

Environmental Values of Wisconsin's Forest

The Forest Legacy Program requires that the states define both “environmentally important forest” as well as each of the environmental values listed on page 3. The term “environmental values” used by the USFS was thought to be too limiting a term. The Forest Legacy Sub-committee saw that the values listed under this heading played much larger roles than the term conveyed and decided to use an expanded term, recognizing the social and economic contributions of these values as well as the environmental. The following is the agreed upon definition developed by the Forest Legacy Sub-committee and adopted for public review by the Forest Stewardship Committee. These definitions were critical in identifying the Forest Legacy Areas outlined in this document.

Definition of “Environmentally Important Forest”

Environmentally important forest lands in Wisconsin are those areas having large forested blocks, including industrial forest blocks, that offer opportunities for the continuation of traditional forest uses such as timber harvesting and undeveloped recreation. Other contributing factors include protecting rare species of plants, animals and communities, carbon sequestering, wildlife habitation, stream/lake buffering, and conserving habitat diversity. These lands sustain productive, high-quality forest ecosystems, which can support the commercial forest industries, and other traditional economic enterprises or which contain forest resources deserving of protection. Such ecosystems and uses can best be sustained within large blocks of forest cover, which are reasonably intact. These large blocks often consist of multiple ownerships. The Forest Stewardship Committee is most concerned that these large blocks continue to remain as intact forest systems and are not converted to non-forest uses.

Ecological, Social, and Economic Values

The foundation of Wisconsin's forest industry, other forest-dependent enterprises, and the biological health of the state's wildlife, fish, and environment depend on ecologically healthy forest lands. Thus, the ecological values of these forests sustain all other economic and social values. While Wisconsin's forests are healthier than a century ago, they could be compromised by unrestrained development and poor management. This could be prevented through the use of easements and forward-thinking policies.

Wisconsin's forests are diverse, productive and beautiful. Hundreds of thousands of individuals rely indirectly or directly for their livelihoods on these forests, and many more seek solitude, recreation, sport, and relaxation within the forest boundaries. This rich legacy is currently threatened in many areas of the State and deserves protection before permanent conversion to other uses occurs. The Forest Legacy Program will be used to identify at-risk lands that meet the criteria established and contain at least two or more of the values discussed below.

The following values are defined and addressed within these environmentally important areas:

Opportunities for Traditional Forest Uses - large expanses of forested areas, rich in diversity of species, habitat and topography, capable of supporting high-quality timber, recreational opportunities, hunting and wildlife viewing, and gathering of forest products.

Known Rare Species - large expanses of forested areas diverse in species habitats and topography, thus increasing the chances of offering the habitat requirements for rare species or, forests that contain known occurrences of State or Federally listed threatened, endangered or rare species.

Known Cultural Resources - large expanses of forested areas rich in diversity, encompassing historical human migration routes such as rivers and old trails or forests that contain known cultural resources.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat - large expanses of forested areas rich in diversity that are capable of supporting diverse populations of wide-ranging mammals, forest interior bird species, and a variety of forested habitats.

Riparian Areas - large expanses of forested areas rich in diversity that offer the opportunity to buffer and protect the numerous inland lakes and streams of the area.

Scenic Values - large expanses of forested areas rich in visual diversity and topography that contain a corridor for viewing, such as a scenic byway, road, river, or lake.

Public Recreational Opportunities - large expanses of forested areas offering the opportunity for water-based recreation such as lakes and streams that encompass regionally important trails or for which a trail system is planned.