

Sustainable Forest Resources Act Implementation in 1999

Minnesota Forest Resources Council Annual Report to the Governor and Legislature

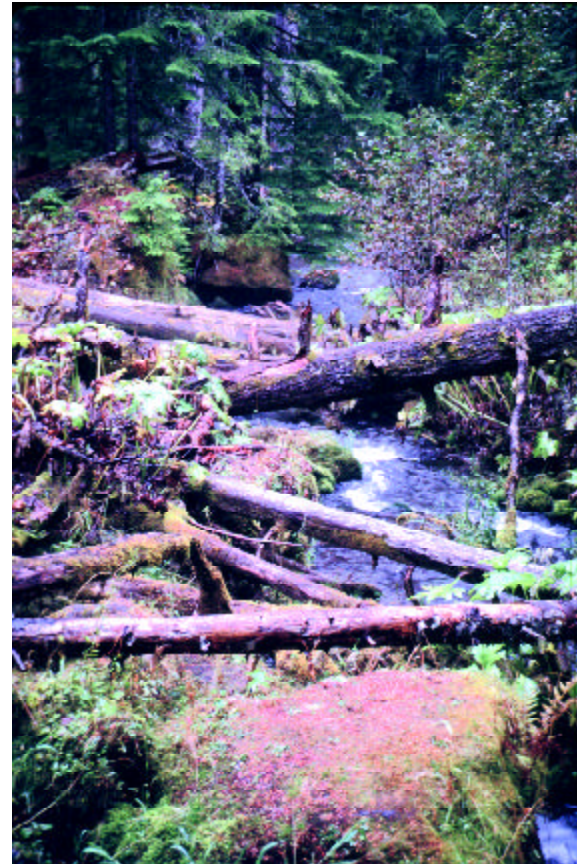
**Respectfully submitted by the
Minnesota Forest Resources Council**

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Message from the Chair

I am pleased to submit the 1999 report of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC). This report highlights the MFRC's major accomplishments during 1999 to implement the Sustainable Forest Resources Act; notable among these are:

- **Implementation of timber harvesting and forest management guidelines.** In 1999 the MFRC initiated distribution of the guidebook, "Sustaining Minnesota's Forest Resources: Voluntary Site-Level Forest Management Guidelines," to loggers, natural resource professionals and forest landowners. In cooperation with several partners, the MFRC supported outreach and training activities directed at increasing awareness and understanding of the guidelines. Over 1,200 loggers and natural resource professionals attended one of fifteen full-day introductory workshops held in spring 1999 throughout Minnesota. In addition, over 900 participated in full-day, field-based training sessions in fall 1999. To encourage use of the guidelines by Minnesota's private forest landowners, the MFRC distributed a twelve-page informational booklet about the guidelines to over 27,000 individuals owning forestland in the state.

- **Development of a guideline implementation monitoring program.** The MFRC finalized its recommendations to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for developing a guideline implementation monitoring program. These

recommendations call for annually visiting a random sample of recently-harvested sites to track use of the timber harvesting/forest management guidelines. In fulfilling its oversight and program direction responsibilities, the MFRC is currently working with the DNR to ensure timely execution of this monitoring program.

- **Assessing the accuracy and availability of information about Minnesota's forests.** The MFRC started a review to assess whether Minnesota's data collection and monitoring efforts: 1) are gathering the data needed to meet the information needs for effective management of forest resources; and 2) are sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the overall health and productivity of the state's forest resources. In conjunction with this review the MFRC will develop recommendations for improving the state's data collection efforts to more effectively support forest resource management.

- **Completion of an assessment for Minnesota's northeast landscape region.** Throughout 1999 the MFRC prepared an assessment of the ecological, economic and social resources of northeastern Minnesota. The Northeast Regional Forest Resource Committee used this information to identify desired future conditions, goals and strategies for sustainably managing the forest resources of that region.

• **Identification of a desired future forest condition for northeastern Minnesota.** In accordance with requirements in the Sustainable Forest Resources Act, the Northeast Regional Forest Resource Committee developed a desired future forest condition and identified key goals and strategies for sustaining the forest resources in northeastern Minnesota. The committee is currently working with various public and private interests in the region to coordinate implementation of these strategies.

• **Initiation of a peer review of riparian management and seasonal pond guidelines.** As required by the Sustainable Forest Resources Act, the MFRC initiated an independent, science-based review of timber harvesting and forest management guidelines for sustaining forested riparian areas and seasonal ponds. Eight scientists representing expertise in hydrology/soil science, terrestrial ecology, silviculture and aquatic ecology will participate in this review. The review will evaluate the extent to which the guidelines for managing forested riparian areas and seasonal ponds are consistent with available scientific information and

understanding. The MFRC will review the peer review results early in 2000.

In 2000 the MFRC's focus will be to expand its landscape-level forest resource planning and coordination program to other regions of the state, evaluate the results of the first round of field-based guideline implementation monitoring, and advise on significant issues affecting the long-term health of Minnesota's forest resources. Most importantly, the MFRC will continue providing a forum for collaborative problem solving among groups interested in sustainable management of Minnesota's forest resources and committed to cooperation in addressing the state's forest resource issues.

