

Review of Minnesota Strategic Forest Resource Planning Requirements¹

MINNESOTA FOREST RESOURCES COUNCIL

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¹**Report to the DNR Commissioner on the Appropriateness and Effectiveness
of Statewide Forest Resources Planning Requirements.**

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Executive Summary

The Minnesota Forest Resources Management Act of 1982 (MFRMA) (M.S. § 89.011) requires the development and implementation of a strategic planning process focused on the state's forests and related resources. The Act calls for an assessment of forest resources on all ownerships in the state and a program document that responds to the assessment and focuses on Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) actions to cooperatively influence the management of forest resources. Assessments were completed in 1983 and 1995, and program documents were prepared in 1983, 1987, and 1991.

The Minnesota Sustainable Forest Resources Act of 1995 (M.S. § 89A.03) requires the Forest Resources Council to undertake a review of the forest resources management plan and forest assessment requirements contained in the Minnesota Forest Resources Management Act. The Council was directed to report to the Commissioner on the appropriateness and effectiveness of these requirements, including recommendations for enhancing existing forest resources planning processes.

The Council identified three essential elements of an effective statewide forest resources planning process: 1) a strategic vision for management and use of the state's forest resources; 2) an assessment of information on the condition of the state's forest resources; and 3) a document describing how the state's forest management organizations intend to structure and implement their programs to respond to the vision and information contained in the assessment. The following describes the Council's recommendations with respect to these three elements.

Strategic Vision. A vision document should be the basis for setting statewide direction for the management and use of forest resources. Such a vision should articulate the major strategies necessary to address the state's important forest resources issues as identified through broad-based public input and involvement. The Council recommends that its biennial report to the governor and legislature identify the strategic vision regarding sustainable management and use of the state's forest resources. With a statewide and strategic focus, the vision contained in the Council's biennial report can provide a context for the development of more specific action plans that are contained in a program or other similar planning documents. While this report is required every two years, the Council recommends development of a strategic vision for the state's forest resources be an iterative process that builds on the direction articulated in previous biennial reports.

Resource Assessment. Acknowledging the changes in information availability, needs, and technologies since passage of the MFRMA, the Council recommends a major restructuring in the format and content of the state's forest resources assessment. Whereas previous assessments have been voluminous and formal documents prepared at time-certain intervals, the Council recommends future forest resources assessments be a compendium of various data bases and information sources describing the status of and related information about the state's forest resources. The specific contents of the assessment should be identified by the Council and over time reflect changes in both the vision and forest resources programs. This information should be widely accessible to land managers and the public through various mediums (e.g., Internet) and updated as new information becomes available. The Council recommends the Interagency Information Cooperative, created by the SFRA, be the clearinghouse that provides access to the forest resources information that collectively comprises the assessment. Recognizing the Cooperative is a new entity created by the SFRA, access to forest resources data will initially be quite limited but expand over time as new data is made available through the Cooperative and existing assessment data is updated. While summaries of assessment data will be incorporated into the Council's biennial report, the Council intends to provide additional summaries of important information on Minnesota's forest resources.

Program Document. The Council recommends the state's various land management organizations prepare program documents that identify how they intend to respond to the vision articulated by the Council as well as information contained in the assessment. Specific to the MFRP program requirements, the Council recommends the DNR prepare formal documents at two levels: 1) a strategic program document that sets strategic direction for DNR forest resources programs; and 2) a more detailed program document describing the Division of Forestry's programs. Preparation of the DNR's strategic program document is recommended to be done on a periodic basis (e.g., every four to six years) and incorporate management direction articulated through strategic planning documents prepared by the Department. The Council recommends a more detailed program document specific to the Division of Forestry be prepared every two years to coincide with the state's biennial budget cycle and the Forest Resources Council's biennial report to the governor and legislature. This document should describe how the Division of Forestry plans to implement its policies and legislative mandates and respond to the Department's strategic direction for managing

the state's natural resources.

Statutory Revisions. The Council recommends the statutory language governing state forest resources planning activities (M.S. § 89.011) be revised to reflect the recommendations suggested herein regarding the assessment and program elements.

