



2. The West Central and Central Sands Forest Legacy Area. This also meets all the criteria for inclusion as a Forest Legacy area. Map 4 shows the boundary locations while Appendix B provides a listing of the counties and townships contained within this unit. Large blocks of industrial, non-industrial and public lands dominate the eastern sands portion of this area, while prime central hardwood forests and the unique landforms of the Driftless Areas characterize the western portion. The topography is steep in the west, featuring loess-capped plateaus and bluffs dissected by river valleys.

While many of the same forested communities may be found in this region, the boreal forest drops out and there are some additional communities. The northern mesic forest – Driftless Area is a relatively rare community found here and in the Baraboo Hills. It may be dominated by tall hemlock and has a mixture of both northern and southern species in the understory.

Additional uncommon forest communities that may occur here are the northern wet-mesic – white pine forest and the pine relict. Unlike the wet mesic forests of the north (cedar swamp), the wet-mesic – white pine forests are composed primarily of white pine and red maple. The pine relict is dominated by white pine, red and even jack pine, occurring only in the Driftless Area. Also appearing, but far more common are the southern mesic forest, the southern dry forest, and the southern dry mesic.

Conversion pressures are present from all sides of this area. The major and minor river, streams and lakes are important water resources for this state and others and are the focus of intense recreational and development pressures. Large wetlands, some of which still remain in natural vegetation, are threatened as well.

This FLA also contains remnants of pine and oak barrens, although with slightly different characteristics and associated species than the NW pine barren. The barrens breeding-bird populations are combinations of species that are characteristic of dry prairies, hardwood and conifer forest edges. Many species reach their greatest statewide abundance in these barrens (Borgerding, et al. 1995). River barrens, an oak barren unique to this FLA and the state, occur on sandy terraces along the lower Chippewa River and occasionally along the Mississippi River.

Other rare communities can be found within area as well with accompanying rare flora and fauna. A rare natural community, algal talus slope, is found only along the tributaries of the Mississippi River in the region. Rare prairies and savannas, once common on the ridge tops, persist locally. Examples of these include bluff prairies, dry oak savannas and dry prairies (Albert, 1995).

The Forest Legacy Program will target and activate areas within this large area based on targeting efforts by the State, opportunities (large industrial holdings being put up for sale) and local interest. Only areas where public and local DNR support is strong will be activated. Government entities, which may have management responsibilities, include the county forests and State Natural Areas. The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, local Society of American Foresters chapters, Trout Unlimited, and forest industry, are among the non-governmental agencies.

The values to focus on in this area include rare habitats or communities, rare species, productive timber lands, non-developed recreational opportunities, establishing corridors or connections of forest where fragmentation is beginning to occur and water quality.