

# **Minnesota Forest Resources Council Public Concerns Registration Process Annual Report**

## ***Overview***

In January of 1998, the Public Concerns Registration Process (PCRP) began serving the citizens of Minnesota. Created by the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC), the process was established to accept “comments from the public on negligent timber harvesting and forest management practices” (Minnesota Statutes 89A.07, Subdivision. 5). The PCRP allows citizens to register concerns about timber harvesting or forest management practices that they have observed. The MFRC worked closely with other environmental and forest management organizations to develop the process. The process is not punitive and the names of the parties involved are dealt with in a confidential manner. The focus of the PCRP is to provide information and education of the involved parties. The involved parties are made aware of the Minnesota Voluntary Site-Level Forest Management Guidelines and other information to help them protect Minnesota’s forest resources.

Citizens observing a practice that they object to or have concerns over, whether on public or private lands, initiate the process by calling the MFRC’s 1-888-234-3702 phone number. The MFRC sends an information packet to the citizen requesting them to complete a “Public Concerns Registration Form,” that when returned to the MFRC office, formally registers the concern. The concern is forwarded to a consultant retained by the MFRC to investigate the concern.

Concerns are investigated under a protocol revised in March 2000 and further revised in April, 2001. The location of the concern and other information regarding the landowner are determined. The person who performed the forest management activity and the natural resource professional that supervised or was responsible for management of the property in question are also determined. If it involves a logger, the Minnesota Loggers Education Program (MLEP) is contacted to check on the logger’s status. If the concern involves a forester, their status with the Society of American Foresters is also checked. The concern also is reported to the organization that manages the property. For example, if the concern were over a harvest on state forestland, the Director of the Division of Forestry in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) would be informed.

As of April 2001, further measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of the registrant of the concern and other parties involved. Specifically, in the report to the MFRC that is generated after each investigation, the key people associated with a timber harvest or forest management concern are to be referred to as follows:

- concern registrant
- landowner (private or corporate); public agencies shall be identified by agency (e.g. DNR, US Forest Service, etc.)
- forester, logger, land manager, or other appropriate title (not names). If more than one employee from the same agency or company is referenced, they shall be referred to numerically (e.g. forester #1 with the DNR).
- other categories as necessary (e.g. concerned neighbor).

After the concern is investigated, the consultant prepares a report that is sent to the MFRC office. From there, copies of the report are sent with a cover letter to the involved parties. This report follows the protocols above and includes the following information:

- Front page
- Confidentiality measures
- Description of the concern(s)
- Description of the site
- Timber harvesting/forest management guidelines or BMP's that would have applied
- Permits/ordinances/laws/contractual obligations violated
- Contacts with the landowner, logger or other forest practitioner, and forester or other natural resource professional.
- Findings

Information regarding the identities of the people contacted in regards to a registered concern is transmitted to the MFRC staff as part of a "Concern Summary" separate from the report. Requests for identities must be made directly to the MFRC.

As determined by the consultant, educational materials about forest management in Minnesota are also sent directly by the consultant to the involved parties specifically matched to their needs. The consultant has obtained a number of publications that are available to address some of those information needs, including but not limited to:

- *Managing Water and Crossing Options* – Forest Management Practices Fact Sheet Series by the DNR and the University of Minnesota Extension Service (MES);
- *Protecting Water Quality and Wetlands in Forest Management (BMPs)* by the DNR;
- *Visual Quality Best Management Practices for Forest Management in Minnesota* by the DNR;
- Tree Management fact sheets (for individual species, e.g. aspen, birch) by the DNR;
- Timber Stand Improvement Fact Sheets by the DNR;
- *Marketing Timber from the Private Woodland*, by the MES;
- *2002 Minnesota Forest Resources Management Directory*, published by MLEP and the Minnesota Forest Association;
- Minnesota Forest Resources Council Vision brochure, 1998;
- *Sustaining Minnesota Forest Resources: Minnesota Voluntary Site-Level Forest Management Guidelines*, DNR and MFRC (new addition, June 1999).

