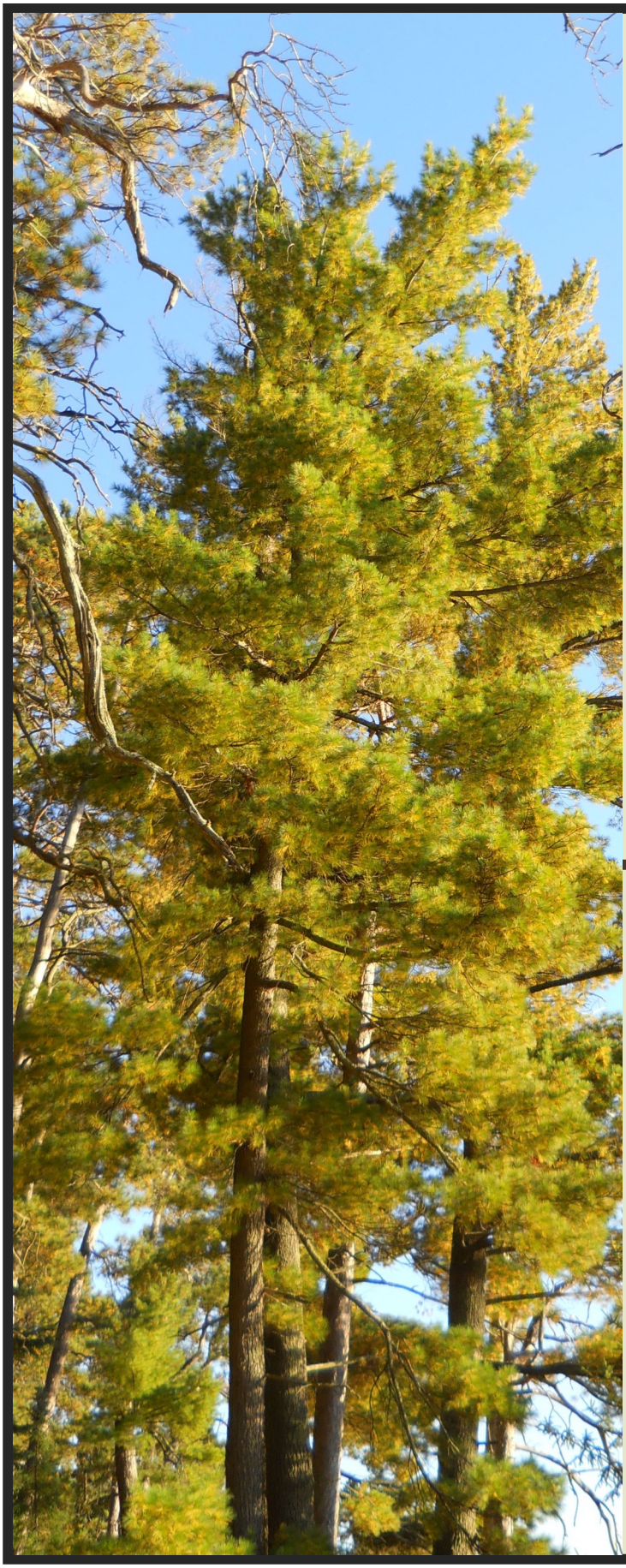

2014

Report to the Governor and Legislature on the Implementation of the Sustainable Forest Resources Act

Minnesota Forest Resources Council

Green Hall 201A and 201C
1530 Cleveland Avenue North
St. Paul, MN 55108
651-603-6761
http://mn.gov/frc/

MFRC Staff

Dave Zumeta
Executive Director
651-603-0108
dzumeta@umn.edu

Lindberg Ekola
Landscape Program Manager
320-256-8300
ekola.mfrc@charter.net

Becky Enfield
Student Worker
651-603-6761
rebecca.enfield@state.mn.us

Calder Hibbard
Policy Analyst
651-603-0109
hibb0006@umn.edu

Amanda Kueper
Landscape Forester
651-259-5281
amanda.kueper@state.mn.us

Michael Lynch
Landscape Forester
651-259-5290
michael.lynch@state.mn.us

Rachael Nicoll
Information Specialist
651-603-6761
nicol071@umn.edu

Jeff Reinhart
GIS Coordinator
651-259-5902
jeff.reinhart@state.mn.us

Robert Slesak
Site-level Program Manager
651-603-6756
raslesak@umn.edu

Clarence Turner
Forest Ecologist/Planner
651-259-5291
clarence.turner@state.mn.us

