

INCREASED ACREAGE SHARE PAYMENTS

The Wisconsin County Forests Association respectfully requests:

- **The State increases the Acreage Share Payment to towns containing County Forest Lands.**

Wisconsin counties hold significant acreage of lands enrolled under Wisconsin's County Forest Law (State Statutes §28.10 & 28.11). Citizens of Wisconsin value these County Forests because they provide reliable raw materials for the forest products industry as well as public access and recreation programs on more than 2.4 million acres of forested lands. These county forests are a large part of what makes northern Wisconsin unique and collectively make up the largest public forested land holdings in the State.

Currently, the Department of Natural Resources makes Acreage Share/PILT payments to towns for state forest, other state lands and county forests. Payment for county forest lands is currently at a rate of \$0.30/acre for every acre of land enrolled under Wisconsin's County Forest Law, a rate set back in the 1980's. In addition, counties are statutorily required to return 10% of gross timber revenue (an overall system average of \$1.25/acre) to towns containing county forest lands. Individual county board may elect to go beyond the 10% that is required, and some do.

The Department of Natural Resources makes payments to towns containing state forest lands at a rate of \$.88/acre for lands acquired prior to 1969; \$1.87/acre for lands acquired prior to 1992; and \$2.41/acre for lands acquired after 1992. Beginning in 2001, state lands purchased with Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds receive PILT payments at the rate equivalent to taxes paid on the parcel prior to purchase by the state. Furthermore, there is no requirement to return any percentage of State Forest timber sale revenue to towns.

Under the current Acreage Share Payment/PILT system, towns are paid at a much higher rate for state forest lands than county forest lands. In general, the public and the towns do not make a distinction between the uses, benefits, and economic impacts of a state forest versus a county forest, and it would be appropriate to compensate the towns on a more equal basis for county forest lands. In light of changes to the shared revenue system, it is important to ensure public lands, including county forests, do not become an economic burden to local governments.

Increasing the County Forest Acreage Share Payment up from \$.30/acre is long overdue and has not kept up with inflation. Coupled with the severance share payment from the counties, this would make the relationship between state PILT payments and County Forest Acreage Share Payments more equitable.

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