



Wisconsin County Forests Association

PRESS RELEASE

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Wisconsin County Forest Program Exceeds Certification Standards

For the 17th consecutive year, twenty-seven of Wisconsin's County Forests have exceeded the standards for certified forests as set by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) and/or Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC). SFI and FSC are two of the most widely recognized forest certification systems in North America. Representatives from NSF-International Forestry Program and Scientific Certification Systems Global Services comprised the audit team conducting the evaluations of Wisconsin's County Forests. Certification means that these forests conform to strict environmental, social and economic standards.

According to Rebekah Luedtke, Executive Director of the Wisconsin County Forests Association, "We were not surprised the 2020 certification audit findings showed that the hard work county forest staff put into properly managing these forests is paying off. The focus of the Wisconsin County Forests is to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of forest ecosystems while providing benefits to the public."

Collectively, county forests in Wisconsin represent the largest public landholding in the state covering over 2.4 million acres. Active sustainable forest management provides healthy forest conditions, robust wildlife habitat, clean water resources and numerous outdoor recreation amenities and services. In 2019 alone, forest products from these forests generated over \$44.6 million in timber sale revenue for the counties and townships encompassing these lands, reducing local tax levies while maintaining healthy, sustainable forests. Wisconsin's County Forest system also provides more than 9,000 miles of snowmobile trails, 1,800 miles of ATV/UTV trails, 1,800 miles of non-motorized trails (biking/hiking/cross-country skiing, snowshoe and horseback) and 330 campsites along with a wealth of hunting, fishing and nature viewing opportunities.

A cooperative management framework between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the counties provides the opportunity for the county forest group certification program. DNR holds the group certificates for the 27 participating counties and provides technical support to county forest management efforts. Heather Berklund, Chief State Forester of the DNR states, "DNR personnel work closely with the staff of the County Forests to manage these healthy, productive and sustainable forests. The county forest program is a unique partnership that stretches back over 90 years and is a fine example of local governments and state agencies working together to address statewide resource needs and services."

Merrill, WI

The Wisconsin County Forests Association provides leadership uniting the interests of the world's largest county forest program while ensuring long-term forest health and sustainability.

Information on the Wisconsin County Forests Association can be found at www.wisconsincountyforests.com.

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