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The power of agreement in landscape planning

In a unique, first-of-its kind effort, a diverse group of 50 northeastern Minnesota citizens is working together to avoid regulation and lawsuits over forest management issues, according to the Minnesota Forest Resources Council.

Authorized by the Sustainable Forest Resources Act, regionally based citizen committees are being asked to address long-term forest resource sustainability within Minnesota's six designated landscapes. The northeast landscape (Cook, Lake, St. Louis and Carlton counties), first in the state to organize, has been operating for 18 months.

"The goal is to find agreement on how best to achieve forest sustainability in the long run," said Dave Miller, coordinator for the council's landscape program. "The first step in this process is to determine desired future forest conditions, and then the goals and strategies to achieve these desired future forest conditions in northeast Minnesota forests."

The northeast committee, in large and small groups, met over 20 times in 1999 before reaching agreement on the desired conditions, goals and strategies.

"It was difficult because of the diverse values and perceptions relating to the management of our forests," said Miller. "The only power we have is in the power of agreement and carving out common ground among the various interests—we have no mandatory or regulatory authority."

The power of agreement is strong, according to Miller. Once people agree, they are committed to cooperating and voluntarily taking the next steps to implement the goals and strategies over the landscape. That's the whole point and it's exciting—voluntary cooperation and coordination, not mandatory regulation.

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