

2015 – 01 Pineland Conservation

- Forested lands protect lake water quality by filtering and absorbing precipitation that would otherwise run off the land, contributing to erosion and increasing nutrient loading to lakes.
- High proportions of agricultural land use in watersheds are correlated with lower water quality and impaired ability to support recreational use in lakes.
- Hubbard, Wadena, Becker, and Cass Counties have large areas with sandy soils that are ideal for pine forests and are also highly desirable for potato farming. These lands are being targeted for acquisition and conversion to irrigated cropland by R.D. Offutt (RDO), a North Dakota based potato processing company.
- 27,000 acres of pine forests in north central Minnesota have been cleared or are at high risk of being cleared and converted to cropland.
- The Pineland Sands Aquifer is large but limited and is directly connected to surface waters including lakes, streams and wetlands
- Conversion to cropland not only destroys forests; it requires extensive irrigation, which includes well drilling for pivot irrigation systems and massive withdrawals of groundwater to grow crops successfully in the sandy soils.
- Permeable sandy soils and agricultural fertilizers pose a risk for nitrate contamination and other water quality impacts to surface waters. Nitrate contamination is also a concern for groundwater, which is used for drinking water by residents of these areas.
- Lakes, wetlands, and rivers are directly connected to the water table. Therefore impacts from land use changes include herbicides and nutrients in runoff as well as increases in water temperature and reductions in stream flows, degrading habitat for important aquatic species such as trout and other game fish.
- Ground and surface water in these counties provide clean, clear drinking water for downstream users including the cities of Minneapolis & St. Paul.
- Conversion of forest to farmland fragments the forest and destroys habitat for upland wildlife and plant species. Many rare ecotypes with rare plants and animals are found in pine forests; none of these are found in potato fields.
- The sandy upland mixed jack pine, oak, and aspen forests that are targeted by RDO for potato farming provide some of the best year-round forested deer habitats. Displaced wildlife may become problematic for farmers via crop depredation.
- Loss of forests means certain reductions in future timber production, resulting in lost jobs in the timber industry.
- Forested lands provide habitat for wildlife, recreational opportunities for hunters, anglers, berry and mushroom pickers, birders, and photographers. These forms of recreation help make up the very identity of Minnesota, and no single crop should be allowed to destroy these traditions, wildlife, fishes, and our clean water.

Therefore be it resolved that the Minnesota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, in convention April 26, 2015, supports initiatives by the State of Minnesota to evaluate impacts of groundwater withdrawals on the sustainability of aquifers, and to limit withdrawal to a level that is sustainable and additionally supports incentives to keep pinelands forested in Hubbard, Wadena, Becker, Cass and other counties.

Submitted by: Prairie Woods Chapter