Introduction

The Minnesota Sustainable Forest Resources Act (MSFRA) of 1995 requires the Forest Resources Council to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of the various processes used to develop the Minnesota Forest Resources Plan (MFRP) Assessment and Program documents. Specifically, the Council is to:

... undertake a review of the forest resource management plan and forest assessment requirements contained in section 89.011, and report to the commissioner no later than July 1, 1996, on the appropriateness and effectiveness of these requirements, including recommendations for enhancing existing forest resources planning processes.

The report presented here is the first product of a two-fold Council-initiated review of strategic forest resources planning in Minnesota. The Council is also undertaking a more comprehensive review of forest resources planning that will address landscape level planning needs and related planning technologies.

Strategic Resource Planning: A Review

Changing Context for Strategic Planning

The context within which public and private organizations plan strategic directions has changed significantly in recent years and continues to evolve at a rapid pace. Organizations responsible for the use, management and protection of forest resources¹ are experiencing major changes in their external operating environments. These changes have significant implications for how they articulate their missions, develop long-term goals and strategies, and evaluate progress and accomplishments. Some of the more noticeable factors influencing the context for planning are as follows (Sample and LeMaster 1995):

Demand for greater accountability. Desire to have plans clearly describe an organization's mission and goals and to set forth a means of periodically reviewing and measuring progress (performance) toward accomplishing such goals. Higher standards of accountability are a reality

¹ "Forest resources" means those natural assets of forest lands, including timber and other forest crops; biological diversity; recreation; fish and wildlife habitat; wilderness; rare and distinctive flora and fauna; air; water; soil; and educational, aesthetic, and historic values (M.S. 89.001, Subd. 8, as amended by the Minnesota Sustainable Forest Resources Act of 1995).

which must be incorporated into strategic planning.

Expectation for more interactive planning. Expectation for more meaningful involvement of the various parties that have an interest in the development and implementation of strategic plans. Especially notable is the reality that many segments of the public (e.g., interest groups) expect to be consulted in decisions about plans for the use and management of forests.

Desire for different services from government. Desire for government resource agencies to increasingly be a source of technical assistance and related services aimed at facilitating the actions of other organizations and individuals. This involves fewer controlling actions of government and more helping groups and organizations accomplish their desired goals.

Desire for better means of addressing uncertainty. Desire for organizations to be more flexible and innovative. Especially notable is the need to shorten planning horizons, view strategic planning as a continuous rather than a periodic activity, and increase the frequency with which missions and strategic directions are reassessed.

Desire for cooperative implementation of plans. Desire for more cooperation amongst public and private organizations in the implementation of strategies that are required to accomplish mutually agreeable missions. Especially notable is the engagement of government in collaborative activities (partnerships and cooperatives) that foster the implementation of plans.

Desire for order among often conflicting legal mandates. Desire for clearer statements of mission and legal limitations, conditions which are often clouded by laws that give conflicting directives regarding the use and management of forest resources. Strategic planning can be a useful process for sorting out inconsistencies in legal directives regarding the use and management of forests.

Evolving Concepts of Strategic Planning

The technologies of strategic planning are also evolving. Organizations continue to view the basic components of strategic planning as an articulation of mission and goals, analysis of external opportunities and threats, assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses, development of alternative strategies, criteria for selecting a preferred strategy, strategy implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Although these original elements of strategic planning remain important, they are no longer sufficient (Bryson 1988, Sample and LeMaster 1995). Consideration must also

be given to planning approaches that embody:

Decreased focus on a formal plan; greater focus on engaging in process. Greater focus on collectively engaging parties in processes that result in mutually acceptable missions and strategies. In such a context, a written planning document becomes less important.

Greater emphasis on a range of possible future conditions. More emphasis on setting forth a range of possible futures, any one (or combination) of which a public or private organization can take advantage of, depending on the occurrence of special opportunities or the need to adjust in order to accommodate unforeseen setbacks.

Greater emphasis on the monitoring of accomplishments. More consideration to the technologies of documenting progress toward long-term improvement in resource conditions. This is in addition to monitoring the accomplishment of short-term resource management objectives. Implied is access to more definitive measures (indicators) of resource condition and environmental quality generally.

Greater incorporation of science and scientific evidence. Greater emphasis on the incorporation of scientific evidence into the planning process and the fostering of healthy discussion of the scientific uncertainty that often surrounds the use and management of forests.

