

THIS PROJECT WAS MADE POSSIBLE
THROUGH THE FOLLOWING
PARTNERSHIPS

Northern Landscape Committee



Little Fork Headwaters NIPF Project



Little Fork Headwaters NIPF Project
Landscape Management for Non-Industrial Private Forestland



Across Minnesota's water-rich forested regions, a series of collaborative projects were developed by the six regional landscape committees of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC), in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry.



Funded by a US Forest Service State & Private Forestry Landscape Scale Restoration grant, with matching contributions by local and state partners, each committee designed their project to address sustainable forest resource concerns in their priority areas.



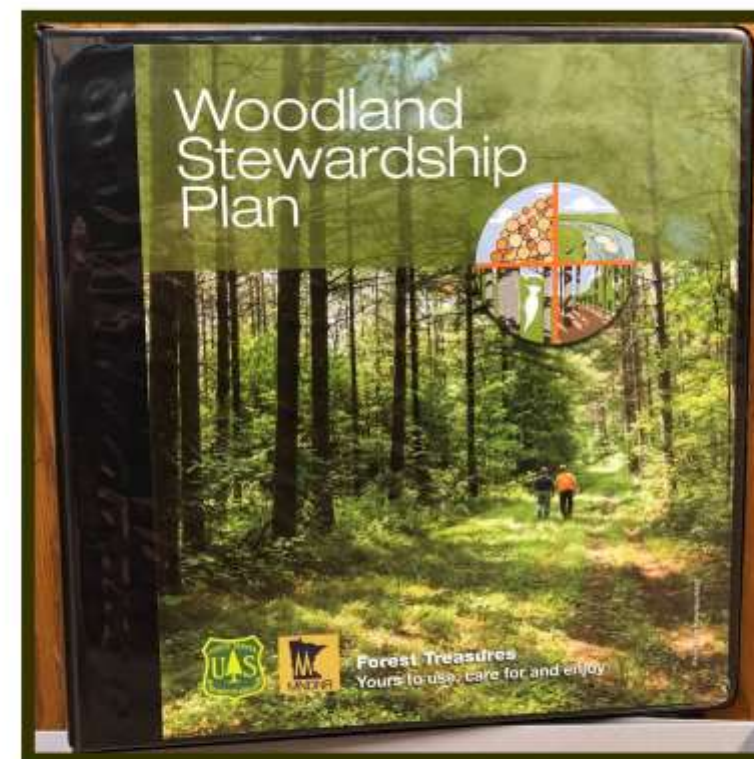
Here is a look at the Northern Landscape Committee's Little Fork Headwaters Non-Industrial Private Forestland (NIPF) project.





Covering the heart of Minnesota's Laurentian Mixed Forest Province, the Northern Landscape Committee (NLC) identified the Little Fork River major watershed as an area of concern. In 2010, MN Pollution Control Agency's Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) assessment had just revealed water quality impairments for turbidity in the Little Fork River.

These findings along with concerns related to forest fragmentation and forest management issues, across all ownerships, helped frame the NLC's efforts to protect public forest investments through a focused project on private in-holdings in the Little Fork River headwaters. The carefully reviewed target area, prioritized concerns, and measurable project goals provided a clear vision for this collaborative effort.