Sincerely,



Gene Merriam
Chair

Sustainable Forest Resources Act



In 1995 the Minnesota Legislature enacted the Sustainable Forest Resources Act (SFRA), one of the state's most significant forestry laws. The SFRA's purpose is to "pursue the sustainable management, use and protection of the state's forest resources to achieve the state's economic, environmental and social goals" (M.S. 89A.02). The Minnesota Forest Resources Council is responsible for coordinating implementation of the SFRA.

The SFRA has a broad strategy for achieving forest sustainability:

- site- and landscape-level programs to address forest resource management over both small and large areas and maintain diverse forest ecosystems;
- supporting programs of forest monitoring, forest resource information management and research, and continuing education;
- cooperation and collaboration between public and private sectors in managing Minnesota's forests;
- bringing in many different perspectives to decisions regarding the use, management and protection of the state's forest resources; and
- seeking decisions about forest resource management that account for long-term objectives of economic viability and community stability.

Minnesota Forest Resources Council

The Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) is a seventeen-member organization with an interest in long-term, sustainable management of Minnesota's forest resources. The council serves two roles. First, it coordinates implementation of the Sustainable Forest Resources Act. Second, the MFRC advises the governor and federal, state, county and local governments on sustainable forest resource policies and practices. The governor appoints the chair and fifteen members; the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council appoints one member. Members represent:

- Commercial Logging Contractors
- Conservation Organizations
- County Land Departments
- Environmental Organizations¹
- Forest Products Industry
- Game Species Management Organizations
- Labor Organizations
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
- Nonindustrial Private Forest Landowners¹
- Research & Higher Education
- Resort and Tourism Industry
- Secondary Wood Products Manufacturers
- USDA Forest Service

¹Has two representatives on the MFRC.



A Vision for Minnesota's Forest Resources

The Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) developed the following vision for the state's forest resources:

Minnesota's forests are managed with primary consideration given to long-term ecosystem integrity and sustaining healthy economies and human communities. Forest resource policy and management decisions are based on credible science, community values, and broad-based citizen involvement. The public understands and appreciates Minnesota's forest resources and is involved in and supports decisions regarding their use, management and protection.

This vision, along with eleven goals the MFRC set to accomplish this vision, guides the MFRC in its work to implement the Sustainable Forest Resources Act and act on important policies and initiatives to sustain Minnesota's forests. Many of the goals are already being addressed through the MFRC's activities.

The eleven goals the MFRC established to help accomplish the vision:

- **Minnesota's forestland base is enlarged and protected.** No net loss of forestland occurs and some previously forested areas are returned to forest cover. The forestland base is protected from decreases and fragmentation caused by land-use changes.
- **Forest ecosystems are healthy, resilient and functioning.** Forests are composed of appropriate mixes of cover types and age classes required to maintain wildlife and biological diversity.
- **Forests are sustainably managed.** Forests are managed to ensure economic, social and ecological sustainability. Forest management activities enhance the diversity of the state's forests and support the long-term sustainability and growth of the many sectors that depend on them.
- **Forest-based economic and recreational opportunities are numerous.** The role and contribution of forests to the state's economic and social well being is acknowledged. Economic

A Vision for Minnesota's Forest Resources

opportunities for Minnesota's forest-based industries, including tourism and wood-based industries, are numerous, sustainable and diverse.

- **Forest practices are implemented in effective and efficient manners.** Forest practices are implemented in ways that maximize their effectiveness while minimizing the costs of their administration. Guidelines suggesting appropriate practices are scientifically-based, practical and easy to understand; their rationale is clearly stated; and their application consistent where possible and appropriate.
- **Forest landscape-level planning is coordinated and involves collaboration.** Landscape level planning is based on ecological landscapes and involves

collaboration between landowners, users, stakeholders and the public.

- **Public and private rights and responsibilities are recognized.** Forest practices that achieve certain public benefits recognize and respect the inherent rights, responsibilities, interests and financial limitations of public and private forest landowners.
- **Forest research programs are effective and adaptive.** Information is provided by effective and coordinated, basic and applied research programs. Forest practices and landscape planning/coordination activities are based on the best available information and technology, and can be readily adapted to new information or changing resource conditions.

- **Multi-resource information systems are compatible and comprehensive.** Landowners, managers and stakeholders have access to information systems that are capable of providing comprehensive information about forest resources.
- **Forest policy development is effective and supportable.** Policies and programs focused on forest resources are developed and supported by processes that collaboratively move forward to resolve issues and accommodate a wide range of constituencies.
- **Program funding is committed and sustained.** Sustainable, adequate and long-term funding is available to accomplish the vision and the goals for the state's forests.



Site-Level Program

Guideline development and outreach

As demands on Minnesota's forests grow ever more complex, forest management must be able to support forest-based economic opportunities, yet also maintain forests for ecological functions such as biological diversity and societal values such as outdoor recreation. One response called for by Minnesota's Sustainable Forest Resources Act is site-level timber harvesting and forest management guidelines that recommend ways to harvest trees with limited impacts to forest functions and values. In December 1998, after two and one-half years of development, the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) finalized these guidelines.

