to vote against SF 3480.

## Ownership Summary in White Earth State Forest

Ownership Category	Acres	%
County Fee	72.17	0.05
Federal	1,491.67	0.96
Municipal	50.07	0.03
Private	34,874.32	22.44
State – DNR Managed	42,961.69	27.65
State – Other	412.84	0.27
County admin tax forfeit*	47,004.65	30.25
Tribal	19,089.48	12.28
Other	9,436.19	6.07
<b>Totals</b>	<b>155,393.50</b>	

The White Earth S.F. was one of 13 state forests established in 1933 by the MN legislature.

State - DNR ownership amounts taken from DNR Lands Records System fee surface ownership.

Non-DNR ownership data derived from county parcel information.

“Other” category comprised of rights-of-way and water bodies.

\*County admin tax forfeit lands are owned by the State in trust for the taxing districts and managed by the counties.

## White Earth State Forest Ownership by County

### Becker County

Ownership Category	Acres	%
County Fee	6.18	0.01
Federal	81.18	0.16
Municipal	41.19	0.08
Private	9,845.29	19.93
State – DNR	6,941.64	14.05
County admin tax forfeit*	27,693.49	56.06
Tribal	727.04	1.47
Other	4,065.19	8.23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49,401.20</b>	

### Mahnomen County

Ownership Category	Acres	%
County Fee	6.08	0.01
Federal	1,410.49	2.85
Municipal	1.00	0.00
Private	11,827.58	23.86
State – DNR	17,078.46	34.46
State – Other	373.29	0.75
County admin tax forfeit*	792.20	1.60
Tribal	14,133.53	28.52
Other	3,938.98	7.95
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49,561.62</b>	

### Clearwater County

Ownership Category	Acres	%
County Fee	59.91	0.11
Municipal	7.88	0.01
Private	13,201.45	23.39
State – DNR	18,941.59	33.57
State – Other	39.55	0.07
County admin tax forfeit*	18,518.96	32.82
Tribal	4,229.32	7.49
Other	1,432.02	2.54
<b>Totals</b>	<b>56,430.69</b>	

**SENATE  
STATE OF MINNESOTA  
NINETY-THIRD SESSION**

**S.F. No. 3480**

(SENATE AUTHORS: KUNESH)

DATE	D-PG	OFFICIAL STATUS
02/12/2024	11544	Introduction and first reading Referred to Environment, Climate, and Legacy

1.1 A bill for an act

1.2 relating to natural resources; requiring transfer of White Earth State Forest land

1.3 to White Earth Band of Minnesota Chippewa Tribe; modifying disposition of

1.4 certain tax-forfeited land; eliminating White Earth State Forest; proposing coding

1.5 for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 282; repealing Minnesota Statutes

1.6 2022, section 89.021, subdivision 54.

1.7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.8 Section 1. **[282.0197] SALE OF LAND LOCATED WITHIN BOUNDARY OF WHITE**

1.9 **EARTH STATE FOREST.**

1.10 Except as provided in section 282.012, notwithstanding any other provision of this

1.11 chapter, a parcel of tax-forfeited land located within the boundaries of the White Earth State

1.12 Forest must first be offered for sale to the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa

1.13 Tribe before it can be offered for sale to any other party.

1.14 Sec. 2. **WHITE EARTH STATE FOREST; LAND TRANSFER.**

1.15 Subdivision 1. **Transfer required.** By August 1, 2029, the commissioner of natural

1.16 resources must convey for no consideration all state-owned land within the boundaries of

1.17 the White Earth State Forest to the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe,

1.18 except for land that:

1.19 (1) is school trust land, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 92.025; or

1.20 (2) is tax-forfeited land held in trust for local units of government as provided in

1.21 Minnesota Statutes, section 281.25.

2.1 Subd. 2. White Earth State Forest Transfer Task Force. (a) By October 1, 2024, the  
2.2 commissioner of natural resources must establish a White Earth State Forest Transfer Task  
2.3 Force to make recommendations to the commissioner and the legislature for policy and law  
2.4 changes designed to facilitate the conveyance of the following types of land located within  
2.5 the boundaries of the White Earth State Forest to the White Earth Band:

2.6 (1) land described in subdivision 1, clause (1) or (2); and

2.7 (2) municipal, county, and federal land.