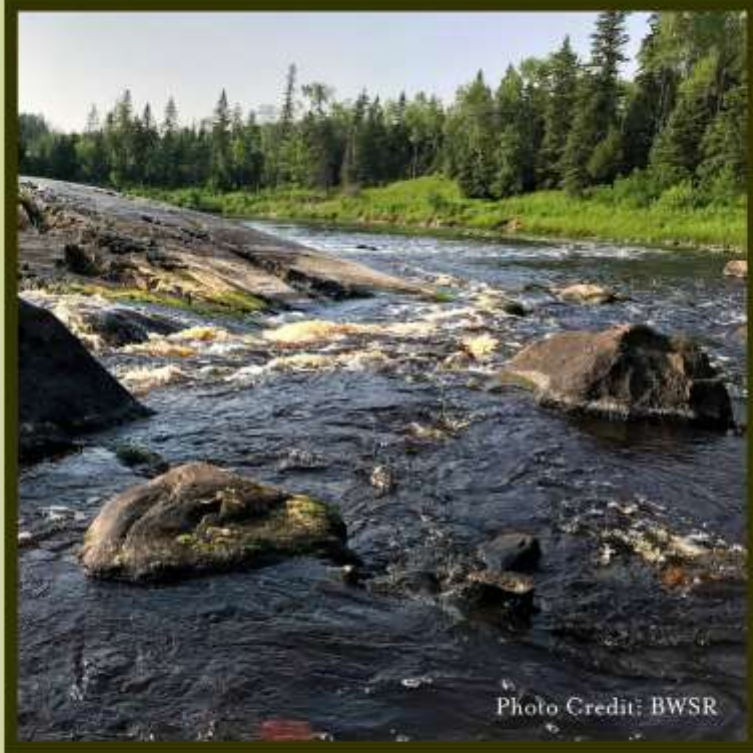


In addition, Minnesota's Sustainable Forest Initiative Act (SFIA) and 2c Managed Forest Land tax classification work in conjunction with the comprehensive forestry advice these plans offer landowners. Eligibility via the Woodland Stewardship planning process encourages sound management decisions and active engagement with Minnesota's natural resource community while contractually ensuring these important forests remain forested.

As the project began to take shape, it became clear that coordinators could use Minnesota's existing private forestry programs to dovetail with the project's water protection and forest sustainability goals. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Private Forest Management (PFM) program connects certified foresters with private landowners, bringing professional forest management to private woodlands.



Photo Credit: BWSR



The Little Fork River watershed is widely considered one of Minnesota's most remote and wild areas. The fertile aspen and birch uplands along with dense tracts of mixed conifer lowlands have been prized for their forest resources dating back to the 1890s and continue to support local communities today. The forest products and outdoor tourism industries are the region's largest economic drivers.



While 52% of the watershed is publicly owned, non-industrial private forestland makes up a significant amount of the most ecologically important areas and have a disproportionately large importance to the condition of the entire forested landscape. Good stewardship practices on privately owned riparian corridors are critical to the successful management of adjacent public forest resources.