Minnesota's timber harvesting and forest management guidelines address the management, use and protection of historic and cultural resources, riparian areas, soil productivity, water quality and wetlands, wildlife habitat, and visual quality. The guidelines are:

- **comprehensive** — address a wide variety of forest resource issues;
- **science-based** — grounded in the best available scientific information;
- **voluntary** — all landowners apply the guidelines according to their management objectives;
- **integrated** — guidelines protecting various forest functions and values are contained in one cohesive package;

- **flexible** — accommodate a range of site-level conditions and management objectives;
- **stakeholder based** — involve the full spectrum of interests in guideline development, education and monitoring; and
- **implementable** — recommend practices that can be widely applied.

Early in 1999 the MFRC published the guidelines as an integrated manual (guidebook). During 1999 the MFRC distributed approximately three thousand guidebooks to Minnesota's loggers, natural resource managers, forest landowners and the general public. This has occurred through guideline education programs, direct mailings and distribution through various organizations. (Read more about guideline education programs on page 22.)

Working with the Minnesota Forestry Association, the MFRC developed a twelve-page informational booklet about the guidelines. Over twenty-seven thousand individuals owning forestland parcels in Minnesota received a copy of this booklet. An additional 18,400 booklets are reaching landowners through various outlets, such as the Forest Stewardship Program, Soil Water Conservation Districts, woodland councils, private forest landowner organizations, industry foresters, state agencies and forestry extension educators, which work extensively with nonindustrial private forest landowners.



Site-Level Program

Peer Review

Changes made to the Sustainable Forest Resources Act during Minnesota's 1999 legislative session include a requirement for the MFRC to undertake a peer review of those guidelines that recommend ways to protect riparian areas and seasonal ponds. This peer review is to be a "scientifically-based review conducted by individuals with substantial knowledge and experience in the subject matter" (MS 89A.01 Subd. 10a). The review will assess the extent to which the guidelines for protecting forest riparian areas and seasonal ponds are consistent with available scientific information and understanding.

At its December 1999 meeting, the MFRC adopted a process for conducting the peer-review and approved a list of peer reviewers. Eight scientists, two each with expertise in aquatic ecology,

silviculture, terrestrial ecology and hydrology/soil chemistry will participate in the review. These reviewers all meet five criteria set out by the peer-review plan; namely, they have substantial knowledge and research experience in their field, are knowledgeable about forests in the lake states, did not serve on any guideline development technical team, are able to commit time to the review, and are able to provide an objective review of the guidelines.

The review will be completed early in 2000, at which time the MFRC will determine what follow-up actions are needed.

Guideline Implementation Monitoring

In October 1999 the MFRC approved a plan for monitoring the use of the timber harvesting and forest management guidelines. This plan calls for annually conducting

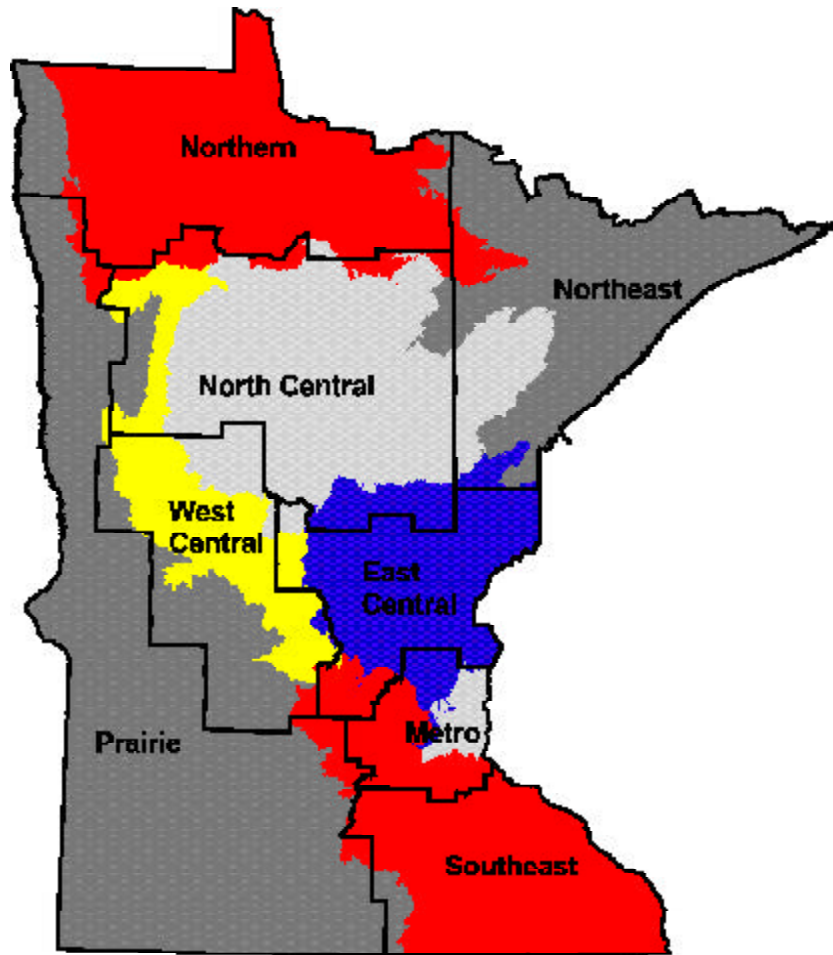
field reviews of a statistical sample of recently-harvested sites to assess the extent to which the guidelines are being applied. Information collected through this monitoring program will be useful in tracking progress towards guideline implementation goals set by the MFRC in 1998. (Read more on guideline implementation monitoring on page 16.)