Future Strategic Forest Resource Planning Needs

Within the context of the changing environment of strategic planning and the successes and failures of previous strategic planning efforts focused on forest resources, future strategic planning activities might be enhanced by:

- Actively engaging constituents in the development and implementation of strategic plans for the use, management and protection of forests.
- Integrating consideration of forest resources and socioeconomic factors.
- Developing resilient organizations that can address forest resources problems effectively and seize opportunities as they arise.
- Accommodating the unknowns (risk and uncertainty) that permeate information about forests and associated social and political conditions.
- Encouraging coordination with other strategic planning programs, including those that do not have forests as their central focus.

C Providing for the development of new capabilities to deal with the future.

- Allocating sufficient professional and financial resources to planning programs (commensurate with the benefits of planning).
- Fostering local forest resource decision-making within broad statements of mission and strategies.
- Enhancing the scientific underpinning, information bases and analytical capabilities required for planning.
- Improving ability to monitor the immediate as well as long-term consequences of plan implementation.

National Reviews of Forest Resources Planning

The following are summaries of several national reviews of federal and state forest resources planning activities. These include a recent evaluation of natural resources strategic planning components and processes, a USDA-Forest Service review of its strategic planning activities, and a national survey of state forest resources planning effectiveness. These reviews provide useful background information for assessing the adequacy of forest resources planning statutory requirements in Minnesota.

Review of Forest Resource Assessment and Program Documents

Strategic forest resources planning activities typically include two central components: 1) a resource assessment; and 2) a program document. The former typically includes a broad overview of forest and related resource conditions, trends, and issues; whereas the latter provides a more specific description of how one or more organizations plan to respond to the information and major issues identified in the assessment through the development and implementation of forest resource policies and programs.

Resource Assessments.

The evolution in strategic planning is nowhere more pronounced than in the relationship between assessments and strategic planning. A recent evaluation of strategic planning suggests the following with regard to the adequacy of assessments (Sample and LeMaster 1995):

Role of Assessment. Resource assessments are being regarded less as detailed, comprehensive evaluations aimed at predicting the future, and more as examinations of broad trends that can be expected to affect an organization's strategic environment (e.g., reduced program financing, shift in responsibilities of governments). Assessments are increasingly examining how an organization is functioning with respect to these trends and how it might better adapt to such trends.

Monitoring Progress. Resource assessments are also increasingly being viewed as a means by which to evaluate an organization's progress toward accomplishing important goals and objectives. Such evaluation is considered important from the standpoint of the agency as well as from the perspective of constituent groups that desire information about progress in implementing strategies.

Long-Term Changes. Resource assessments are being acknowledged as means of measuring long-term changes in the quality of forest and related resources. Most aspects of natural resource management and protection cannot be meaningfully demonstrated by annual or even 10 year "snapshots" of resource conditions. Assessments must have the ability to monitor long-term changes in the condition of resources, communities and economies.

Focused Information Gathering. Resource assessments are also moving away from being "data-driven" assessments to becoming "data-supported" assessments. In such a context, potential strategies for the use and management of natural resources are first identified by organizational leaders and constituent groups, with assessment information subsequently gathered in order to shed light on the virtues of such possibilities. In this respect, information gathering is focused so it can play an important role in helping formulate, compare and choose among the alternative strategies to ultimately be included in program documents, and to later evaluate progress in implementing a plan. To be useful (adequate) in this respect, information must be of the right kind, sufficiently up to date, understandable by leaders and constituents, developed via open processes (many organizations can contribute to the data pool), reliable and credible, and accurately portray the uncertainty that surrounds the information.

Program Documents

Resource programs also must adapt if they are to play an effective role in strategically guiding resource use and management. A recent review of strategic planning of forest resources suggests more adequate program documents are those which (Sample and LeMaster 1995):

Build New Capabilities. Rather than developing a program document that fits an

organization's current capabilities, a program should be directed toward building new capabilities to take advantage of future opportunities and to address challenges both anticipated and unexpected. A program should "stretch" an organization.

Engage Constituents. Rather than being developed by often isolated planning units, program documents should be developed with the full and active participation of individuals and interests that have a stake in the consequences of an implemented program document (both internal and external to an agency). The technologies of roundtables and related collaborative mechanisms are possible means toward such ends.