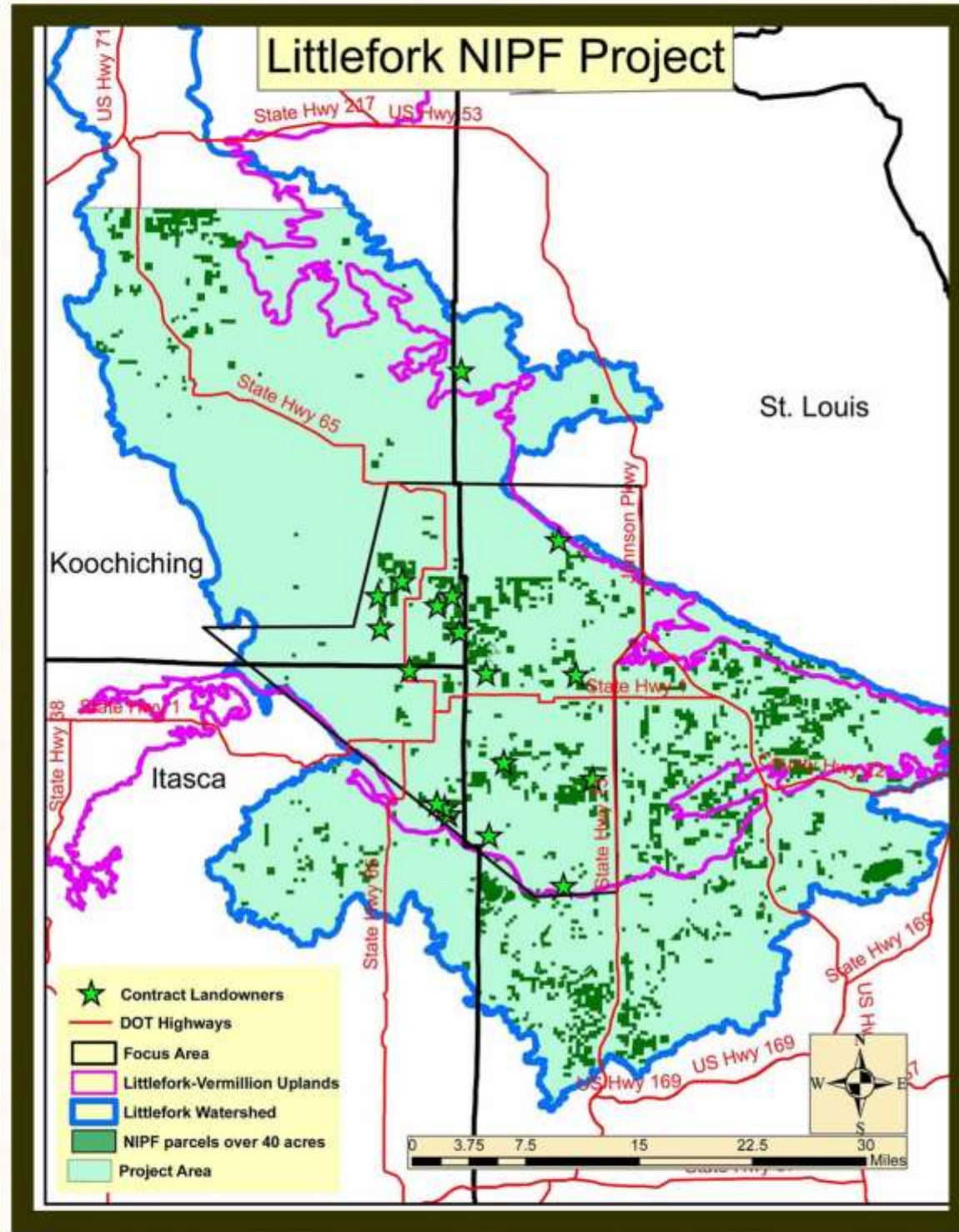




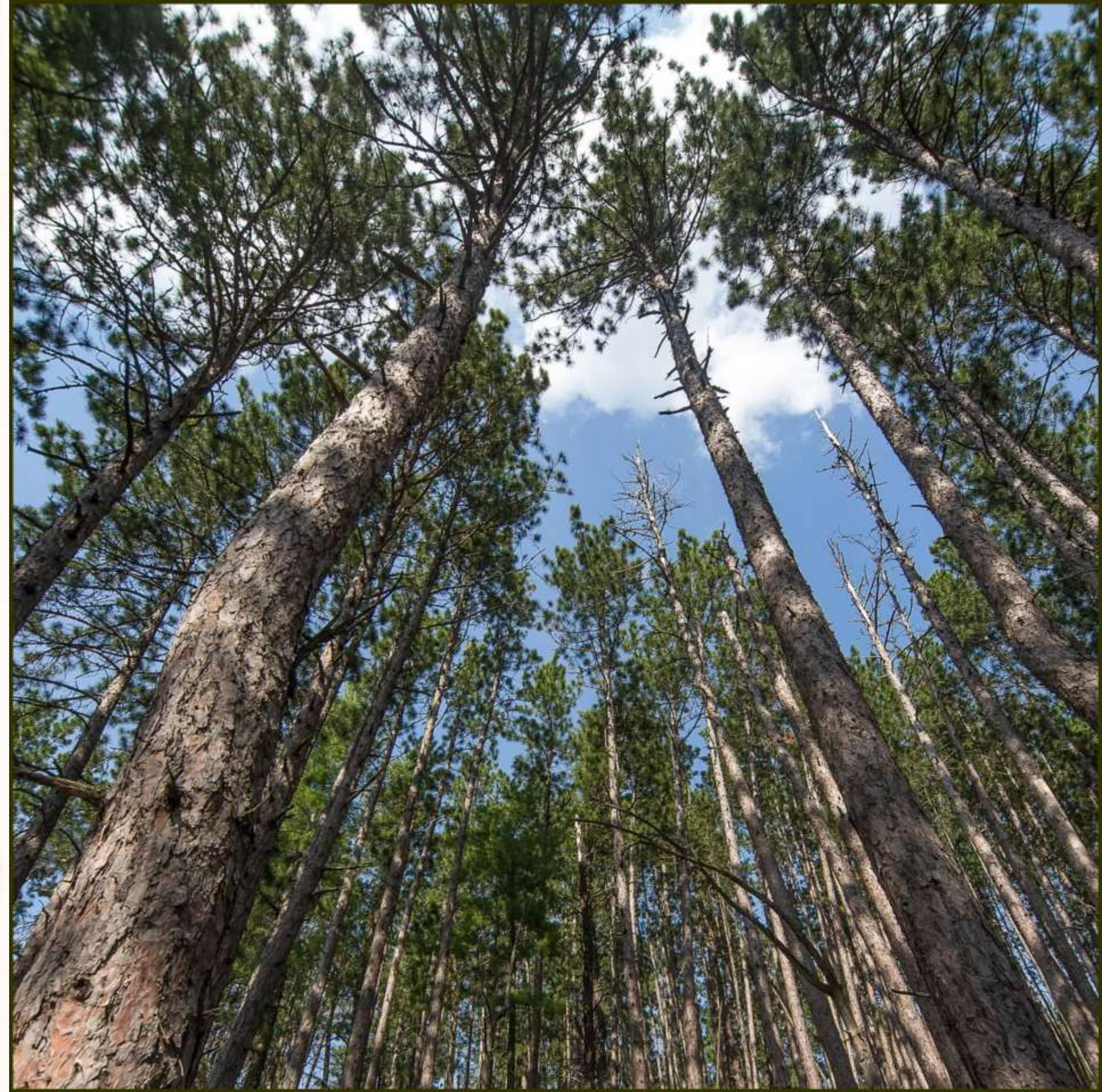
Good water quality and forested landscapes have a strong connection. Through outreach and support, efforts to keep family forest lands forested reduces the risk of conversion to other land uses that may otherwise negatively impact the valuable water and forest resources for which Minnesota is renowned.