### **Activities During 2001-2002**

At the end of June 2001, the PCRCP consultant, Mary Kroll of Kroll Communications, decided to not renew her contract with the MFRC. The PCRCP was launched in 1998 with the help of Kroll Communications. During her tenure with the PCRCP, she investigated and reported on the first 12 concerns registered with the MFRC. Her work set the standard for today's PCRCP and is much appreciated.

On September 8, 2001, Bruce ZumBahlen, a retired DNR forester, agreed to serve as the PCRCP consultant. Two concerns were registered and investigated from that date during the time period ending June 30, 2002. Since its inception in 1998, the PCRCP has received a total of 14 concerns.

Following is an activity summary for the time period of July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002 based on the consultant's bi-monthly reports to the MFRC.

*July 1 - August 31, 2001*

There was one registered concern in August that addressed a number of concerns over a timber harvest on private land. No action was taken on the concern until a PCRCP consultant was retained.

*September 1 - October 30, 2001*

The concern registered previously in August was investigated. The investigation and report addressed a number of issues that are described later in this report.

*November 1, 2001 - January 9, 2002*

There was one registered concern in November dealing primarily with timber harvest on DNR managed lands adjacent to a lake. The investigation and report were not completed until early January due to the difficulty of contacting the involved parties during the holidays.

*January 10 – March 1, 2002*

There were no concerns registered during this period. However, there was follow-up to see if any mitigation had occurred on the DNR lands to address the concern registered during November. Information on the PCRCP was also provided to a private forestry consultant wondering whether a recent timber sale would be a candidate for investigation.

*March 2 – April 30, 2002*

There were no concerns registered during this period. However, there was follow-up to check on whether any mitigation had occurred on the two previously registered concerns. In the case of the first concern on private land, no action had been taken. In the case of the second concern on DNR lands, some remedial work had been done to soften the visual impact from the harvest visible from the lake.

*May 1 – June 30, 2002*

There were no concerns registered during this period. The PCRCP consultant did meet with the MFRC's Executive Director and assistant to discuss the future of the PCRCP. Work was also done on the PCRCP annual report to the MFRC.

***Descriptive Information About Registered Concerns***

*Registered Concern, Cass County*

The registrant had concerns with a number of issues affected by a timber harvest on private land adjacent to a forest road. Concern was expressed over the visual quality along the road, the condition of the road and a recreational trail following the harvest, the potential for fire, and effects of the harvest on wildlife habitat.

The landowner and logger were contacted and given educational material relating to forest management and visual quality. The landowner also received information on the Forest Stewardship Program, which provides professional management assistance. (Please see Appendix B for more information.)

*Registered Concern, St. Louis County*

This concern was related to a timber harvest on DNR lands along a lakeshore and its impacts on visual quality from large slash piles left on the site. The resource manager involved with the site was contacted to encourage mitigation of the concern. The registrant was also given information dealing with a law on management of shore lands that was part of the basis for their concern. Some of the large slash piles were burned on the site to lessen the visual impact as a result of this concern being registered. (Please see Appendix C for more information.)

## Appendix A

### Public Concerns Registration Process Log

Date	Description of Concern	Location	Type of Communications and Materials Sent
August 2001	Visual quality of a timber harvest adjacent to road, the condition of the road and a recreational trail after the harvest, the potential for fire and impact on wildlife habitat following the harvest.	FRC Landscape #4, Cass County	The landowner received: <i>Guidelines for Forest Management – “How-To’s” for Private Landowners</i> ; <i>Visual Quality Best Management Practices for Forest Management in Minnesota (VQBMP’s)</i> ; and information on the Forest Stewardship Program. The logger received a copy of the VQBMP’s.
November 2001	Timber harvest adjacent to a lakeshore, and visual quality of the harvest affected by large slash piles visible across the lake.	FRC Landscape #1, St. Louis County	No information was sent to the forestry employee in charge of the sale or the logger since they were familiar with the Minnesota Voluntary Site-Level Forest Management Guidelines. The forestry employee was encouraged to burn the larger slash piles. The registrant received information on the Shipstead-Nolan law dealing with harvests adjacent to lakeshore covered by the law.