2.8 (b) The task force must include seven members appointed by the commissioner, in  
2.9 consultation with the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, and must include  
2.10 representatives of:

2.11 (1) the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe;

2.12 (2) the Forestry Division of the Department of Natural Resources;

2.13 (3) local governments located near the White Earth State Forest; and

2.14 (4) any other parties, as determined by the commissioner.

2.15 (c) The task force may at any time make recommendations to the commissioner and to  
2.16 the legislature for policy and law changes and appropriations designed to facilitate the land  
2.17 transfers described in paragraph (a), clauses (1) and (2). The task force expires and the  
2.18 terms, compensation, and removal of members are as provided in Minnesota Statutes, section  
2.19 15.059.

2.20 **Sec. 3. REPEALER.**

2.21 Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 89.021, subdivision 54, is repealed.

APPENDIX  
Repealed Minnesota Statutes: 24-05997

**89.021 STATE FORESTS.**

Subd. 54. White Earth State Forest.

This Document can be made available in alternative formats upon request

State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-THIRD SESSION

H. F. No. 4304

02/26/2024

Authored by Gomez

The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy

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APPENDIX  
Repealed Minnesota Statutes: 24-05997

**89.021 STATE FORESTS.**

Subd. 54. White Earth State Forest.

Hello. My name is Todd Glander, Becker County Sheriff. With me today is Mahnomon County Sheriff, Josh Guenther, and Clearwater County Sheriff, Darin Halverson. I am here today, not only as Sheriff, but as a concerned citizen of Becker County, where I have lived my entire life. Since hearing of this proposed bill, citizens, property owners, business owners, and recreational enthusiasts have contacted me to express their questions and concerns regarding file SF 3480. Some of these concerned individuals are tribal members of White Earth.

As you have heard (or are about to hear) these concerns range from personal and recreational to business and economic. How will this proposed bill affect everyone who enjoys and/or benefits from these lands. Right now, everyone has the right to enjoy these lands. It doesn't matter who you are or where you are from, they are for everyone. The concern is that if transferred, the regulation of these areas is taken out of the State's hands.

There are concerns of losing access to properties for emergency and first responder personnel. Could roads, accesses, trails, driveways, be moved or possibly vacated? I know of one private property where access to their property starts at a state highway, then routes through State Forest and County Tax Forfeited land before entering their property. This would be extremely detrimental to public safety, not only for law enforcement response, but medical response.

There are over 400 lakes in Becker County. Many of those lakes lie within the boundaries of the reservation on State Forest and County Tax Forfeited lands. As sheriff, some of my responsibilities include enforcing laws on recreational waters. Deputies spend hours patrolling lakes and rivers within the White Earth Forest, along with patrolling snowmobile and ATV trails. Part of MN Statute 387.03 states the Sheriff shall... "investigate recreational vehicle accidents involving injury or death...searching for drowned victims...and searching for lost persons." Would access to these areas be changed or ultimately closed?

This bill has not been vetted by the communities in Becker County. People are concerned about what happens to these public lands, their property, businesses, recreational land, and the future of Becker County. I am asking you to vote against SF 3480.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Todd Glander

**SF3480**

Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to speak about concerns with SF 3480 on behalf of the Becker County Board of Commissioners. My name is Barry Nelson, I represent District 5 on the Commission.

Becker County manages 27,693 acres of public lands within the White Earth Forest, which is approximately 37% of all County managed public lands that the County manages on behalf of the State. These lands are managed using sustainable forest management practices and create social, economic, and recreational benefits for the public.

The parcels that would be transferred under this bill are currently used by hunters, snowmobilers, ATV users, hikers, bird watchers, and horseback riders, to name a few recreations uses.

