

NEWS



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**MISSISSIPPI NORTHWOODS NATURAL AREA DEAL IS *COMPLETED*
Bud Grant: Project Delivers On Promise of the Legacy Amendment**

Brainerd, Minn. (December 3, 2012) Minnesota conservation advocates and Potlatch Corporation today announced the closing of an \$11 million deal to conserve a very special natural area along the Mississippi River northeast of Brainerd, Minnesota, known by conservation leaders as "Mississippi River Northwoods."

"To put this in football terms, this is a big win for all Minnesotans. I think this is precisely the kind of project they envisioned when they overwhelmingly voted to pass this constitutional amendment," said Bud Grant, former head coach of the Minnesota Vikings, and avid outdoorsman and conservation advocate. "Whether you are a sportsmen who has a passion for hunting and fishing or just someone who loves the outdoors and wants to leave this outdoor legacy for our children and grandchildren, it's a win-win. Minnesotans should feel very proud today."

In 2008, Minnesota's voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (Legacy Amendment) to the Minnesota Constitution. One-third of those funds are set aside in an Outdoor Heritage Fund to protect, enhance, and restore wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat. This project uses approximately \$11 million of that funding.

The nearly 2,000-acre tract of land is a few miles northeast of Brainerd. It has 2.7 miles of riverfront, and will link with adjacent properties to create a 9-mile stretch of protected natural shoreline. By providing an alternative to fragmentation of forestlands, and ensuring the public use the land in the future, the project will protect the kind of natural asset that draws tourists and residents to the Brainerd area, one of the most rapidly growing and developing areas of Minnesota. It is a prime spot for visitors to enjoy hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, hiking, snowmobiling, and canoeing.

From an environmental standpoint, conservation experts consider the land a rare gem. It is home to Blanding's turtles, bald eagles, red-shouldered hawks, and other species of special concern. The property provides critical habitat along the Mississippi River Flyway, which is used by 60% of North America's migratory birds. A lake-like basin on the property and a designated trout stream are critical fisheries for bass, walleye, muskellunge, panfish, brook trout, brown trout, and other species.

"This is one of Minnesota's 'wow' spots," said Ron Schara, member of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) and host of Minnesota Bound, a television series that features outdoors activities and Minnesota scenery. "I'm not surprised that a dedicated group of Minnesotans, working together, have succeeded in protecting this absolutely unique and special area along the Mississippi River!"

Potlatch Corporation has long owned the land, but has been exploring options for selling it for development, including for a master planned community. The Trust for Public Land and Potlatch have been involved in long and complex discussions about the possible conservation future of the property. Two land appraisals were required to be completed by DNR-approved appraisers, and the DNR subsequently reviewed both appraisals for quality control. The purchase price was limited to the DNR's approved appraised value. The deal closed last Thursday.

"A long list of public, non-profit and private leaders deserve credit for this success, but I want to especially recognize Crow Wing County," said David Hartwell, Chair of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC). "These kind of conservation deals take vision, courage and perseverance, and these county leaders stepped up and did something really

special for the citizens they serve and the state as a whole. With county leadership like this, we're going to accomplish great things across Minnesota in the coming years."

Lead partners on the project include Crow Wing County, which will own and steward the land, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), The Nature Conservancy, Anglers for Habitat, Cuyuna Lakes Trail Association, Delta Waterfowl (Brainerd Chapter) and The Trust for Public Land.

Senator Paul Gazelka and Representative John Ward were among many legislators from both political parties who joined the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, several environmental, hunting and angling groups, dedicated citizen advocates, and the Dayton Administration in championing the project.

"On this project, we had Republicans working with Democrats, county government working with state government, and business working with government and non-profits," said Doug Houge, Chair of the Crow Wing County Board of Commissioners. "If anyone wonders whether Minnesota can still accomplish great things, just look at how we all pulled together to save this spectacular natural area."

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