Minnesota Forest Resources Council 2014 Report

to the Governor and Legislature on the Implementation of the Sustainable Forest Resources Act

Respectfully submitted by the Minnesota Forest Resources Council

Robert Stine, *Chair*

Greg Bernu
Forrest Boe
Wayne Brandt
Alan Ek
Dale Erickson
Shaun Hamilton
Darla Lenz
Robert Lintelmann
Gene Merriam
Bob Owens
David Parent
Shawn Perich
Kathleen Preece
Mary Richards
Susan Solterman Audette
Michael Trutwin

MFRC Membership

The governor appoints a chair and 15 members to the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC), and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council appoints one member. The 17-member council includes representatives from the following interests:

- Commercial logging contractors
- Conservation organizations
- County land departments
- Environmental organizations (2)
- Forest products industry
- Game species management organizations
- Labor organizations
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
- Nonindustrial private forest landowners (2)
- Research and higher education
- Resort and tourism industry
- Secondary wood products manufacturers
- USDA Forest Service

This report fulfills requirements of Minnesota Statute 89A.03 Subd. 6., in which:

The council must report to the governor and to the legislative committees and divisions with jurisdiction over environment and natural resource policy and finance by February 1 of each odd-numbered year. The report must describe the progress and accomplishments made by the council during the preceding two years.

The Sustainable Forest Resources Act (M.S. § 89A)

In 1995, the Sustainable Forest Resources Act (SFRA) created a policy framework for sustainable forestry to:

- Sustainably manage, use, and protect the state's forest resources to achieve the state's economic, environmental, and social goals.
- Encourage cooperation and collaboration between public and private sectors in managing the state's forest resources.
- Recognize and consider forest resource issues, concerns, and impacts at appropriate geographic scales.
- Recognize all perspectives regarding the management, use, and protection of the state's forest resources; establish processes and mechanisms that seek these perspectives; and incorporate them into planning and management.

Estimated cost to prepare this report (M.S.§ 3.197): $1,588 (staff time and printing). This report was printed in limited quantities. The electronic version is available on the Minnesota Forest Resources Council website at http://mn.gov/frc/documents/council/MFRC_2014_Report.pdf.

This report can be made available in other formats upon request.

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From the Chair

An Overview of MFRC Accomplishments in 2014

Robert A. Stine, Chair, Minnesota Forest Resources Council

Sustainable Forest Resources Act (M.S. 89A) Revision

The 2014 legislature revised the Sustainable Forest Resources Act (SFRA), the first major SFRA update since 1999. Changes included deleting obsolete deadlines, streamlining language, changing the MFRC's annual report to a biennial report, adding requirements for periodic revisions of site-level guidelines and landscape plans, deleting certain monitoring requirements, and extending the MFRC through 2021.

Report on the Competitiveness of Minnesota's Primary Forest Products Industry

Recognizing the importance of Minnesota's forest industries and the dire challenges they face, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Commissioner asked the MFRC to complete a study of the competitiveness of these industries in Minnesota. The final report, submitted in December 2014, compared Minnesota's forest industries to those of other states and countries in terms of several key competitiveness factors (e.g., wood fiber availability and cost, energy, transportation, taxation, workforce development). The report showed that the health of Minnesota's forests and forest industry are at risk. Recommendations were made regarding each of the issues addressed in the report (see *State of the Forest* section of this report for more details).