Monitoring Riparian Forests

Working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the MFRC has set plans to address special Sustainable Forest Resources Act requirements to monitor riparian forests and seasonal ponds. Aerial photos taken for use in the guideline implementation monitoring program will be used to assess the extent and condition of riparian forests. The extent of harvesting within riparian management zones and seasonal ponds will be tracked through on-

the-ground field visits for monitoring guideline implementation. During these field visits the application of timber harvesting and forest management guidelines in and adjacent to these areas also will be recorded. Effectiveness of guidelines applied in riparian management zones and around seasonal ponds will be looked at through a broad guideline effectiveness research study. Among other topics, this study also may look at guideline effectiveness for wildlife habitat, soil productivity, and balancing costs and benefits of applying the guidelines.

Landscape-Level Forest Resource Planning and Coordination



Minnesota Forest Resources Council Landscape Program
Regions: northern, northeast, north central, west central, east central, southeast, prairie, metro.

Landscape-level forest resource planning and coordination is a way of assessing and promoting forest resource sustainability across large forested landscapes. The Sustainable Forest Resources Act's landscape program is a forum where forestland owners and stakeholders can collaborate to address forest resource issues over broad regions of Minnesota's forests.

In 1997 the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) established a framework consisting of three components to guide the landscape program: identification of principles and goals, establishment of a general planning process, and delineation of regional forest landscapes. Principles and goals provide a context for undertaking landscape-level planning and coordination while the general planning process serves as a map to follow to reach the goals.

The MFRC identified six forested landscape regions within the state, plus metro and prairie regions that are mostly nonforest. Within each landscape region committees of citizens and representatives of various organizations work to:

- 1) **gather and assess information** on a region's current and future ecological, economic and social characteristics;
- 2) use information about a region to **identify that region's key forest resource issues**;
- 3) **plan ways to address key issues** in order to promote sustainable forest management within the region; and
- 4) **coordinate various forest management activities** and plans among a region's forestland owners and managers in order to promote sustainable forest management.

Northeastern Minnesota

The MFRC established the Northeast Regional Forest Resource Committee in 1998 as a pilot to test the feasibility of landscape level forest resource planning and coordination in northeastern Minnesota.

In order to tackle an array of forest resource issues, the northeast regional committee established three working groups: assessment, coordination and outreach/education. The regional committee also designated a small convener group to help coordinate and guide overall progress. Between meetings of the full committee, working groups and convener group, in 1999 volunteer members committed a total of thirty-six meeting days to the landscape program.

As required in the Sustainable Forest Resources Act, throughout 1999 the northeast regional committee prepared an assessment of the current conditions and trends for northeastern Minnesota's forest resources, outlined six key forest resource issues the committee needs to address, and finalized a desired future condition for the region's forests. They also planned goals and strategies for attaining the desired future forest condition and coordinated various forest management activities across the region. The specifics of these accomplishments, organized around the program's four objectives described above, are as follows:

1) Gather and assess information. In 1999 the Assessment Working Group put together an assessment of current conditions and trends for northeastern Minnesota's forest resources. They completed the draft assessment in early summer 1999 and the northeast regional committee finalized it in July 1999. This assessment, which describes the region's ecological, social and economic conditions, can be found on the website <http://www.iic.state.mn.us>.

Key conclusions of the assessment include:

- a comprehensive ecological inventory should be undertaken;
- the MFRC should reexamine and clarify goals for the landscape program; and
- a landscape-assessment process should be adopted that includes assessment of historical, ecological, social and economic conditions in each landscape region.

2) Identify region's key forest resource issues. Based on the assessment of northeastern Minnesota's forest resource conditions and trends, the northeast regional committee identified six key issues to address and of these selected three that need immediate attention:

- Harvest sustainability: Is the current (or an increased) level of forest harvesting sustainable over time?
- Ecosystem sustainability: How can all available data be synthesized to determine ecosystem sustainability at a landscape scale?

Landscape-Level Forest Resource Planning and Coordination



- Adequate information and inventory system for ecological assessments: Existing forest vegetation inventories are primarily focused on collecting data for commercial tree species but do not serve the broader needs of an ecological assessment.

Questions about ecosystem and harvest sustainability became the focal point as the northeast regional committee developed desired future conditions for northeastern Minnesota's forests. An ad hoc

working group of the northeast regional committee met for two days in September 1999 and found common ground on a desired future forest condition (DFFC). Then the northeast regional committee met to refine this DFFC, completing it in December 1999. The desired future forest in northeastern Minnesota is:

A forest that falls within the range of natural variability, whose spatial patterns are consistent with the processes associated with ecological types and that creates diverse habitat to maintain natural communities and viable populations for the species native to northeastern Minnesota.

3) Plan ways to address key issues.

When the ad hoc working group met to develop a desired future forest condition, it also established goals and strategies for achieving this future condition. Throughout 2000 the working groups will have

the task of determining specifically how the goals and strategies can be implemented.