Respect Political Influences. Rather than viewing a program document as the product of a technical process, view its development as an open process that is subject to all the vagaries and biases that frequently permeate the many communities that depend on forests for their livelihood and enjoyment.

Acknowledge Uncertainty. Rather than setting forth a single option or direction, a program document should set forth a range of options that give responsible agencies sufficient flexibility to accommodate the unexpected. Examples of the latter are the financial disasters that may befall an agency or the windfall of constituent support that leads to new activities demanded by constituents.

Local Decision-Making. Rather than driving local decision-making about the use and management of forests, a program document should provide for decentralized decision making within the bounds of an organization's mission, vision and strategies.

Review of USDA-Forest Service Planning Activities

The USDA-Forest Service carried out an extensive review of its strategic planning activities in 1990 (USDA-Forest Service 1990). More than 100 persons inside and outside the agency were involved in the review, relying heavily on interviews and workshops that solicited ideas from more than 2,000 people. Consistent with the agency's mission, the review was national in scope. Among the major findings of the review were: expectations from planning needs to be more realistic; conduct of public involvement needs to be improved; planning technologies need to be enhanced; planning procedures need to be clarified and simplified; procedures for plan implementation need improvement; and connections between appropriations and forest plans need improvement. Based on these findings, more than 230 recommendations were made within the following categories:

Planning:

- Simplify, clarify and shorten the planning process (e.g., clarify regulations).
- Ensure high quality planning (e.g., enhance analytical tools).

Organizing:

- Improve organizational and administrative structures for planning (e.g., promote integrated resource management).
- Strengthen the link between plans, budgeting and appropriations (e.g., adopt end-results budgeting).

Implementing:

- Define and clarify planning in a multi-level agency (e.g., in-service staff training).
- Assign clear responsibility for implementing plans.

Monitoring:

- Improve mechanisms for monitoring the quality of plan development and plan implementation (e.g., disseminate results of monitoring).

In reflecting, the agency identified the following as principles for guiding the development and implementation of strategies to be focused on forest resources: integrate and balance resource allocations; communicate a clear vision; recognize limits; seek informed consent; finish in a reasonable time; be people-oriented; promote active leadership; match analysis to questions at hand; and be both locally and nationally balanced.

Review of State Forest Resource Planning Activities

The focus and utility of forest resource planning programs in a number of states was assessed in 1986. Forty-eight states were involved and a minimum of seven different stakeholders in each state was contacted. The intent of the review was to determine the constituents of planning programs, degree of satisfaction with planning processes, and benefits resulting from statewide forest resources planning activities (Gray and Ellefson 1987). State foresters and federal natural resource agencies were viewed as especially important clients of the planning process; governors and legislatures were very much less so (although support improved over time). As for satisfaction with elements of the planning process, six of 10 respondents were pleased with how the agency's mission was defined, goals were developed, and multiple resource uses considered. Greatest dissatisfaction was with linkages between planning and budgeting processes and assessment of major trends in resources,

economies and technologies.

The most significant benefits of state forest resources planning exercises were the development of long-term direction for programs, and enhanced communication and program coordination. Key clients of a state's forest resources planning program were quite consistent in their views about the benefits of planning. For example, over half the environmental and the industrial forestry respondents agreed or strongly agreed that planning programs improved communication and coordination and led to a clearer long-term direction for state forestry programs generally. On the negative side, environmental clients doubted (43 percent) a planning program's ability to garner political support for new monies or programs. Forest industry clients (20 percent) were uncertain about a planning program's ability to improve agency decision-making.

Among the specific recommendations made by respondents to improve the effectiveness of statewide forest resources planning programs were:

- Include all relevant interests and stakeholders in the planning process.
- Seek support of state policy makers early on in the planning process.
- Create an advisory body to establish general direction for the planning effort.
- Develop a comprehensive, statewide forest resources plan first (provide general context and direction); then prepare more detailed program plans and sub-state (unit) plans.
- Focus on desirable resource, economic, and community goals (goal-oriented planning) rather than the major forest resource issues (issue-driven processes).
- Consider all land ownerships and their potential contributions to achieving strategic forestry goals.
- Improve linkages between strategic planning and various budgetary processes.

