



Land Services Department  
Natural Resource Management  
Land Services Building  
322 Laurel Street, Suite 12  
Brainerd, MN 56401

## CROW WING COUNTY

BRAINERD, MINNESOTA 56401

### Protecting our Natural Resources

Kirk Titus

The history of county-managed land within the county is quite interesting. Much of the county land was abandoned at one time. Lands were cut over and converted to farms, but thin soils and the hard times during the 1920's and 1930's caused widespread tax delinquency. Eventually, these lands were forfeited to the state of Minnesota for nonpayment of real estate taxes. At one point, Crow Wing County had over 250,000 acres of tax forfeited land.

In the 1930's, the management and administration of tax forfeited land was given to the counties by the state legislature. In 1945, County leaders realized the value of the land and subsequently, the Crow Wing County Tax Forfeited Land Department was created to manage the land and resources for the benefit of its residents and visitors. In fact, the first forest inventory was completed in 1951. The forest inventory gave land managers a tool to identify and evaluate the available forest resources.

The Crow Wing County Natural Resource Management Division (NRM) is one section within the Land Services Department. NRM is responsible for the management and administration of approximately 103,000 acres of county tax forfeited land. These lands are held in trust to the state of Minnesota. The division operates in the three distinctive program areas of forest management, recreation management and land asset management.

The NRM Division's mission and forest management objectives are identified in the Forest Management Plan for the Tax-Forfeited Lands of Crow Wing County. It is the mission of the NRM Division to be responsible stewards of the tax forfeited trust lands on behalf of local government subdivisions. Professional forest resource management objectives, principles and techniques are implemented to sustain a healthy, diverse and productive forest for future generations to come.

The foundation of forest management identifies, incorporates and balances three major factors: economics, social and ecological. The economic factor includes the need to generate economic activity from the resource. The social factor includes the need to enhance the community which lives, works or recreates in the forested area. The ecological factor includes the need to maintain the forested area as a healthy, functioning ecosystem.

Recently, Crow Wing County's forestlands, along with four other counties, became third party certified to the SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) and FSC (Forest Stewardship

Council) forest certification standards. Sustainable forestry is all about striking a balance between the economic, social and ecological values in a manner that protects these values over time. The NRM Division is committed to the principles of sustainable forestry and will manage the land accordingly.

Two timber auctions are held each year that generate approximately \$600,000, a portion of which is distributed throughout the county to the cities, townships, school districts and the county revenue/building fund. Over the last five years, 580,000 trees have been planted on county tax forfeit property. Each year, protection efforts are undertaken to help protect the young conifer seedlings from deer browse. In 2009, over 125,000 bud caps were installed on pine seedlings.

Whatever the season or activity, Crow Wing County offers multiple recreation opportunities to explore forested lands, lakes and streams. The NRM Division manages 12 public lake accesses, three designated ATV trails and three multipurpose trails for cross country skiing, hiking, biking and horseback riding. There are also ten designated non-motorized trails.

The county is currently working with Dovetail Partners, Inc to develop a comprehensive recreation trails plan. The purpose of the plan is to identify and classify opportunities to provide outdoor trail-based recreation, while meeting forest management goals. The plan will address recreation trails that serve a broad range of motorized and non-motorized uses, including ATV routes, equestrian trails, biking, hiking, dog-sledding, skiing, snowmobiling, and other trail based recreation activities. Information about the project is available at the project website. <http://www.dovetailinc.org/content/crow-wing-county-recreation>

The County promotes no net loss of the amount of land within the tax forfeited land base. This is commonly achieved through land exchanges and sales, acquisitions or partition actions. A Tax Forfeited Land Sale is held each year and offers for sale parcels designated as non conservation. Like the revenues generated from the sale of timber, revenues from the land sale support the operation of the division, while surplus dollars are distributed throughout the county to the cities, townships and school districts. No tax levy dollars are used for the operation of the Natural Resource Management Division.

The Natural Resource Management Division is committed to maintain and improve the County's land base for public benefit. Please feel free to contact our office by phone, email or in person with questions or feedback. The office is located in the Land Services Building next to the Historic Courthouse at 322 Laurel Street in Brainerd. The office phone number is 218-824-1115 and my email address is [kirk.titus@co.crow-wing.mn.us](mailto:kirk.titus@co.crow-wing.mn.us) . You can visit our website at [www.co.crow-wing.mn.us](http://www.co.crow-wing.mn.us).

(Kirk Titus supervises the Natural Resource Management program in the Land Services Department. He joined the County in October 2009.)