

Scoping Document

Update to the 2003 Northeast Landscape Plan



At its meeting on May 25, 2011, the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC) voted in favor of updating the Northeast (NE) Landscape Plan. This vote followed recommendations by the NE Committee and the Council's Landscape Committee for the Council to support updating the plan.

The first step in updating the NE Landscape Plan involves developing this scoping document through an iterative process with the NE Committee.

Question 1 – Why?

The MFRC Landscape Program encourages cooperative and collaborative, landscape-level forest management among public and private ownerships in Minnesota. Landscape-level forest management involves four iterative phases: planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation.

Current MFRC landscape plans articulate collaboratively-identified *Desired Future Forest Conditions*, as well as goals and strategies, to guide sustainable management within forested regions of Minnesota. Landscape plans provide regional context for operational plans developed at federal, state, and local levels. Regional goals and strategies are incorporated, as applicable, into National Forest, Subsection Forest Resource Management, county, industry, and private stewardship plans by public and private managers. Through this framework, landowners, resource managers, interested groups, and public officials work together to address forest sustainability on a landscape-level.

Good planning is dynamic, reflecting appropriate change over time. The first generation NE Landscape Plan was developed by the NE Committee from 1998 through 2003 and approved by the Council on March 25, 2003. Since the plan's approval and through the ensuing years of coordination and implementation efforts, committee members have identified a number of topic areas that need to be addressed in a plan update, including:

- The first generation plan did not develop social and economic goals and strategies. Members of the NE Committee have expressed the need for these areas to be addressed in an updated plan to help them better address issues in these areas.
- Issues such as climate change and bioenergy have emerged since the approval of the 2003 plan. Changes in regional conditions caused by climate change, parcelization, increased incidence in wildfires, bioenergy initiatives and other issues identified by the committee should be analyzed and incorporated into the update.

In light of the inherent uncertainty resulting from these changing conditions, resource managers are entering a second generation of landscape planning; one that recognizes the uncertainty of future conditions and identifies strategies to promote resilient social, ecological, and economic systems.

In addition to the NE Landscape Plan update process, there are several initiatives underway that seek to address various forestry and related resource management issues, including (see attached Major Efforts diagram):

- Northern Minnesota Climate Change Response Framework (NMCCRF). This collaborative effort will assess the vulnerability of ecosystems in northern Minnesota to climate change and identify adaptation approaches for use by field managers. The analysis will provide important information for the NE plan update process.
- Boreal Forest and Community Resilience Project (BFCRP). This University of Minnesota (UMN) applied research project has the goal of incorporating an understanding of complexity, uncertainty and social-ecological resilience into the NE plan and the NMCCRF processes. The Boreal project team will provide critical support to the NE plan update effort through modeling and analysis and facilitation of scenarios and systems thinking workshops.
- All Lands Management Team – This group of agency and organizational leaders from NE Minnesota have compiled 2003 Landscape Plan monitoring results and helped initiate major proposals to fund cross-ownership coordination and plan implementation efforts. These leaders will be critical in supporting the plan update process.

Anticipated outcomes of a NE Landscape Plan update (second generation plan) include:

- Strengthened and up-to-date economic, social, and ecological plan components.
- A new framework to assist managers in planning for an uncertain future.
- Improved coordination, implementation, and evaluation strategies based on a decade of landscape-level forest management in NE Minnesota.

Discussion Questions

- *What other major initiatives have been developed or in progress that could help inform the update of the NE landscape plan?*

Question 2 – What is Involved?

Planning Process

The following are suggested steps or phases to be followed in updating the NE Landscape Plan:

- Review past plans (first generation NE Landscape Plan and other relevant forest management plans developed from 2004 to 2011)
- Review monitoring and evaluation feedback from the first generation plan.
- Discuss the social, economic and ecological factors related to forest management in NE Minnesota
- Explore relevant social, economic, and ecological trends; draw out major conclusions.

- Formulate future landscape goals.
- Explore the challenge of how to plan for an uncertain future.
- Develop / revise social, economic, and ecological goals and strategies to maximize objectives given the range of possible future scenarios.
- Update and expand coordination and implementation strategies.
- Refine monitoring and evaluation framework for the next 10-year landscape management cycle.

Documents and Resources for Updating the NE Landscape Plan

Below is a list of documents developed for the first generation landscape plan:

- Economic and Census Data Report.
- Current Trends and Conditions Report.
- Northern Superior Uplands RNV studies.
- Forestry Bottleneck Analysis.
- Landscape Perspectives Report.