December 10-11 Forest Futures Conference

On December 10-11, 2014, the Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership[1] hosted a key conference in Baxter that focused on the MFRC's *Report on the Competitiveness*

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1 The Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership is a non-profit 501©(3) corporation that includes the majority of Minnesota's federal, state, county, industry, utility, university, and other private forest land managers and landowners. The Partnership, founded in 1995, is referenced in the SFRA as amended in 2014: "It is the policy of the state to encourage forest landowners, forest managers, and loggers to maintain a partnership in which the implementation of council recommendations can occur in a timely and coordinated manner across ownerships. The partnership shall serve as a forum for discussing operational implementation issues and problem solving related to forest resources management and planning concerns....This partnership shall also actively foster collaboration and coordination among forest landowners, forest managers, and loggers in addressing land-scape-level operations and concerns...." (M.S. 89A.04)

of Minnesota's Primary Forest Products Industry. This conference, which was attended by 90 forest industry executives, state agency commissioners, legislators, and other private and public sector forestry leaders, focused on discussion about the report's recommendations to the legislature, Minnesota's Congressional delegation, and various public sector agencies to enhance the forest industry's competitive position. The MFRC is working closely with the Partnership in convening state experts and leaders to advance the recommendations.

Assessment of Historic Forest Management Guideline Implementation

The MFRC completed a comprehensive assessment of historic forest management guideline implementation, including identifying key practices needing improvement, underlying factors influencing implementation, and risk of impacts occurring during operations. Recommendations to address these issues were developed and acted upon in 2014.

User-friendly Field Guide Publication

With major financial assistance from multiple partner organizations[2], the MFRC designed and published a field guide focused on those guidelines most commonly applied during timber harvesting operations. The field guide content was designed in a concise, user-friendly format so that it can be used by loggers, managers, and landowners when harvesting timber.

Northeast Landscape Plan Revision

In September 2014, the MFRC approved the revised Northeast Landscape Plan that was prepared by the Northeast Landscape Planning Committee, updating a plan that was approved in 2003. Over 30 people representing a broad range of interests developed the forest management plan for the four-county region. The revised Northeast Landscape Plan will provide an important context for revisions of operational land management plans by the Superior National Forest, the DNR, several counties, and various private forest landowners.

Southeast Landscape Plan Revision

In November 2014, the MFRC approved the revised Southeast Landscape Plan that was prepared by the Southeast Landscape Planning Committee, updating a plan that also was approved by the MFRC in 2003. An array of interests from the thirteen-county region developed the plan, which will provide a significant landscape context for revisions of operational land management plans by private forest landowners, who own the vast majority of the region's forest land, as well as for DNR land managers.

2 $20,000 contribution from DNR Division of Forestry; and $3,000 contributions from each of the following entities: Blandin Foundation, Minnesota Association of County Land Commissioners, Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership, Minnesota Forestry Association, Minnesota Forest Industries, and Minnesota Timber Producers Association.

Forest Policy

The MFRC is a forum where forest stakeholders discuss and resolve issues regarding the management of Minnesota's forests. We have helped depoliticize forestry issues in Minnesota by facilitating collaboration and fostering the use of scientific information. ***We advise the governor, legislature, and public agencies on sustainable forest policies.***

Accomplishments

Report on the Global Competitiveness of Minnesota's Primary Forest Products Industry

The forest-based industries in Minnesota are vital to our state and are facing a number of challenges. Recognizing the importance of these issues, the DNR Commissioner asked the MFRC to complete a study of the competitiveness of Minnesota's primary forest products industry. The final report, submitted in December 2014, compared Minnesota to other states and countries in terms of several key competitiveness factors. It also described current forest resource conditions, including drivers of forest health and productivity, wildlife habitat, and timber supply. The report identified particular challenges for Minnesota regarding wood fiber availability and cost as well as taxation. Minnesota is more competitive relative to workforce development and some potential future bioeconomy investments. Recommendations were made regarding each of the issues addressed in the report. The MFRC has worked closely with the Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership in convening state experts and leaders to advance the recommendations.