The economic impact of this would be felt throughout the region and state, not just Becker County. It will decrease the number of people coming to this region. There are many small family-owned businesses, many of them generational, that depend on the tourists and residents that enjoy the White Earth Forest to patronize their gas stations, resorts, bars, and restaurants. Many local loggers depend on timber sales from County and State Forest lands to sustain their business. These loggers are not allowed to cut timber on wooded lands owned by the White Earth Band. The transfer of these lands to the Tribe would impact their livelihood.

We have provided you with information specific to Becker County including the number of miles of roads, trails, and water accesses in the White Earth Forest. We also included the fiscal implications this would have for Becker County and the townships affected by this including Forest, Round Lake, and Eagle View. This will result in a higher tax levy for the citizens of Becker County or a decrease in services, which includes public safety, road maintenance, and other emergency services.

There are many questions about this legislation that need to be answered: Who will maintain the roads? What about the trails and access roads to properties that go through these parcels of land? What will happen with the North Country Trail? will it remains open to the public, Will hunting continue to be allowed by everyone? Will local businesses that depend on the management of the forests and tourism generated by the use of the White Earth Forest survive? How will the ability of local units of government to provide essential services be impacted?

We are fortunate to live in an area where we have public lands for all of us to enjoy. State parks were created for the use and enjoyment of all Minnesotans. Once they are gone, they cannot be replaced. For these reasons, we ask you to vote against SF 3480.



# Mahnomen County Sheriff's Office

311 N. Main  
PO Box 440  
Mahnomen, MN 56557

Sheriff Josh Guenther

Phone: (218) 935-2255  
Fax: (218) 935-5946

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My name is Josh Guenther. I am the Sheriff of Mahnomen County, and I am opposed to bill S.F. 3480. I believe that this bill would cause more harm than good, and that it would create division amongst the citizens of Mahnomen County. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of July, 2022 the population of Mahnomen County (5,328) is made up of 57% non-American Indian, and 43% American Indian, or approximately 2,291 American Indians. Far fewer than that are enrolled members of the White Earth Tribe.

As the State owned lands within the boundaries of the White Earth State Forest now sit, everyone can use it, including Tribal members. The land is open to public use for recreation, hunting, and fishing. Tribal members are able to use the land to practice their treaty rights of hunting, fishing, and gathering. If these lands are transferred to the Tribe, only a small percentage of people will be allowed access and the general public will be denied access. As a taxpayer in this State I believe that those lands should remain public.

I grew up in Mahnomen County, which is entirely within the boundaries of the White Earth Reservation, and I have family members and friends who are enrolled members of the Tribe, as well as family and friends who are American Indian, but not enrolled in the Tribe; they are descendants. I've personally heard opposition to this bill by both enrolled tribal members and descendants. The land would become inaccessible to all but enrolled members of the Tribe, denying access to non-enrolled American Indians and descendants.

The transfer of this land would have a major economic impact on Mahnomen County. Mahnomen County's geography creates vastly different economic drivers in the different parts of the county. To the west is flat farmland, the economic driver being agriculture. To the east (the area of the White Earth State Forest) is woodlands, lakes, and public lands for recreation. The major economic driver here is tourism and recreation; camping, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and ATV trails. People come from all over Minnesota to enjoy our lakes and trails, much of which is on the State lands in question. There are a number of resorts in the area which depend on these lands being public. If the access to these lands is cut off, tourism will halt, and a major economy for Mahnomen County will be destroyed.

Another concern with the State lands becoming inaccessible to the public is the lack of access that private land owners will have to their private lands that are currently accessed by crossing public land. These land owners' properties would become land-locked, and inaccessible. If State owned public water accesses become inaccessible, private land on lakes within the White Earth State Forest will lose value and decrease Mahnomen County's tax capacity, which is already razor thin due, in part, to the large amount of non-taxable Tribal trust lands within the county.

The State lands within the White Earth State Forest have been enjoyed by generations of Minnesotans for many years and the lands need to remain open to the public for generations to come.

Gary Carlberg  
4733 Carolyn Lane  
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

March 6, 2024

**SF3480 White Earth State Forest Land Transfer**

Dear Chair Hawj and Members,

As a veteran I ask for you to oppose approval of SF3480 White Earth State Forest Land Transfer.

