



# Mahnomen County Sheriff's Office

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Sheriff Josh Guenther

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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.