The targeted efforts of the Little Fork Headwaters NIPF project allowed project managers and partners to focus attention on the most important and vulnerable of these parcels as well as provide outreach and education services to landowners about the wide range of services and resources made available through local, state, and federal conservation programs.





Targeted outreach criteria were developed using spatial analysis data to identify high priority private parcels over 40 acres, surrounded by public lands within the Little Fork River headwaters region and along the main stem of the river and its tributaries.





Local forestry staff from the Itasca and Koochiching Soil and Water Conservation Districts used the sorted landowner data to invite eligible landowners to participate in the forest stewardship opportunities this project provided. Once engaged, landowners worked with partnering private forest consultants to develop custom stewardship plans tailored to their individual forest management goals and to learn about best management practices for forestry and protection of adjacent water resources.

Feedback from landowner surveys indicated this was an effective approach that enabled them to implement projects like reforestation, riparian forest buffer installations, or timber stand improvement projects in addition to promoting timber harvests.





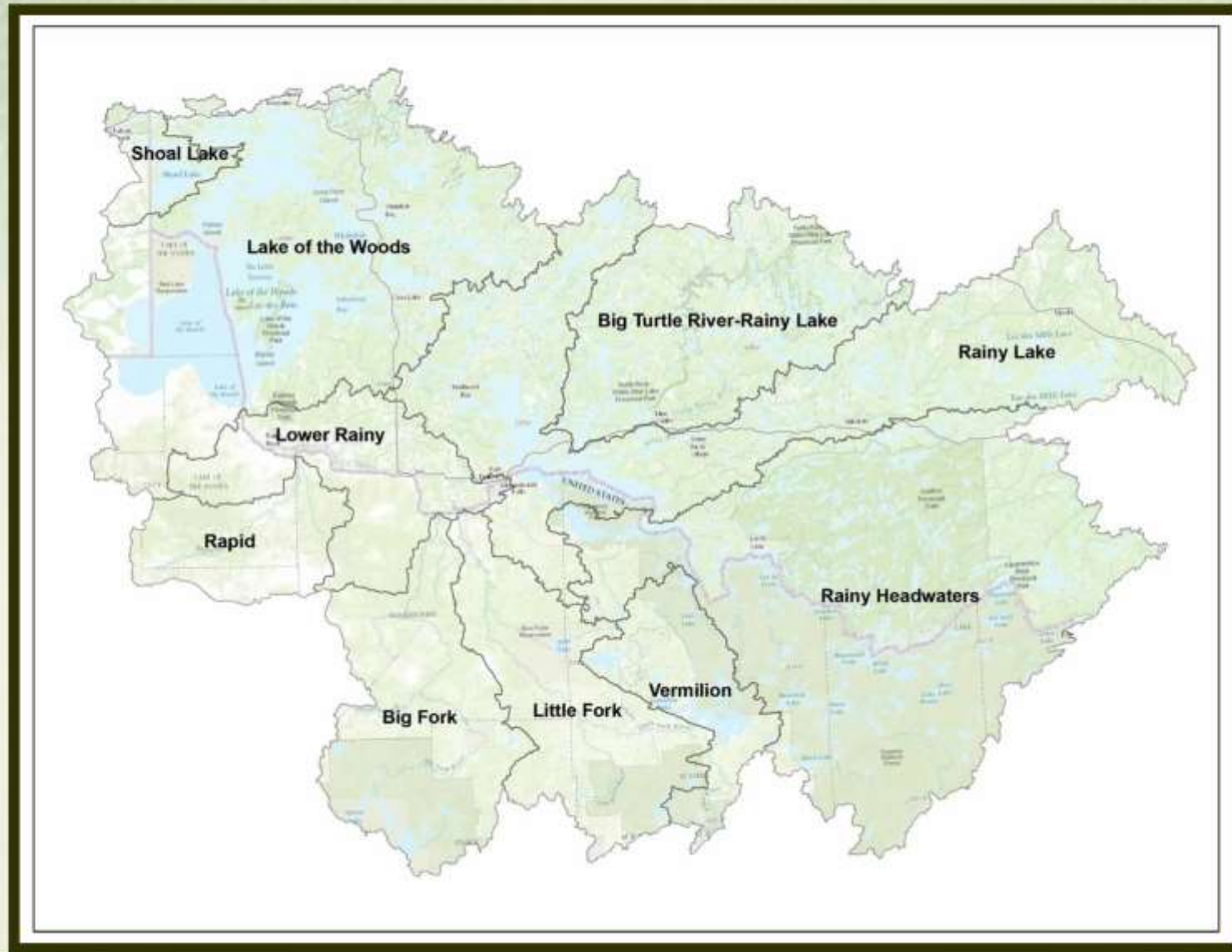
Understanding that timber harvests were a key component to the implementation of goals in the forest stewardship plans, Minnesota Logger Education Program (MLEP) events supported logger education and relationship building. Training, education, and certification of the region's loggers ensure MFRC's forest management guidelines are used to protect water quality while accomplishing landowners' sustainable harvest goals.