Minnesota Forest Resources Planning

Minnesota Forest Resources Management Act of 1982

The Minnesota Forest Resources Management Act of 1982 (MFRMA) (M.S. 89.011) requires the development and implementation of a strategic planning process focused on the state's forests and related resources (Appendix A). Patterned after processes called for by the federal Forest

and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, the MFRMA calls for an Assessment of forest resources on all ownerships in the state, and a Program focusing on MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) actions to cooperatively influence the management of forest resources in response to findings in the Assessment. The Assessment is to be updated at least once every ten years and is to “evaluate forest resource conditions and explore emerging forest management issues.” Complementing the Assessment, the Program is to be updated every four years and is to “describe specific actions to address the assessment.” Most of these statutory requirements were fulfilled in the 1983 and 1995 Assessments, and in the 1983, 1987, and 1991 Programs (MN DNR-Division of Forestry 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995) (see Appendix B).

The 1983 Minnesota Forest Resources Plan (MFRP) was an extensive, seven volume set of documents that described and evaluated past, current and future forest resource conditions in Minnesota. The Assessment portion of the plan combined issues and opportunities identified in the plan’s Issues Document (Volume 2) with goals and strategies presented in the plan’s Goals and Strategies Document (Volume 4). The 1983 Program (Volume 6) included statewide and regional program goals and targets and made recommendations to other agencies and organizations on how their programs could help achieve goals specified in the plan.

The 1987 MFRP Program update was not as detailed as the 1983 plan (Volume 6), in that it consisted of only three volumes, namely a strategic plan, an executive summary, and an implementation report and issue update. The document contained fewer specific program targets than the 1983 Program. The implementation report and issue update evaluated how well the 1983 document was being implemented by both the DNR and other agencies and organizations. In 1991, the MFRP Program was updated for the second time. The document was more detailed than its 1987 counterpart, but less detailed than the 1983 Program. Although strategic regional information was not included, more program goals and targets were listed. The document did not outline recommendations to other agencies or organizations.

The MFRP Assessment update was completed in 1995. Completion was delayed for two years to take advantage of findings from several significant studies, including the Generic Environmental Impact Statement on Timber Harvesting, Lake States Forestry Alliance Regional Forest Resources Assessment, and the Governor’s Sustainable Development Initiative. The 1995 MFRP Program update is currently on hold pending review of the forest planning requirements by

the Forest Resources Council.

Minnesota Sustainable Forest Resources Act of 1995

The Minnesota Sustainable Forest Resources Act of 1995 (SFRA) (M.S. 89A) requires the Forest Resources Council to prepare a biennial report to the governor and legislature on the status of the state's forest resources, and strategic directions to provide for their management, use, and protection. To the extent possible, the Council's report must identify the activities and accomplishments of various programs that directly affect the state's forest resources.

The act also requires the establishment of a process that will facilitate strategic planning for large forested landscapes. The Forest Resources Council is charged with responsibility for establishing this process, namely:

“The council shall establish a framework that will enable long-range strategic planning and landscape coordination to occur, to the extent possible, across all forested regions of the state and across all ownerships.”

The Council has adopted procedures for the development of the planning framework and a time schedule for its implementation (Forest Resources Council 1996). The framework consists of four major components: defining forested landscapes, developing principles and goals to guide landscape-level planning, establishing a general planning process, and establishing regional resource committees that will implement the planning process. The committees will be composed of representative regional interests that are committed to and involved in landscape planning and coordination. The overall process will be supported by a regional forest resources planning coordinator. The regional committees will be provided with administrative and technical support staff.

The Council plans to designate regional landscapes by November 1996 and to establish a statement of principles and goals for conducting landscape planning by December 1996. An appropriate landscape-level planning process will be developed by mid-winter 1997. Regional resource committees are anticipated to be in place by September 1997.

The Council is also statutorily mandated to provide oversight and program direction for the development and implementation of a comprehensive monitoring program to be developed by the DNR Commissioner. This program is to include monitoring broad trends and conditions in the state's forest resources at statewide, landscape, and site levels, as well as monitoring compliance with and

effectiveness of site-level forest practices guidelines.

