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For additional information, contact:

Chad Skally, Minnesota Forest Resources Council, (651-296-0757.)

Forest Vision Developed for Southeast Minnesota

Forested blufflands and coldwater streams are prime features in nature's master design of southeastern Minnesota. Unfortunately, that landscape design has been so altered over the years that there is now widespread concern about how long it can be sustained.

"As more land continues to be converted from small grains and pasture to row crops, and as forest land is increasingly fragmented by development, the future of southeastern Minnesota could look a whole lot different than it does now," said Dave Zumeta, Executive Director of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC).

As a result of those concerns, a diverse committee of citizens and resource professionals has been working for over two years on a long-term plan to help guide forest management activities in the region. During the planning process over 20 existing local plans were utilized including county, watershed, non-profit, and state documents.

The southeast report is now complete and is intended as a guide that can be used by agencies, local governments, and private landowners on a voluntary basis. Within the report is a vision for what the committee hopes the region will look like 100 years from now. The vision includes increasing native vegetation, protecting riparian areas, and providing more assistance to landowners for management of their lands.

The report also outlines specific goals and strategies to achieve the vision. "In a nutshell, the goals are to increase the amount of forest land over the next five to ten years by approximately 3 percent and to decrease the amount of fragmentation that is taking place," Chad Skally, MFRC Forest Planner, stated.

Prior to European settlement, it is estimated that 50 to 60 percent of the southeast region was forested. Today, only about 15 percent is forested. "Since only about 5 percent of the region is publicly owned, the potential for more fragmentation of private forest land is very high," Skally said.

Population growth in the region accounts for much of the current fragmentation and forestland loss, Skally acknowledged. "From 1990 to 2000, population in the region increased 9.5 percent. Over the next 30 years, it is expected to rise another 25 percent. That will obviously put much more pressure on the resources in this area."

Southeast Minnesota's fabled coldwater streams are also impacted by development and fragmentation. "The amount of run-off into these streams increases as more of the landscape is converted from grass and trees to blacktop. Water quality and temperature are then affected and trout and other aquatic species suffer the consequences," Larry Gates, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), explained.

By adopting strategies and practices outlined in the report (entitled *Recommended Vision, Goals and Strategies: Southeast Landscape*), landowners will be able to forge a sustainable future for the region, the planning committee believes.

The report has been a cooperative effort between private landowners, representatives from University of Minnesota, The Audubon Society, The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy - Forestry Center, Izaak Walton League, forest industries, woodland council groups, Sierra Club, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Minnesota DNR, county and watershed staff, and numerous other groups.

The planning committee was developed jointly by the University of Minnesota Experiment in Rural Cooperation and the MFRC Landscape Program. The committee will continue its efforts by coordinating, implementing, and monitoring the recommendations in the report to support sustainable forest management in the region.

For additional information about forest landscape planning or obtain a copy of the report, visit the MFRC web site at www.frc.state.mn.us. Information is available by contacting Chad Skally.

Additional Contacts

Dave Zumeta, Minnesota Forest Resources Council (651-603-0108.)

Larry Gates, DNR/Experiment in Rural Cooperation (507-280-5065.)