The Sustainable Forest Incentive Act (SFIA)

The Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) issued a report in November 2013 evaluating the SFIA. The report identified a number of areas of concern as well as recommendations to either revise or replace the SFIA. Several legislators subsequently asked the MFRC, DNR, and the Department of Revenue to respond to the report. The MFRC, in consultation with the two agencies, convened a stakeholder group to vet OLA recommendations. Facilitated by MFRC staff, this group met a number of times and has developed a suite of recommendations for decision-makers that built upon those in the OLA report. The recommendations included:

1. Clarify the program goals.
2. Identify the program as an incentive program rather than a tax program.
3. Implement a two-tiered payment for those landowners who provide public recreational access.
4. Require landowners to register forest management plans with the DNR.
5. Require the DNR to periodically review participant compliance.
6. Increase penalties for non-compliance with SFIA program requirements.
7. Clarify ownership transfer details.
8. Repeal the 60,000 acreage limitation on SFIA enrollment.
9. Employ complementary tools such as conservation easements.

Wildfire Funding

Over the past 15 years, federal firefighting costs have increased dramatically. Since 2000, the USDA Forest Service has run out of wildfire appropriations eight times, borrowing $1 billion in FY 12 and FY13. USDA Forest Service expenditures devoted to fire have increased from 16 percent of the total budget in 1995 to 42 percent in 2014. Recently, the MFRC expressed its support for a separate budgeting process for funding the suppression of major catastrophic fires for the USDA Forest Service by creating an emergency funding process that is partitioned from the USDA Forest Service operating budget. The MFRC also supports reinvestment by the USDA Forest

Service in those programmatic activities that have been curtailed due to the increased cost of large scale fire suppression. The MFRC encourages the promotion of activities that will decrease the occurrence, severity, and/or financial impact of large-scale fires in the future.

Other policy initiatives
The MFRC has worked on a number of other issues this year, including addressing the potential forest management implications of listing the northern long-eared bat as federally endangered; water quality impacts of land use conversion from forest to farm land in west central Minnesota; impacts of existing and potential terrestrial invasive species; forest management adaptation to climate change; and encouragement of private forest management, among others.

Voluntary Site-level Forest Management Guidelines

The MFRC provides science-based, voluntary forest management guidelines to help loggers, foresters, and landowners sustain and conserve forest resources and protect wildlife habitat, soils, water quality, wetlands, riparian areas, aesthetics, and cultural resources. ***In 2014, the MFRC focused its efforts on publishing a user-friendly field guide of important forest management guidelines, evaluation of guideline implementation and effectiveness, and implementation of a new monitoring approach to assess water quality risks in forested watersheds across Minnesota.***

Accomplishments

Forest Management Guidelines
The MFRC conducted the following activities in 2014 to promote implementation of forest management guidelines:

1. Completed a comprehensive assessment of historic guideline implementation, including identifying key topics for improvement, underlying factors influencing implementation, and risk of impacts occurring during operations. Recommendations to address these issues were developed and acted upon in 2014.
2. Designed and published a field guide focused on those guidelines most commonly applied during timber harvesting operations. The field guide content was designed in a concise, user-friendly format so that it can be used by loggers, managers, and landowners when harvesting timber.
3. Conducted evaluations to determine at-risk sites and operability conditions that influence effectiveness of guidelines related to soil productivity and water quality.

Photo: Dick Rossman on left and Doug Hecker on right, DNR, conducting a site evaluation.

Accomplishments, continued

Accomplishments from 2014 will serve as a foundation to improve guideline implementation with the development of targeted training programs in collaboration with the Minnesota Logger Education Program, the Sustainable Forest Education Cooperative, and the DNR.

Monitoring Guideline Implementation and Assessing Water Quality Risks

The Minnesota DNR conducts field monitoring of guideline implementation to identify areas in need of improved implementation efforts. The program has been recently reorganized to focus on assessing implementation at the watershed scale while incorporating forest disturbance metrics to assess relative risks to water quality in forested watersheds of the state. MFRC staff worked collaboratively with the DNR to accomplish the following related activities in 2014:

1. Finalized protocols for site selection and field measurements for the 2014 monitoring season.
2. Evaluated guideline implementation at approximately 100 harvest sites across the following watersheds: Mississippi River (headwaters), Leech Lake River, Rum River, and Lake Superior (north and south).
3. Hired a new Spatial Analyst to conduct a forestry-centric risk assessment for each watershed.