Another way to promote sustainable forest management in the region is by sharing information about landscape program activities. During 1999 the Outreach and Education Working Group planned ways to “get the word out” about the northeast regional committee. In August they represented the committee at the Rural Summit in Duluth. Several other outreach activities are slated for 2000.

4) Coordinate various forest management activities. During 1999 the Coordination Working Group met an average of once per month to deal with coordinating various forest management activities across public and private forestlands in northeastern Minnesota. Among these activities were management of old growth forests, use of visual quality guidelines, and planning for off-highway vehicle usage of forested areas.

North Central Minnesota

In 1999 the MFRC began planning how to expand the landscape program into north central Minnesota. They initiated cooperation with the Resource Management Partnership (ReMaP), an existing group of approximately twenty representatives from public and private forest landowners in the region that coordinates forest management activities across the region's forestlands. Cooperation with this group will be key in developing the current conditions and trends assessment for north central Minnesota's forest resources, which is now in draft form and will be complete by March 2000. Once the forest resource conditions and trends assessment is completed, the MFRC will work with ReMaP to establish a regional forest resource committee in north central Minnesota by summer of 2000.

Monitoring



The Sustainable Forest Resources Act calls for four monitoring programs: forest resource, forest practices and compliance, effectiveness, and citizen concerns. Each program, except the citizen concerns monitoring, is a joint task of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Because compliance and effectiveness monitoring are closely related, these two are described together here; activities in forest practices monitoring are outlined separately.

Forest Resource Monitoring

A program to monitor "broad trends and conditions in the state's forest resources at statewide, landscape and site levels" (M.S. 89A.07 Subd. 1).

To monitor broad trends and conditions in the state's forest resources, the MFRC began with an initial trends and conditions report for the 1997-1998 MFRC biennial report. Throughout 1999 the MFRC continued collecting and summarizing forest resource data and established a forest resource information website.

One component of tracking information about Minnesota's forest resources is providing access to existing forest resource data. The Interagency Information Cooperative (IIC), a Sustainable Forest Resources Act program, coordinates the development and use of forest resource data in the state. Run by the DNR, the IIC has developed a website that provides access to information about forestland management plans, rare wildlife and plant species, archaeological and historic sites, land use, roads and trails, among others.

IIC staff also has developed a common database format for forest inventory data from public forest landowners. Having forest inventory data from all landowners in a uniform database format provides a more complete picture of the forest and greatly aids in conducting landscape-level forest resource assessments. The DNR, USDA Forest Service and county land departments in Aitkin, Becker, Cass, Cook, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Koochiching, Lake, Pine and St. Louis counties have converted their forest inventory data to this common database format. The landscape program's Northeast Regional Forest Resource Committee is already putting this data to use.

Monitoring

Compliance and Effectiveness Monitoring

In 1999 the MFRC began developing programs to monitor Minnesota's timber harvesting and forest management guidelines. The Sustainable Forest Resources Act calls for two separate programs: guideline compliance (or implementation) monitoring and guideline effectiveness monitoring. The former is a way to track how widely the guidelines are used and how the guidelines are applied. The latter is a way to learn whether the guidelines are achieving the intended goal of protecting various forest resources.

Compliance Monitoring.

A program to monitor "application of the timber harvesting and forest management guidelines at statewide, landscape and site levels" (M.S. 89A.07 Subd. 2).

In October 1999 the MFRC approved a plan for monitoring the

use of recently-developed timber harvesting and forest management guidelines. This plan has two major components:

- 1) a methodology for randomly selecting a set of recently-harvested forest sites to monitor, developed for the MFRC in 1999 by several University of Minnesota researchers; and
- 2) protocols and a systematic procedure for monitoring guideline implementation on each harvest site, established in 1999 with help from a technical committee.

Important aspects of the monitoring plan:

- Approximately 120 sites will be selected at random to ensure the results of each year's monitoring are truly representative of timber harvesting practices on public and private forestlands across the state.
- Sites must be reviewed within two growing seasons after trees are harvested.
- Monitoring will take place during spring or fall when deciduous trees

have no leaves. (This makes it easier to see which timber harvesting and forest management activities were carried out on a site.)

- Permission will be obtained from all landowners before monitoring teams enter and monitor any harvest sites.
- Monitoring teams will look at measurable timber harvesting, forest roads and general guidelines, which make up the bulk of guidelines.
- Quality control teams will visit 5% to 10% of all sites monitored to ensure the on-site evaluations of guideline implementation are consistent and accurate.

While the MFRC is responsible for designing and overseeing the guideline implementation monitoring plan, DNR has the task of putting the monitoring program into action. The DNR will coordinate field monitoring activities and process data collected in the field to develop a picture of how widely the forest management

guidelines are used. The first round of field monitoring is planned for spring 2000, and results from this monitoring are anticipated later in 2000.

Effectiveness Monitoring.

A program to evaluate "effectiveness of practices to mitigate impacts of timber harvesting and forest management activities on the state's forest resources" (M.S. 89A.07 Subd. 3).

