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The guide to sustaining America's family forests

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## The Value of Certification

You Earn the Global Stamp of Approval for Sustainable Forestry

**50 Years**



# Group Certification Means Shared Opportunities & Savings

By **KATHLEEN Preece**

The figures are impressive: 700,000 acres. Five counties. Two forest management certifications. One consortium. It all adds up to a successful, sustained partnership with economic and ecological benefits.

Seven years ago, Minnesota forestry leaders gathered as part of the Governor's Task Force on the Competitiveness of Minnesota's Primary Forest Products Industry, to begin addressing dramatic industry shifts, including demand for "green" forest products. With an eye on that future, five northern Minnesota counties — Beltrami, Carlton, Clearwater, Crow Wing, and Koochiching — formed the County Sustainable Forest Management Certification Cooperative.

Their goal was to achieve dual forestland management certification according to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

The woodlands of these five counties are not contiguous. However, the counties are bound by a common purpose: to respond to their key customers' need to assure the public that forests are being managed well — before, during, and after harvests. "Certification validates the practices we are doing," says Dick Moore, resource manager for Beltrami County. "It's an important message to residents and visitors to our woodlands."

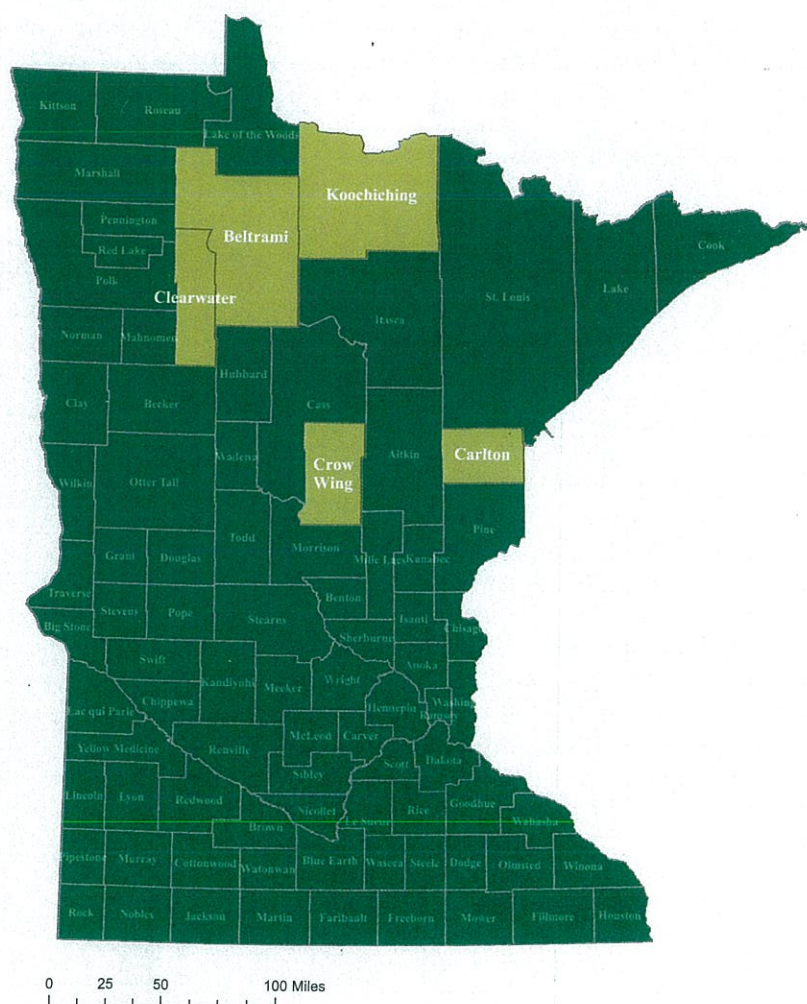
Participating counties are home to a large number of forestland acres, which serve some of Minnesota's largest papermakers and lumber producers. In recent years, those industries have seen increased pressure from end-use customers for proof that wood used has been harvested carefully and that precautions are taken to protect forest environments.

Earning certification that best practices govern the management and use of those lands bolster the counties' ability to continue to market timber under both the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

"We want loggers who buy wood to have access to all markets available to them," says Bruce Cox, Clearwater County land commissioner. "Certifying in both FSC and SFI provides this opportunity."

Group certification means the counties are treated as a single entity. It is a rare approach to certification for both SFI and FSC, but offered the consortium significant advantages. It also meant working closely as a team. Together, the counties' land department staffs worked on the technical aspects of certification. They developed a common forest management database and coordinated on-site evaluations by SFI and FSC auditors.

"By doing the audit cooperatively, we reduced the cost by 20 to 30 percent," says Dennis Hummitzsch, Koochiching



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County land commissioner. "What we all saved in staff power and funds was significant."

Collective will was equally significant. The counties took full advantage of the opportunity to strengthen relationships among the various boards and land departments.

As Carlton County Land Commissioner Greg Bernu points out: "We divided the challenges and opportunities of certification 'by five.' This consortium gives us creativity and, importantly market positioning for our woodlands and our loggers, for the future.

Land Commissioner Hummitzsch says that Boise Paper, located in Hummitzsch's backyard, wanted documentation of certification. "When the timber flows, they look to use and keep us, the county, at the forefront."

"This achievement required leadership and tenacity," says Bernadine Joselyn, director of public policy and engagement at Blandin Foundation, which encouraged the counties to work collaboratively to achieve their shared goals and then provided grant and staff support for the



*Carlton County uses this Bombardier J-5 to pull a 1940s vintage fireplow for row planting and for scarification under birch stands the year prior to harvest. The idea behind the scarification is to capture the seed source directly to mineral soils and develop single-stem birch stands vs. coppice (stump sprout) regenerated birch stands.*



*Land Commissioner Bruce Cox and staff with an assessment team in Clearwater County.*

project. Blandin provided a \$50,000 grant to assist with development of the forest management database as well as the staff support for convening pre-audit training sessions for the counties' land management staffs. In addition, increasing the number of acres of forestland under certification was a key goal of the foundation's Vital Forests Vital Communities initiative, a seven-year, \$15 million program that ended in December 2009. "These counties had common vision," adds Joselyn. "They stayed focused, leveraged their strengths, and reached their goal."

The five resource managers agree:

- We know certified forestland management is essential to the long-term economic sustainability of the forestry community in our region
- We want to manage our forests with due regard being taken of social and environmental issues
- Certain segments of the retail sector are demanding timber from certified sources – this demand will only grow over time

The certification also boosted the amount of Minnesota's certified forestland by 9 percent – to 8.2 million acres – according to an estimate in a 2008 Dovetail Partners study of forest certification in the Great Lakes Region. That is good news for managers and consumers alike.

"Green forest products are happening now, and demand appears to be growing," said Crow Wing County's Resource Manager Kirk Titus. "Anytime you can get in a niche [with the logger and mill communities], that is good. 🌿"



*Beltrami County Resource Manager Dick Moore, right, and staff with an auditor at a harvest site in Beltrami County.*