Senate File 3480 introduced by Senator Kunesch removes State owned from all access for any use by Minnesota residents and visitors, restricts access to Minnesota landowners, and will negatively impact recreation related commerce in the area. State-owned land created for public use such as White Earth State Forest, Upper Sioux Agency State Park, and Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site never reached the status of surplus property nor do any reach an end to their use.

Before any of these proposals move there should be open and transparent meetings.

Senator Steve Green has heard from dozens of Tribal members and descendants, as well as other local landowners in opposition to this transfer. The bill does not state that the land will have to remain accessible to non-members if the transfer goes through. That means this land may become inaccessible to folks across the state who have enjoyed those lands for generations, and there is nothing in the bill that will allow non-members to continue hunting, hiking or snowmobiling as they have for years.

Because the area is currently a state forest, everyone can hunt on the land and use it for many purposes. This includes members of the tribes, as well as the general population. This can all be done currently, and the state maintains the land. But if this bill passes, the responsibility to maintain the lands will now fall on the tribes. There's also a clear concern that this change will make it harder for family members of tribal members to have access to these areas. White Earth has a diverse population.

I oppose SF3480 until this action has gone through the public review process.

Respectfully,

Gary Carlberg, Colonel (Ret)  
(651) 214-7086

**Stephanie Chappell**  
2401 14<sup>th</sup> Street East  
Glencoe MN 55336  
952-250-6108      fussy@hotmail.com

March 6, 2024

Senate Committee on Environment, Climate, and Legacy

**SF3480 White Earth State Forest Land Transfer**

Dear Chair Hawj and Members,

Senate File 3480 introduced by Senator Kunesh removes State owned from all access for any use by Minnesota residents and visitors, restricts access to Minnesota landowners, and will negatively impact recreation related commerce in the area.

State-owned land created for public use such as White Earth State Forest, Upper Sioux Agency State Park, and Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site never reach the status of surplus property nor do any reach an end to their use or purpose.

This bill does not consider or act in the best interests of the State of Minnesota.

I oppose this action. Any vote in favor of this bill is a vote to dissolve the State of Minnesota.

Thank you,

  
Stephanie Chappell

March 4, 2025

MN State Senate

RE: SF3480

I would like to express my dissatisfaction with the proposed transfer of the White Earth State Forest to the White Earth Band. I have lived in Clearwater County for 33 years and along with my family have enjoyed using this forest for camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling and four wheeling. In addition, we have enjoyed the beauty of the forest that is provided.

I believe the use of the forest will be diminished if this transfer is allowed to happen. First of all, the management of the forest will no longer be in the interest of all citizens as it would be managed for the benefit of White Earth Band. This will result in restrictions and curtailment of present use. I know you propose to keep access open to all but note how the White Earth Band has restricted the Heart Lake access nearby to all citizens. This transfer is not in the best interest of the citizens of Minnesota.

In addition, the proposed transfer will result in conflicts with the management of adjacent properties. Clearwater, Becker and Mahnommen Counties own a vast amount of property in this area. Much of these lands are managed along with the MN DNR for recreational and logging purposes. The loggers will be impeded by change of land ownership as will the recreation users. If you don't believe this look at the Beltrami State Forest that is intermingled with Red Lake Reservation land.

There is also an economic impact to this transfer. The state will no longer be able to collect from logging sales. There will be a decrease in hunting and fishing licenses by people who use these lands. There will be a decrease in sales of snowmobile and ATV licenses as some people only use this forest for their outdoor enjoyment.

This bill be a steppingstone to transferring the Beltrami State Forest to the Red Lake Nation, the Chippewa State Forest to the Leech Lake Bank, or any number of state forests to various bands. These State Forests were established for all citizens of Minnesota and let's keep it that way.

I ask that consideration of this bill be dropped as the land should be owned by the State and managed by the State for all citizens of Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Clayton J. Quade  
36935 Lomond Dr.  
Bagley, MN 56621