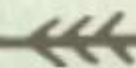
Further networking efforts included forest stewardship events and workshops. These events promoted the project and were held to engage and educate interested landowners. Professional forestry staff discussed Minnesota's diverse plant communities, the ecological effects of property owners' decisions, and techniques to improve forest health and resiliency on private lands.





One of the additional benefits of developing this project was its replicability. Using the Prioritize-Target-Measure (P-T-M) approach, methods were put into place to track the project's accomplishments and improve the next project's task development.

Through consultant forester feedback and landowner surveys, project managers were able to measure project effectiveness including landowner satisfaction and forest plan implementation.





The Little Fork Headwaters NIPF project spanned 2 phases: Phase 1 from 2011 through 2014 and Phase 2 from 2016 through 2019. The main goal for Phase 1 was to write 25 forest stewardship plans covering 2,200 acres of private forestland on priority parcels to provide professional forest management guidance.

Actual accomplishments included 19 plans written covering 2,250 acres which are eligible for cost share for forestry practices as well as forest protection programs like SFIA and 2c Managed Forest Land tax classification.





Building from the experience and success of Phase 1, Phase 2 began in spring 2016. In order to promote all lands management as well as water quality protection measures across the entire Little Fork River watershed, a larger focus area was developed to increase the number of priority parcels and expand services to include plan implementation assistance.



The main goal for Phase 2 was to write 20 forest stewardship plans covering 2,000 acres. The work plan was adapted to compliment the new Minnesota DNR Private Forest Management funding passed by the legislature in 2016. The state's streamlined private forest management program would work seamlessly with the focused outreach efforts and landowner engagement.



Phase 2 accomplishments exceeded the original goal and included 21 plans written covering more than 4,000 acres of private forestland. These completed plans along the Little Fork River and its streams now have long term management strategies, project schedules, and connections with Minnesota's professional forestry community.



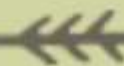
New threats to Minnesota's natural resources are emerging every year. Climate change, insect and disease outbreaks, non-point source pollution, and terrestrial invasive species are just a few of the front runners in a long list of critical issues that threaten to affect the indelible picture of Minnesota's cherished landscapes.



Individual families own over 40% of Minnesota's forest land, making them the largest ownership group. Working with private landowners to mitigate negative impacts, improve habitat, and maintain a valuable forest products industry is critical to the health and well-being of this important Minnesota resource.



Forests don't stop at property lines and neither should professional forestry management. Collaborative projects like the Little Fork Headwaters NIPF project clearly demonstrate the wide range of public and private benefits that come through team efforts working across all land ownerships.





The Little Fork Headwaters NIPF project was, first and foremost, a collaborative effort.

We would like to thank our partners for making this such a successful and rewarding experience.

- * US Forest Service State & Private Forestry
- * Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry
- * MFRC Northern Landscape Committee
- * Koochiching Soil & Water Conservation District
- * Itasca Soil & Water Conservation District
- * North St. Louis Soil & Water Conservation District
- * Koochiching County Lands & Forests
- * Northern Forestry Inc.
- * Woods & Wildlife Forestry Services
- * Itasca Woodland Services, Inc.
- * Minnesota Logger Education Program
- * UPM Blandin Forestry
- * Packaging Corporation of America Forestry

