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## CROW WING COUNTY

BRAINERD, MINNESOTA 56401

# NEWS

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### **CROW WING COUNTY ACHIEVES DUAL CERTIFICATION OF FOREST LANDS**

Crow Wing County manages its public forest lands to the highest environmental, social and economic standards, according to the world's two leading forest certification organizations. This recognition comes after a series of rigorous third-party audits resulting in the County receiving its first-ever dual certification for best-management forestry practices from both the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

"This dual certification validates that county forest lands are sustainably managed and will continue to provide multiple benefits for future generations," said Kirk Titus, Land Services Department Supervisor for Natural Resource Management.

By recognizing standards of excellence in management practices, Forest Certification is important to maintaining and expanding markets for locally grown wood, as demand for products harvested in an environmentally responsible way is increasingly required by the marketplace. "The forest products industry asked for certified raw material from our forests, and we are delivering," Titus said. "Certified wood allows the industry to compete in a global market and meet their customer's needs. The economic impact in Crow Wing County and Minnesota is huge. It is very important that we continue to manage our forests in a sustainable way, because they are such a vital resource for our communities. Forest certification helps us do that."

SFI is one of the world's leading third-party forest certification programs. Its forest certification standard is based on principles that promote sustainable forest management, including measures to protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk, and forests with exceptional conservation value. FSC competes with SFI for top-billing as the world's most respected third party forest certification program. Environmental organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Greenpeace, National Wildlife Fund, Sierra Club and the World Wildlife Fund all support and encourage FSC certification. Like SFI, FSC sets high standards that ensure forestry is practiced in an

environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable way. Both SFI and FSC require independent auditing firms to evaluate the practices of an organization to certify that the strict standards of the certifying entity are met. In achieving those standards, Crow Wing County was awarded certification by both organizations.

As a next step in its certification achievement, the County already is embarking on a process to identify its High Conservation Value Forests, in conjunction with its recently-announced Recreational Trails Comprehensive Plan process. This strategic long term planning effort will become an effective tool for County resource managers to identify future recreational opportunities and meet the forest management objectives to protect, enhance and restore High Conservation Value Forests. “The FSC certification standard includes a process for identifying, managing and monitoring high conservation value forest areas, including old-growth forests, water source protection areas or cultural and historic sites and this process will help inform the comprehensive trails plan,” says Katie Fernholz, with Dovetail Partners and the project coordinator for the trails plan. More information about the comprehensive trails planning project is available via the County website and citizens can join the project contact list by contacting Katie at [katie@dovetailinc.org](mailto:katie@dovetailinc.org) or 612-414-8041.

The County’s effort to achieve forest certification began in 2005 under the leadership of former Land Commissioner Tom Cowell. At that time, Crow Wing County joined with four other area counties – Beltrami, Clearwater, Koochiching and Carlton – to create a one-of a-kind county cooperative to achieve certification. The cooperative arrangement, meant lower costs for each county to implement the rigorous third-party certification process. “There is no other example in the world of five counties joining together to achieve certification as we have, Titus said. “Working with our partner counties has resulted in lower costs, increased efficiencies and the sharing of best practices. It’s an innovation that makes enormous sense.”

“Tom Cowell had the vision and laid the foundation for this important achievement,” Titus noted. “After Tom’s retirement in 2008, our current County Board of Commissioners reiterated its commitment to achieving certification, and our staff – Bryan Pike, Jake Frie, Vickie Sullivan, and Heather Becker – worked extra hard to complete the rigorous audit process. Many hands working together have created this success for Crow Wing County.”

The County manages 103,000 acres of forest land for timber production and recreation opportunities. “Our timber management practices deliver revenue to county and local governments, provide diverse recreation opportunities to multiple users and protect and enhance our water resources and the county’s extraordinary natural environment,” said Titus. The sale of timber at public auctions during the year funds the County’s management of these lands, while providing revenues to local communities under a revenue-sharing formula. In 2009, timber sales on County managed lands generated \$575,000.00, 30 percent of which – \$172,500 – was distributed to Townships, Cities and School Districts in the County to offset local tax levies. Moreover, for every dollar of timber sold, an estimated \$41.60 of value added economic activity is generated – or nearly \$24 million based on 2009 County timber sales -- according to a 2004 State of Minnesota study.

Titus noted, “Our mission is to be responsible stewards of the land, and use the best forest management practices to sustain a healthy, diverse and productive forest for future generations. Forest certification will help us achieve this important management mission.”