Landscape-level Forest Resource Management

The MFRC Landscape Program supports regional and local level forums where partners collaborate to bring about desired future conditions in each of six major forested regions in the state. ***Over the past five years, the MFRC has helped landscape committee partners obtain $15 million in federal, private and non-General Fund state grants to support their work.***

Accomplishments

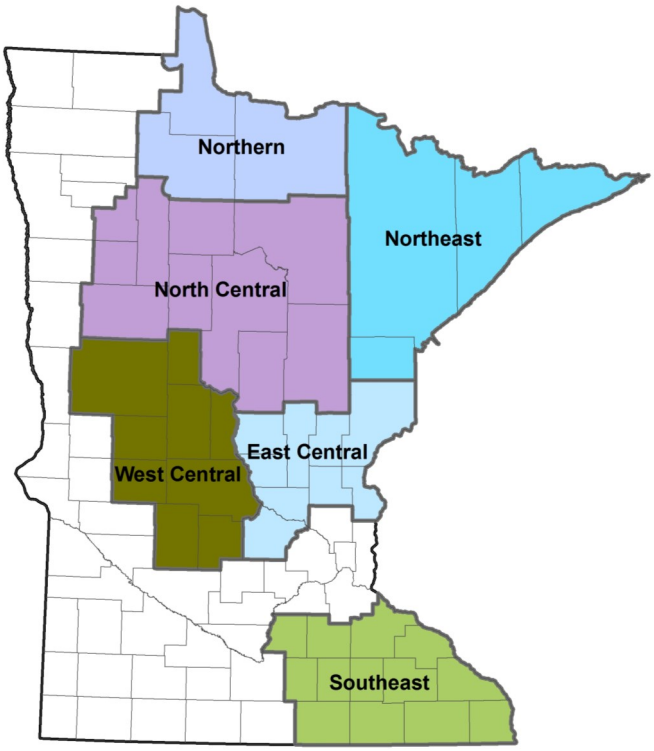
Northeast Plan Revision

In September 2014, the MFRC approved the revised Northeast Landscape Plan that was prepared by the Northeast Landscape Planning Committee, updating a plan that was written in 2003. Over 30 people representing a broad range of interests developed the forest management plan for the four-county region. The revised plan incorporated economic, ecological, and social research by the University of Minnesota and USDA Forest Service and integrated input from a diverse array of stakeholders. Particular emphasis was placed on adding economic and social goals to the landscape plan and climate change considerations into the plan, especially forest management adaptation to climate change effects that are already being observed or that are anticipated in coming decades. The revised Northeast Landscape Plan will provide an important context for revisions of operational land management plans by the Superior National Forest, the

DNR, several counties, and various private forest landowners. The Northeast Landscape Coordination Committee will reconvene in January 2015 to initiate the second generation of plan coordination and implementation efforts over the next ten years. The Northeast Plan is the first of six landscape plans to be revised in Minnesota.

Southeast Plan Revision

The Southeast Landscape Committee completed the revision of the Southeast Landscape Plan in November 2014, updating a plan that was written in 2003. The committee worked with various stakeholder organizations and interested parties to develop the revised plan. The plan outlines an overarching vision of desired future conditions, goals, and strategies for consideration by all public land managers and private landowners throughout the region. The committee also established a more formalized work planning process to guide specific efforts to promote and demonstrate robust implementation of the plan. The committee will also coordinate plan implementation monitoring, review plan implementation progress annually, and report its findings to the MFRC. These efforts will be part of a larger statewide monitoring and reporting effort developed by the DNR, as required by the SFRA, in cooperation with partnering natural resources agencies.



MFRC landscape regions.