Effectiveness of guidelines will be looked at through a broad guideline effectiveness research study. Over time the study will provide insight to how well the guidelines are achieving intended objectives of sustaining various components of Minnesota's forests. A primary focus of this study will be how effective guidelines are in protecting riparian areas and seasonal ponds. This study also may look at guideline effectiveness for maintaining wildlife habitat and soil productivity and gather information on the costs and benefits of applying the guidelines.

Monitoring



In December 1999 the MFRC, through its Research Advisory Committee, developed a proposal for a broad study to evaluate guideline effectiveness. The proposal, which involves many researchers from several organizations and scientific disciplines, will be submitted in early 2000 for funding consideration by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources.

Forest Practices Monitoring

A program to monitor "silvicultural practices" (M.S. 89A.07 Subd. 2).

One part of the 1994 "Generic Environmental Impact Statement Study on Timber Harvesting and Forest Management in Minnesota" was a 1991 survey to collect information on timber harvesting and silvicultural practices across the state. The survey asked loggers and forest resource managers about methods used to harvest trees, the number of trees being cut, whether sites are clear-cut or partially cut, time of year when trees are harvested, and how many trees are harvested on public versus private forestlands.

A 1996 survey conducted by the MFRC collected similar data from loggers and forest resource managers. Results showed what is happening on a substantial portion of the timberland acres in Minnesota. Complete results of the surveys are compiled in a report "Status of Minnesota Timber Harvesting and Silvicultural Practice in 1996," which the Minnesota Forest Resources Council has made available throughout 1999 and will continue to distribute upon request.

Because of its utility for planning and evaluation of forest management activities, this information needs to be updated regularly. The MFRC will oversee and provide direction for another such survey in a few years. Data collected will add to the current database and show trends in how forest stands are managed and how trees are harvested.

Monitoring

Citizen Concerns Monitoring

A program to accept “comments from the public on negligent timber harvesting and forest management practices” (M.S. 89A.07 Subd. 5).

Citizen concerns monitoring — or the Public Concerns Registration Process (PCRP) — is a way for citizens to voice concerns they have about specific timber harvesting and forest management practices they see in Minnesota. Set up in 1998, the PCRP lets landowners, foresters and loggers know about these concerns and encourages sustainable management of Minnesota’s forests. It is not a program for taking punitive measures to stop logging or resolve disputes over contractual issues or specific forest management activities.

Through the PCRP citizens can:

- formally let the MFRC know their concerns about forest management activities they see;
- be a catalyst for mitigation of any problems on a site; and
- learn more about forest management and guidelines for sustainable forestry.

Landowners, loggers and foresters benefit by becoming more aware of public concerns regarding forest management, and learning more about guidelines for sustainable forest management.

Summaries of concerns registered through the PCRP help the MFRC better understand citizens’ expectations for how Minnesota’s forests should be managed. The MFRC can use these insights in deciding which, if any, additional timber harvesting and forest management guidelines are needed and recommending continuing

education programs for forestland managers and owners, loggers and citizens.

Between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 1999 five citizens called the toll-free PCRP number. Of these, two callers did not provide the information needed for staff to begin looking into a concern. One citizen’s concern dealt with timber trespass. As the PCRP was not established to resolve disputes between landowners, staff provided this individual information on how to handle the situation, but did not contact any other parties associated with the property in question.

The remaining two concerns involved problems of soil rutting, erosion, damage to stream banks, and poor attention to protecting riparian areas. In both cases MFRC staff contacted the logger, forester and landowner to inform them of the registered concern and recommend options for mitigating

damage to the harvest site. By raising loggers’, foresters’ and landowners’ awareness of citizens’ concerns, the PCRP helps spur such mitigation to occur.

Throughout 1999 the MFRC increased outreach to raise Minnesota citizens’ awareness of the PCRP. This includes an advertisement about the PCRP published in various newsletters, magazines and newspapers; a new brochure; and short articles about the PCRP in various newsletters and magazines. Citizens also can now register concerns via the MFRC website (<http://www.frc.state.mn.us/monitor/PCRP.htm>).



Photo courtesy of Dorian Grilley

Research Advisory Committee

The Research Advisory Committee was established in 1996 under the Sustainable Forest Resources Act. Consisting of representatives of major research institutions and natural resource professional employers, this group is charged with periodically conducting research assessments, promoting forest resources research, and fostering linkages between researchers and practitioners.

Research Assessment

The Sustainable Forest Resources Act requires periodic assessment of strategic directions for forest resource research in Minnesota. In July 1998 the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) completed the first such review, synthesized in the report “Forest Resources Research in Minnesota: Meeting the Information Needs of the Next Decade.” Based on input gathered by the Research Advisory Committee, the report identifies areas where more information is needed to support sustainable management of the state’s forest resources. Four high-priority areas are highlighted: 1) understanding forest ecosystem function and integrity; 2) assessing economic and social aspects of forest resources; 3) information and technology development to support forest resource planning and management activities; and 4) designing effective policies and programs directed at the use, management and protection of Minnesota’s forests. Throughout 1999 the MFRC continued distributing this report to interested parties.

