

Upper Wisconsin River Legacy Forest

New Forest Legacy project completed in Vilas County

The State of Wisconsin's most recent Forest Legacy project was recently completed in the headwaters of the Wisconsin River near Land O' Lakes. This partnership between two private landowners and the State of Wisconsin protects 1,042 acres of wooded forestland and 2 miles of Wisconsin River riparian habitat, and contributes to existing public lands. This project adjoins the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest along the east border, and is in close proximity to the Ottawa National Forest, the Spruce Grouse State Natural Area and the Vilas County Forest. The project has 1 mile of frontage on County E on the south, and also fronts on South Crystal Lake Road on the north.

The Forest Legacy program is designed to protect working forests with high ecological and recreational value, and achieves a permanent conservation easement between the landowners and the Department of Natural Resources. This perpetual agreement ensures non-motorized public access to the entire parcel for traditional forest uses like hiking, hunting, fishing and skiing, and leaves open the possibility of establishing trails for biking. Further public access is available by licensed motor vehicle to a parking area approximately one mile north of County Highway E, and a short segment of snowmobile trail is also in the property. In addition to requiring public access, the Forest Legacy agreement forbids future development or parcel division and mandates sustainable forest management under a Forest Stewardship plan.

Situated at the origin of the Wisconsin River, this project protects water quality, riparian habitat, and northwoods forests. The forest resources are diverse and include large stands of jack pine and red pine, aspen, white pine, fir-spruce and hardwoods on the upland sites. The wetland areas feature very significant stands of 120 year old white cedar near the river, as well as black spruce and tamarack. In accordance with the Stewardship plan, the timber resource will continue to be managed by the landowners, with emphasis on watershed protection, wildlife habitat and protection of rare plants. Rare or endangered taxa have been documented on the project, including the Calypso Orchid, the Spruce Grouse and Kirtland Warbler, and management for these species is included in the Forest Stewardship plan.

Partners in Forestry Co-op (PIF), with cooperation from American Acquisitions, LLC, brought this project forward, as yet another significant step in the Co-op's efforts in enhancing local economies by maintaining working forest lands and associated public benefits. PIF board representative Rod Sharka of Land O' Lakes was elated by this transaction, stating, "With the very reduced level of Stewardship Funds in the current budget, we are very pleased to achieve such a significant project in the headwaters area, protecting our namesake river in its headwaters, as well as all the valuable habitat on this property. This project is a huge benefit to this community economically and ecologically and will be a solid legacy benefiting future generations. We are very grateful to DNR and the landowners for the vision they display with this project." The Land O' Lakes Chamber of Commerce also supported the project as a benefit to the community. "This is another

great area for healthy public recreation, and close to town so folks can also enjoy the amenities we offer,” said Chamber President Cheryl Pytlarz.

The value of the Forest Legacy conservation easement was appraised at \$1,010,000. The easement was purchased using \$745,000 from the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Fund, and, to alleviate reliance on public funds and help move the project forward, the landowners donated \$265,000 of value. The Natural Resource Board approved the purchase unanimously on October 28, and the Joint Committee on Finance confirmed.

This conservation project was generated through collaboration of Land O’ Lakes real estate businessman Gary Goska and well-known conservationist Joe Hovel of Conover.

For more information on this Forest Legacy project please contact Joe Hovel of Partners in Forestry at 715 479 8528 or logcabin@nnex.net

For supplementary material on the easement and approval process, please see below.

dnr.wi.gov/About/NRB/2015/Oct/10-15-3B4.pdf

<https://dnrmedia.wi.gov/main/Catalog/Full/9da0bb432fd448a69d86756192a62f1721>

(see 1 hour 35 minutes into webcast)

From NRB Brief October 2015

Doug Haag, Facilities and Lands Deputy Bureau Director, requested permission to combine his presentations for 3.B.4. and 3.B.5.

Co-Chair Hilgenberg approved.

3.B.4. Easement Acquisition and Donation, Hovel – Forest Legacy Program, Vilas County and

3.B.5. Easement Acquisition and Donation, Goska – Forest Legacy Program, Vilas County

(PowerPoint)

Discussion followed on whether the disabled will be able to use the logging roads on these properties, whether all easement lands in the ceded territory are subject to tribal night hunting, and whether signage will be in place.

Dr. Prehn stated for the sake of agreement, we need to make it clear what is and is not allowed.

The ceded territory item needs to be addressed. We need clear rules or we will have conflict. This is an easement and not ownership. Discussion followed on significant management issues and the size of the properties.

Public Appearances:

1. **Joe Hovel**, Conover, representing himself and as agent of Goska’s

Mr. Hovel responded to questions from the Board regarding Ceded Territory and the tribal night hunting questions, disabled access, and his concerns with unregulated ATV use and the spread of invasive species.

2. **Jane Severt**, Merrill, representing Wisconsin County Forests Association as Executive Director

Ms. Severt supported the proposal as good for the industry and the area.

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Dr. Prehn MOVED, seconded by Mr. Zimmer, approval of the department’s recommendations for agenda item 3.B.4. Easement Acquisition and Donation, Hovel – Forest Legacy Program, Vilas Count and 3.B.5. Easement Acquisition and Donation, Goska – Forest Legacy Program, Vilas County. The motion carried unanimously.

Secretary Stepp thanked the Hovel’s and Goska’s and then presented Mr. Hovel with plaques recognizing the donations.

See www.partnersinforesstry.com for photos and text on a four page document previously used for advancing this project.