Landscape Coordination

The six MFRC landscape committees have over 30 multi-owner collaborative projects in progress. In 2014, partners on the regional committees completed two landscape stewardship plans, including one for the Whitewater Watershed in the Southeast Region and one for the Camp Ripley area that overlaps into three MFRC landscape regions, including the East Central, North Central, and West Central Landscapes. Partners also completed six family forest demonstration projects across the state. These projects leveraged funding from multiple sources, including federal, state, local, and private sources. Through these projects, regional partners have advanced the implementation of their landscape plans and simultaneously supported efforts to redesign the DNR Forestry Private Forest Management (PFM) Program. All of the these collaborative projects seek to advance the integration of landscape stewardship approaches, as recommended by the USDA Forest Service, a major funding source for collaborative landscape projects across the state.

In 2014, the MFRC regional landscape committees continued to successfully support the collaborative pursuit of federal and state funding. Partners on the Southeast Committee, for example, successfully obtained federal and state funding for two additional landscape stewardship plans in priority watersheds in that region.

Research

The MFRC conducts and supports key research to improve forest management and the sustainable use of forest resources. ***In 2014, the MFRC continued to collaborate on research projects and proposals assessing guideline effectiveness and other topics related to sustainable forestry and forest health.***

Accomplishments

Guideline effectiveness over time

In 2014, Council staff continued efforts to assess guideline effectiveness, including the effect of roads and landings on site productivity over time. A subset of harvest sites that were previously monitored by the DNR over the past 15 years were selected, road and landing areas within them were delineated, and LIDAR imagery was used to indirectly assess effects on productivity. These data are currently being analyzed, and study findings will be available in 2015.

Ecological impacts of woody biomass harvesting

Research continues on a collaborative study led by Dr. Anthony D'Amato involving University of Minnesota (UMN) and USDA Forest Service researchers to assess the impacts of different levels of biomass removal on forest ecological functions. In 2014, MFRC staff coauthored a paper on the effects of biomass harvest and leave tree retention on soil carbon flux and implications for ecosystem functions. Other papers related to changes in soil nutrient pools over a 20-year period are being prepared in collaboration with the project team. Council staff also initiated a nutrient flux assessment at nutrient poor jack pine sites that are part of the larger project, and are evaluating soil water dynamics as related to plant community development and precipitation patterns.

Emerald Ash Borer

Research continues on a five-year project funded by the LCCMR to assess the ecological and hydrologic impacts of Emerald Ash Borer in black ash wetlands and develop recommendations for management. The project is being conducted by researchers from the UMN Department of Forest Resources, Council staff, and the USDA Forest Service. Experimental treatments were applied in the winter of 2012. The project team is currently focused on assessing black ash physiology, and the hydrologic response and planting success of alternative tree species following experimental cutting and girdling. Council staff coauthored papers on water table dynamics and black ash transpiration rates in 2014, and also disseminated the study findings at conferences and workshops.

Participating in Sustainable Forestry

MFRC programs rely on individuals interested in forest resources in Minnesota. Their participation assures that a "broad array of perspectives regarding the management, use, and protection of the state's forest resources" (M.S. § 89A.02) guide forest resource planning and management.

MFRC Activities

There are many ways for interested individuals to become involved:

- Attend MFRC meetings. A schedule of meetings is posted on the MFRC website: http://mn.gov/frc/. In 2015, MFRC meetings are scheduled for January 14, March 18, and May 13. Meetings in July, September, and November 2015 are not yet scheduled.

- Participate in regional landscape committees and projects. Contact Lindberg Ekola, MFRC Landscape Program Manager, at ekola.mfrc@charter.net or 320-256-8300.

- Use the timber harvesting/forest management guidelines. Guidelines are available on our website.

- Use the Public Concerns Registration Process to notify the MFRC of specific timber harvests or other forest management practices that concern you (see below for more details).

- Attend forest resources educational programs provided by the Sustainable Forests Education Cooperative[3] or the Minnesota Logger Education Program[4].

The Public Concerns Registration Process

The Public Concerns Registration Process (PCRP) allows citizens to inform landowners, foresters, and loggers of specific concerns regarding timber harvesting and forest management practices they see in Minnesota and learn more about forest management.