Forest Resources Research

Under the Sustainable Forest Resources Act, the Research Advisory Committee also recommends to the MFRC research projects to support. In March 1999 the MFRC extended for an additional two years the funding for three research projects, each originally funded from December 1996 to December 1998. Each study addresses one or more priority research areas highlighted in the research assessment report. The three studies are:

- 1) “Impacts of harvesting on regeneration, productivity and floristic diversity of quaking aspen and northern hardwood ecosystems;”
- 2) “Evaluating riparian area dynamics, management alternatives and impacts of harvest practices;” and
- 3) “Wildlife species: response to forest harvesting and management of riparian stands and landscapes.”

Each project leveraged significant additional funding from other sources to support the research. During the first two years of the studies, the researchers cooperated in conducting the research (using the same research sites, planning field seasons, and sharing resources) and are building on this collaboration in the second phase of the projects.

In 1999 the MFRC also requested a study that could continue exploring the potential economic effects associated with implementing timber harvesting and forest management guidelines. The project “Assessing

the financial effects associated with implementing Minnesota's timber harvesting and forest management guidelines" is taking some different angles to augment understanding of such costs. Researchers began working on the project in summer 1999 and will complete the study in 2000.

Each project funded by the MFRC meets research study goals laid out in the SFRA:

- collaboration between organizations with responsibilities for conducting forest resources research;
- linkages between researchers in different disciplines in conducting forest resources research; and
- interaction and communication between researchers and practitioners in the development and use of forest resources research.

Researcher-Practitioner Linkages

Throughout 1999 researchers from the productivity, riparian and wildlife studies (see above under "Forest Resources Research") presented their research and preliminary results at numerous workshops and national meetings. Current plans of the riparian and wildlife research teams are to write fact sheets about the research for the Internet; develop a guided tour of the research sites near Grand Rapids, Minnesota; and schedule a workshop for spring 2001 to present results of the studies to forest resource managers.



Education



Continuing Education

In the mid-1990s the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) promoted establishment of the Minnesota Logger Education Program (MLEP) and the Institute for Sustainable Natural Resources (ISNR) – organizations offering continuing education programming for loggers and natural resource professionals, respectively. During 1999 ISNR sponsored workshops on topics ranging from landscape ecology to the collaborative learning approach. MLEP scheduled workshops on topics such as logging safety and business management. Both organizations were heavily involved in timber harvesting/forest management guideline training. By offering programs on current research, new technologies and state-of-the-art practices, both ISNR and MLEP advance the Sustainable Forest Resources Act's mission to pursue sustainable management, use and protection of the state's forest resources.

Guideline education

Education programs are key to reaching a high level of timber harvesting/forest management guideline use within the state's forestry community. In 1999 the MFRC supported two guideline education programs for loggers and natural resource professionals sponsored by MLEP, ISNR and the Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership (MFRP). From April to August, 1244 loggers and natural resource professionals (620 and 624, respectively) attended one of fifteen full-day introductory sessions to find out what the guidelines say and practice using the guideline book. Over 900 loggers and natural resource professionals (505 and 420, respectively) got hands-on practice using the guidelines out in the forest at one of fourteen field sessions in September and October. Workshop participants practiced making decisions about which guidelines to use depending on the site's conditions and various landowner goals for the site.

In November 1999, with input from the Minnesota Forest Resources Council, MLEP, ISNR and MFRP surveyed those who attended the introductory and/or field training to learn how guideline education programs can be improved and to identify additional guideline-related training needs. MLEP, ISNR and MFRP will offer introductory and field guideline training to loggers and natural resource professionals in 2000.

Outreach



Throughout 1999 the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) has sought to improve its outreach and communication with various stakeholders. While much is being done to raise awareness of the Sustainable Forest Resources Act and the many ongoing activities to implement the act, the MFRC looks to continuously improve and expand its outreach in 2000.

Among the outreach conducted in 1999:

- updated, reorganized MFRC website to improve access to information about the Sustainable Forest Resources Act and MFRC;
- established links from other web sites to the MFRC website;
- produced semi-annual newsletter covering MFRC activities and distributed it to over 500 individuals;
- updated the brochure on the MFRC and Sustainable Forest Resources Act;
- updated the brochure about the Public Concerns Registration Process;
- developed an advertisement for the Public Concerns Registration Process and distributed it to various newsletters, magazines and local newspapers;
- wrote articles about various MFRC activities for newsletters of other organizations;
- placed notices about the availability of the timber harvesting and forest management guidelines in newsletters of other organizations;
- announced regular MFRC meetings more widely — through MFRC website, Environmental Quality Board Monitor and local newspapers; and
- set up an informational booth at three conferences — Sustainable Communities Workshop, Minneapolis, April 30, 1999; Rural Summit, August 11-12, 1999, Duluth; and Minnesota Resort Association Annual Conference, October 19, 1999, Park Rapids.

Strategic Forest Resource Issues

Availability and Accuracy of Forest Resource Information

In order to achieve its vision for Minnesota's forests (see Vision, page 7), the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) is addressing various forest resource issues facing the state. Throughout 1999 the MFRC began addressing one particularly significant issue: the availability and accuracy of forest resource information.

In 1998 the MFRC determined that the availability and accuracy of information about forests is one of the top issues affecting Minnesota's ability to sustainably manage its forests. To address this issue the MFRC created the Forest Resources Information Management Committee and charged it with reviewing information about Minnesota's forests. This review centers on two significant questions:

- 1) Are Minnesota's data collection efforts gathering the right data to meet the information needs for effective forest resource planning and management?
- 2) Is the information sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the overall status and productivity of Minnesota's forest resources?