Staff has collected these and other documents from the first generation planning process and will make them available to committee members as requested. Some of these are on the MFRC website: http://www.frc.state.mn.us/initiatives/11m_committees_northeast.html Staff is in the process of updating / refining these background documents to support the planning process. For example, the MFRC recently contracted with the University of Minnesota Duluth Business School to update a northern Minnesota forest-based economic analysis from 2001 to 2011. The 2001 report served as part of the basis for the Forestry Bottleneck Analysis and was used to develop the first generation NE plan.

Discussion Questions

- *Which of the above documents did you find useful in developing the first landscape plan?*
- *What documents and data would be useful for updating the NE landscape plan?*
- *What other information do you need to develop meaningful desired future conditions (DFC) statements, goals and strategies in the updated plan?*

Additional Resources

Because the NE region is nested within the geographic scope of the NMCCRF and BFCRP initiatives, documents, maps, data, modeling results, and other relevant information from these concurrent efforts will inform the NE landscape plan update. These analyses will contribute information on ecosystem vulnerability, potential future forest conditions and forest productivity under various climate change scenarios.

Discussion Questions

- *What other plans and policies and programs, etc. could be useful to the plan update process?*
- *What projects and programs could provide useful insights to the plan update process?*
- *What additional data and mapping do we need for the update process?*

Question 3 – Who should be involved and how?

The Sustainable Forest Resources Act (SFRA) enacted in 1995 directed the Council to establish and maintain regional committees to support the landscape program. Each regional committee is to include a mix of interests to reflect the region’s economic, social and ecological interests.

In October of 1997, the Council approved the document entitled, “Landscape-Based Forest Resource Planning and Coordination Framework” which laid the basic framework for the landscape program, including who should be involved in developing it.

The proposed framework outlined below has been modified from the 1997 framework document.

Planning Committee Structure and Roles

Members on the planning committee for the update process should meet the following:

- Reside (including seasonally) within the landscape region for which the regional committee has responsibility for fostering landscape management activities, or represent an interest group with a significant interest in the forest resources of the landscape region.
- Be committed to the goal of sustainable forest management and an all lands approach.
- Be willing to work collaboratively with others, including those with different interests and values with respect to fostering landscape management.
- Recognize the voluntary nature of the landscape program.
- Be able to commit the time and energy required to complete the landscape plan update.

The committee’s primary roles include:

- Review data and information developed for the plan update and related initiatives.
- Engage in broad and strategic thinking about the future of forests, forest management and the NE landscape region
- Support the involvement and participation of the related initiatives (NMCCRF, BFCRP, etc.).
- Review and comment on draft language in the planning documents.
- Support the public review and comment process.
- Develop a consensus based recommendation on a final draft plan document to the Council’s Landscape Committee.
- Support the coordination and implementation of the update plan in future years.

Public Participation / Public Involvement Strategy

The planning committee, representing a broad range of diverse interests in the region, will be one of the primary public participation approaches in developing the plan update. The Council will seek broad participation serving on the planning committee from economic, social and environmental interests in the region.

In addition to the planning committee involvement, input will be gathered from a variety of sources including:

- Inventory of existing forest resource policies (“Landscape Perspectives” report).
- NMCCRF process and products.
- Ongoing opportunity area projects sponsored by the NE Regional Landscape Committee such as the Heart of the Continent’s international Community Congress workshop to be held in late October.

Plan Review and Approval

The SFRA (Chapter 89A) provides minimal guidance on the landscape plan amendment process and public review requirements of landscape plans: “(3) identify and implement an open and public process whereby landscape-based strategic planning of forest resources can occur”. The following is a suggested review process for the draft plan:

- Distribute the draft plan to major landowners in the NE landscape region.
- Distribute the draft plan amendment to original NE planning committee members.
- Post notice in the EQB Monitor.
- Send press releases to 3 local newspapers in the region.
- Post the draft amendment on the MFRC website.
- Public review and comment period – 30-day period.
- Review / recommendation by the LAC.
- Review / approval by the Council.

Discussion Questions

- *Are the steps in the planning process outlined above appropriate? Any missing steps?*
- *Are there specific groups or organizations that you think should be represented on the planning committee?*
- *Are there any missing steps in the plan review and approval process?*

Question 4 – When?

Timing/Schedule

The plan will be developed in conjunction with the emerging opportunities over a 15 to 18 month period with the goal of completing the update by winter/spring 2013 (see attached schedule).

The planning committee will generally meet on a monthly basis with the possibility of additional subcommittee or work group meetings held in between monthly meetings.

The NE Regional Landscape Committee will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to continue its ongoing operations and functions. Current members of the NE Regional Landscape Committee will be encouraged to serve on the planning committee. Periodic updates on the update process will be provided to the NE Regional Landscape Committee.

Discussion Questions

- *Does this timing make sense?*
- *Are there other events that might impact the schedule?*
- *Other timing considerations?*
- *How much time can you commit to the update process?*
- *Other considerations?*