PCRP encourages sustainable management of Minnesota's forests through education. It is not a regulatory or dispute resolution program. Instead, landowners, loggers, and foresters become more aware of public concerns regarding forest management, and citizens learn about guidelines for sustainable forest management.

Concerns registered with the Public Concerns Registration Process are confidential. To register a concern, call 1-888-234-3702 or submit one online at http://mn.gov/frc/

[3] http://sfec.cfans.umn.edu/
[4] http://www.mlep.org/

State of the Forest 2014: Minnesota's Forest Products Industry

Minnesota's primary forest products industry is vital to state's economy and to the health of the state's forests. The economic downturn that started in 2008 hurt the competitive position of Minnesota's primary forest products industry, and concern about the competitiveness of the industry lingers. At the same time, the health of our forests and habitat are also ask risk. To address these concerns, the DNR Commissioner asked the Minnesota Forest Resources Council to assess Minnesota's forest-based economy and compare it with other states and countries. The Commissioner asked the Council to specifically look at permitting and environmental review, vehicle weight limits, taxation, energy costs and other metrics.

In general, Minnesota's forests are aging and declining rapidly in terms of growth and quality. Harvesting has declined steadily over the past decade, despite development opportunities cultivated from new forest-based products. The result is diminished forest health, productivity and wildlife habitat, compounded by environmental review processes that have stalled new investment. Uncertainties related to climate change, invasive species and threats to summer harvest increase these challenges. All put a strain on the competitiveness of Minnesota's primary forest products industry and the forest.

The report offers numerous recommendations to address these challenges. The recommendations focus on improving the competitiveness of Minnesota's primary forest products industry directly and its major role in managing the forest. No single recommendation on its own will make a significant difference. It is the combination of recommendations, which are aimed at improving forest health, increasing the availability of quality wood, and improving the business environment in which the industry and all its affiliated constituents operate, that will start bending the curve toward a more competitive position.

The table below provides a summary of the competitive position of Minnesota's forest products industry relative to other states and countries across several key factors. Each of the factors, and the related recommendations, are explained in more detail in the report.

Comparison of all factors — Minnesota versus other locations

	Wood Fiber Availability and Cost	Cost of Energy	Workforce Development	Environmental Review and Permitting	Taxation	Transportation
Wisconsin	B	W	W	S	B	S
Michigan	B	W	W		W	B
Mississippi	B	W	W		B	
Louisiana	B	B	W		B	B
Georgia	B	B	W	B	B	W
North Carolina	B	Mixed	W	S	B	
Washington		W	W	S	B	B
United States						
Germany						
Finland						
Canada						

Legend

B	= Better than Minnesota
S	= About the Same as Minnesota
W	= Worse than Minnesota
Mixed	= Mixed
	= Missing Data

Priority Recommendations

Wood Fiber Availability and Cost

- Employ additional tools, such as the purchase of permanent conservation easements, to ensure the protection of high value forest lands and associated timber supply (page 23).
- Enhance the effectiveness of the Sustainable Forestry Incentive Act (SFIA) at providing a multitude of benefits including increased timber supply, slowed parcelization, maintenance of water quality and maintenance of public recreational access (page 23).

Cost of Energy

- The state should continue to exempt vehicles used for off-road activities from the biodiesel mandate and from fuel taxes for logging vehicles and equipment (page 28).