Related Strategic Resource Planning Activities in Minnesota

Minnesota has a number of additional strategic planning processes that are being actively implemented. These processes originate within both the public and private sectors. Not all the processes focus exclusively on forests and forest resources. Examples of other plans include:

- C Chippewa and Superior National Forest land management plans, which are updated every 10 to 15 years (USDA-Forest Service 1986a; USDA-Forest Service 1986b).
- C the biennial strategic planning of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) (documented in Directions for Natural Resources) (Minnesota DNR 1995).
- C strategic plans of various divisions within the Department of Natural Resources (e.g., Division of Parks and Recreation's strategic plan (Minnesota DNR , Division of Parks and Recreation 1995); Division of Fish and Wildlife's strategic plan (Minnesota DNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife 1990).
- C strategic plans of various state agencies besides DNR, which are updated at various intervals (e.g., Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Water Quality Division 1994).
- C interagency and public\private initiatives related to sustainable forestry (e.g., the Environmental Quality Board's Sustainable Development Initiative) (Minnesota Environmental Quality Board 1994).
- C county and local government forest and related resource plans, which are not done for all jurisdictions and are updated at various intervals (e.g., Hubbard County Land Department 1990).
- C plans for tribal lands.
- C plans of watershed districts and boards created by statute or joint powers agreements (e.g., Upper Mississippi Headwaters Board, Northern Counties Land Use Coordinating Board).
- C strategic plans of various private concerns (e.g., forest industry, conservation groups).

Review of Minnesota Forest Resource Assessment and Program Documents

The changing environment of planning, the availability of new planning technologies, and the requirements placed on the Forest Resources Council necessitates a review of the adequacy

(appropriateness and effectiveness) of strategic planning in Minnesota as currently focused on the use and management of the state's forests. Information needed to judge program adequacy can originate from a number of sources, including the experiences of stakeholders and agency staff.

DNR-Division of Forestry Survey

The DNR Division of Forestry conducted a survey in 1995 of the internal utility of the 1991 MFRP Program. Major survey findings are very briefly summarized below. A more detailed summary is presented in Appendix C.

The Program document's greatest internal utility was in providing overall strategic direction for the Division of Forestry. Its next greatest value was as an information source, and in providing strategic direction for specific programs. The document was least valuable in guiding work planning and identifying program needs.

Most survey respondents proposed various changes in the MFRP Program. Over three-quarters suggested reducing or eliminating specific targets, and two-thirds recommended focusing on strategic direction or a statement of need.

While the survey was useful in evaluating the utility of the 1991 MFRP program to the DNR, Division of Forestry, it is important to note that the survey findings do not address the larger issue of document's utility to stakeholders, since survey respondents were limited to Division of Forestry managers and supervisors.

To help provide the basis for the Council's review of appropriateness and effectiveness of statutory statewide forest resources planning requirements, DNR staff identified a number of strengths and weaknesses in the processes leading to the assessment and program documents called for by the Minnesota Forest Resources Management Act of 1982, and in the substance contained in these documents. These perceptions are listed in Appendix D.

Council Perceptions

A Council subcommittee evaluated current statutory requirements relating to statewide forest resources management planning (M.S. # 89.011) with respect to their appropriateness and effectiveness. The evaluation reflects subcommittee members' general responses to the existing statute, as opposed to a line by line evaluation of specific statutory language.

Appropriate or Effective Aspects of M.S. # 89.011

The Council's general response is that the statute asks many of the "right" questions, and for the most part includes suitable requirements. The heavy emphasis on data, especially in Subd. 2 (Forest assessment), is appropriate. Subd. 2(b) provides a database framework that is at least theoretically in place. A positive aspect of the statute is the requirement to assess resource outputs (e.g., "the present and projected use and supply of and demand for forest resources in the state"; Subd. 2(a)).

Another strength of the statute is that it requires DNR personnel to collectively focus on forest resources management. The strong emphasis on interagency coordination is also positive (e.g., with the Land Management Information Center in Subd. 2; federal agencies in Subd. 4 [Federal coordination]; and counties, other public agencies, and private organizations in Subd. 5 [Public and private coordination]). The requirement related to public involvement (Subd. 5) is especially appropriate, although it needs to be updated.