To begin addressing these two questions, the committee arranged the MFRC's March 1999 meeting so council members could learn more about forest resource information and monitoring work in the state. Experts in forest resource information talked to the MFRC about what information is available about various forest resources, such as forest inventories, non-game and non-commodity forest resources, forest-based tourism and recreation, and forest wildlife.

The committee also initiated a two-phase review of forest resource information in Minnesota. Phase one is identifying baseline questions and indicators that can be used in a review of forest resource information; phase two is evaluating the state's existing forest information resources.

For phase one, the committee partnered in 1999 with the Environmental Indicators Initiative to identify baseline questions and indicators for each MFRC goal that must be met to accomplish the vision for Minnesota's forests (see Vision, page 7). Baseline questions are those by which progress toward the MFRC goals can be measured; indicators are specific quantitative or qualitative measures that provide

answers to baseline questions. For example, one goal is for Minnesota's forestland base to be enlarged and protected. A baseline question for this goal is "how much forestland is there?" An indicator for this question is the specific acreage of forestland across the state. These baseline questions and indicators will be completed by early 2000.

Phase two will look at existing programs that collect data on various forest resources. It will seek to answer two questions: 1) Does the data being generated by these programs provide answers to the baseline questions identified in phase one of the review? 2) Which baseline questions are not adequately addressed by existing information resources? The committee will complete phase two by the end of 2000.

This two-phase information review will be a significant step forward in answering the questions of whether Minnesota's forestry community is collecting sufficient data for fully understanding the overall status and productivity of the state's forest resources. Based on this information review, the MFRC will develop recommendations for strengthening the state's forest resource information capacity.



MFRC Advisory Recommendations



The Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) has a role advising the governor and federal, state, county and local governments on strategic forest resource policies and practices. In this capacity, the MFRC responded to two issues needing immediate attention: County Biological Survey funding and proposed changes to Environmental Protection Agency water quality protection rules that could affect forestry in Minnesota.

County Biological Survey Funding

In March 1999 the MFRC took a position supporting continued funding of the County Biological Survey (CBS) as recommended by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources. A letter went to chairs of legislative committees with responsibility for funding environmental and natural resource programs outlining reasons for the MFRC's continued support of the CBS.

The CBS identifies Minnesota's significant natural areas by systematically collecting and interpreting data on the distribution and ecology of natural communities. Gathering information on sensitive natural habitats and rare plant and animal species is central to this effort.

Information collected through the CBS advances Sustainable Forest Resources Act programs and supports MFRC activities to promote sustainable forest resource management. For example, data from the CBS is used in landscape planning and coordination to help assess regional forest resource sustainability. CBS work also addresses forest resource research priorities identified by the MFRC, such as the need to have a better record of the plants and animals in Minnesota's forests. The CBS' collection of ecological data also contributes to enhancing the availability of information about Minnesota's forests.

Proposed Environmental Protection Agency Rules

In December 1999 the MFRC took a unified position on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed changes to the Total Maximum Daily Load and the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System rules for water bodies. Changes to these rules could have significant implications for Minnesota's voluntary timber harvesting and forest management guidelines, a program central to the Sustainable Forest Resources Act.

Among the proposed changes to these EPA rules, many silvicultural activities would be classified as point sources of pollution, and permits could be required for conducting any such activities in the watershed of any water body listed as not meeting water quality standards. Requiring permits for silvicultural activities would undermine Minnesota's history of voluntary

programs for protecting water quality and other forest functions and values. In 1989 voluntary best management practices for water quality were adopted; voluntary visual quality best management practices were adopted in 1994. Although these best management practices were voluntary, monitoring showed high compliance levels – levels comparable to those in states with regulatory forest management programs.

The tradition of these voluntary programs was continued in broad timber harvesting and forest management guidelines, which the MFRC adopted in December 1998. These guidelines incorporated the previous best management practices and added guidelines to protect historic and cultural resources, riparian areas, soil productivity and wildlife habitat. While it is not yet known how widely the guidelines will be applied, many public and private landowners and other stakeholders have expressed strong commitment to using the guidelines and to making this voluntary

program successful in sustaining Minnesota's forest resources. The extent of guideline use will be tracked through a guideline implementation monitoring program. Effectiveness of the guidelines in protecting forest resources also will be evaluated through broad, multi-disciplinary research studies.

In a letter to the governor, the MFRC noted its concern that Minnesota's voluntary guidelines and the collaboration built among many stakeholders in developing these guidelines would suffer should changes to EPA rules require permits for silvicultural activities. The MFRC also feels that this voluntary, collaborative approach should not be abandoned until there is compelling evidence suggesting that Minnesota's water quality goals are not being met and forestry practices are a significant contributor to water quality impairment. This letter requested the governor express to the EPA his support for Minnesota's voluntary, collaborative system of ensuring the state's forests are sustained.

Sustainable Forest Resources Act Implementation in 1999:
Minnesota Forest Resources Council Annual Report to the
Governor and Legislature

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