Taxation

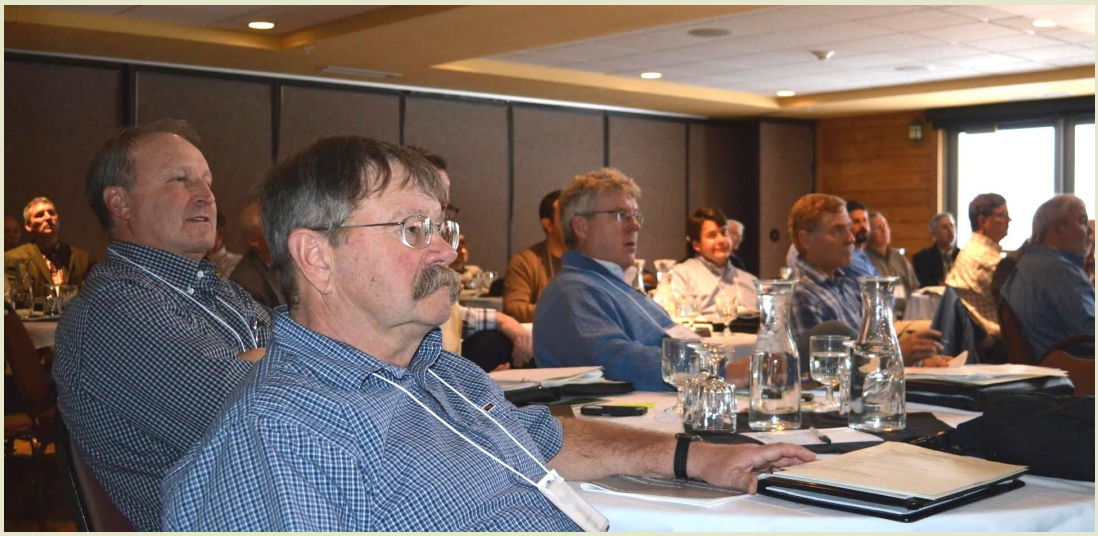
- Assure that the up-front exemption on capital equipment rather than a rebate occurs on July 1, 2015, and consider expanding the definition of capital equipment to include entire projects as well as logging equipment (page 36).

Transportation

- Fund improvements and maintenance of existing forest roads and bridges in the forested parts of the state (page 38).

Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership — Minnesota Forest Futures Conference

In December, the Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership hosted a two-day conference focused on the issues and recommendations of the 2014 Report on the Competitiveness of Minnesota's Primary Forest Products Industry. Event co-hosts included: Minnesota Forest Resources Council, Minnesota DNR, Minnesota Association of County Land Commissioners, Minnesota Forest Industries, University of Minnesota, and Dovetail Partners. The purpose of the conference was to allow those responsible for shaping the future of Minnesota's primary forest-based industry the opportunity to consider and commit to the "next steps" in advancing the recommendations of the Task Force Report.



MFRC 2014 Publications

Reports are available online: *http://mn.gov/frc/*

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Thank You

MFRC programs are voluntary. Thank you to all the organizations and individuals who continue to help, support, and participate in the programs of the Sustainable Forest Resources Act and the Minnesota Forest Resources Council:

Associated Contract Loggers; Audubon Minnesota; Blandin Foundation; Citizens of Minnesota who participate in SFRA and MFRC programs; Dovetail Partners Inc.; Freshwater Society; Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness; Great River Greening; Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy — Community Forestry Resource Center; Interagency Information Cooperative; Minnesota Association of County Land Commissioners; Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources; Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy; Minnesota Deer Hunters Association; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Minnesota Forest Industries; Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership; Minnesota Forestry Association; Minnesota Indian Affairs Council; Minnesota Land Trust; Minnesota Logger Education Program; Minnesota Pollution Control Agency; Minnesota Power; Minnesota Resort and Campground Association; Minnesota Ruffed Grouse Society; Minnesota Timber Producers Association; National Council for Air and Stream Improvement; North Shore Forest Collaborative; Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science; Sierra Club — North Star Chapter; The Conservation Fund; The Nature Conservancy; The Trust for Public Land; University of Minnesota Twin Cities – Cloquet Forestry Center, Department of Forest Resources, Extension, Institute on the Environment, Sustainable Forests Education Cooperative; University of Minnesota Duluth — Natural Resources Research Institute; USDA Forest Service — Chippewa National Forest, Superior National Forest, Northern Research Station and State and Private Forestry; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; USDI Fish and Wildlife Service; University of Minnesota Extension and Institute on the Environment; Wood Fiber Employees Joint Legislative Council.

The Minnesota Forest Resources Council was established by the Sustainable Forest Resources Act (SFRA) of 1995 to promote sustainable management of Minnesota's forests.

To find out more about the council, visit our web site:

http://mn.gov/frc/

or call

651-603-6761

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