Inappropriate or Ineffective Aspects of M.S. # 89.011

The current statutory timelines for completing the assessment (10 years) and program (four years) are too long. The assessment should not be a formal document, but rather accessible, online information that is continuously updated. The program's update interval should be more frequent and more flexible. Program updates should be required at least once every two years to coincide with the state's biennial budget cycle and improve the linkage between planning and budget development. The program should continue to be a formal document.

Some of the information requirements in the statute are outdated (e.g., identification of backlog areas (Subd. 2(c)); a description of how the multiple use and sustained yield management policy will apply to decisions about other uses of forest lands and resources (Subd. 3(f)). Despite the forest resources database requirements in Subd. 2(b), there is no comprehensive interagency "information system" in place to manage data. The Interagency Information Cooperative currently being formed by the Forest Resources Council will help address this requirement.

An especially ineffective aspect of the statute is that it does not provide a basis for creating a strategic statewide vision for forest resources and forest resources management across ownerships and organizations. The act also provides no structure to coordinate forest resources planning activities among organizations, which has led to redundancy in planning activities among

organizations, as well as within the DNR (e.g., between Division of Forestry and Division of Fish and Wildlife plans). Moreover, the lack of a clear requirement for linkages to "non-forest" planning activities (e.g., water planning, wetlands planning) is a deficiency. Although the public involvement requirement in Subd. 5 is appropriate, the public involvement techniques used in recent planning processes have been out of date, and public involvement has been mostly "after the fact." Public involvement procedures by both the Division of Forestry and the DNR as a whole need to be substantially improved. A special effort needs to be made to involve the general public, as opposed to involving only interest groups. Revised statutory language should require up-to-date public involvement processes, as described later in the recommendations section.

The statute provides for no accountability with respect to achieving resource output goals within the DNR. There also is inadequate accountability outside the DNR with regard to follow-up and review, or for timely completion of the MFRP Assessment and Program.² In recent years, there have been insufficient investments in the planning process. The support identified in Subd. 6 (Staff assistance) was inadequate to do a thorough job on the 1995 MFRP Assessment. Insufficient staff are available to work on the four year update of the MFRP Program, which should have been completed in 1995. Due to this lack of accountability, the existing statute has limited utility from the standpoint of key stakeholders.

Council Recommendations

The Forest Resources Council's report is required to include recommendations for enhancing the forest resources planning processes called for by the Minnesota Forest Resources Management Act of 1982. This is a significant challenge in that the scope of planning for the use and management of forest resources can involve a single administrative unit (e.g., Division of Forestry), multiple administrative units (e.g., all divisions within the DNR), a general agency-wide plan (e.g., DNR), or multi-agency plans (e.g., DNR, PCA, EQB). The challenge looms even larger when non-governmental units are considered along with federal, state, and county government agencies. The

² Although MS # 89.013 requires hearings of the completed forest resources management plan "before the standing committees of each house of the legislature with jurisdiction over natural resources or appropriation matters", these hearings have never been held.

Forest Resources Council faces this challenge in carrying out its responsibilities for forest resources planning at both the strategic level (through its biennial report to the governor and legislature) and the regional level (through its landscape-level planning responsibilities). For purposes here, concern is with improvements in the Minnesota Forest Resources Management Act of 1982, especially as they relate to planning activities called for by the Minnesota Sustainable Forest Resources Act of 1995.

General Principles: Statewide Strategic Forest Resource Planning

The Council has identified a number of general principles to guide statewide strategic planning of forest resources and recommends these principles be incorporated into statewide forest resources planning processes.

- C Seek active constituent and public involvement in the development and implementation of strategies for the use and management of forest resources.
- C Support strategic planning of forest resources with up-to-date information and analysis.
- C Integrate the planning of forest resources, both within the DNR and among other land management organizations.
- C Coordinate strategic planning, to the extent possible, across large forested landscapes that encompass multiple public and private ownerships.
- C Encourage cooperative actions to implement strategies guiding the use and management of forest resources.
- C Closely link strategic planning of forest resources to monitoring programs that evaluate the condition and use of the state's forest resources.
- C Support strategic planning of forest resources by making available sufficient professional and financial resources.

Recommendations

The Council recommends that Minnesota's statewide strategic forest resources planning activities contain three principle elements: 1) a strategic vision; 2) an assessment of forest resources; and 3) a program document that describes how the state's forest management organization plans