



Greetings from the Black River State Forest! As Wisconsinites we have many things to be proud of. The state has a long history of being progressive, has produced some of the greatest minds in various fields, and is in the top 10 states in many quality of life issues. One of the areas Wisconsin is recognized nationally is land protection. This is due to the foresight of our elected officials in the late 1980's.

In 1989 the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program was authorized to protect Wisconsin's most significant natural resources for future generations. The program was named for two former Governors, one Republican and one Democrat, who were recognized as leaders in the conservation movement. The Stewardship Fund originally authorized funding for 10 years to purchase land for the public good. The fund was reauthorized in 2000 for another 10 years.

There were many factors that drove the creation of this program. One of these is the strong relationship Wisconsinites have with their natural resources. Hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, camping, and other outdoor recreation are an important part of our heritage. It also made good sense economically. The program directly supports two of Wisconsin's most important economic drivers; tourism and forestry which account for \$33 billion a year to Wisconsin's economy.

This program was especially important in the late 1990's. With record land prices many timber companies found it more profitable to sell their lands than manage them. This massive sell-off threatened the permanent loss of thousands of acres that had been open for public hunting and produced materials needed for our timber industry. While many acres were lost to private developments many acres were protected for the public good.

The Stewardship program has also been important for the Black River State Forest. This year we added a new 50 acre parcel to the forest. This property runs along the Black River and protects 3/8 of a mile of shoreline. It also lies in one of the most biologically rich areas of the state forest.

This parcel was added through the Stewardship program but also with assistance from the Friends of The Black River and the Western Wisconsin Land Trust. We were also fortunate that the previous owners of the property were interested in selling to the state as they wanted the aesthetic and natural qualities of the site undisturbed.

The state forest is approximately 68,000 acres. The last master plan for the property called for purchasing an average of 60 acres a year. Since that plan was adopted the forest has actually averaged twice that amount. As we only purchase from willing sellers the amount available each year varies significantly. We also only purchase property within a boundary defined by the Department.

We are currently reworking our master plan. In early 2008 there will be a public meeting where those concerned can provide comments on various management alternatives for the property. Changing the boundary that the Department can purchase land will be one of the alternatives presented. I encourage all of you interested in this matter and the property in general to attend.