



Seven-Mile Woods

Forest Legacy Tract, Minnesota

December 2002

In December 2002, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forestry Division acquired conservation easements on four separate tracts totaling 293 acres within the Rice County Big Woods Forest Legacy Area located just 45 minutes south of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

"I've known for 20 years or more that I wanted to give this land back to nature."

Landowner John Maakestad

The four tracts are within Seven-Mile Woods, a relatively large, high-quality block of forest that represents one of the most important remnants of Minnesota's historic Big Woods, originally a 3,000-square-mile hardwood forest in south-central Minnesota. In the years since settlement, over 90 percent of the Big Woods has been converted to agriculture, housing, or industrial use.

The local community has been involved in protecting the Big Woods. For the past 10 years, a group of citizens, conservation groups, and universities, as well as local and State governments, have been working to restore, preserve, and maintain what remains of the Big Woods. That effort, known as the Big Woods Project, was instrumental in bringing the Forest Legacy Program to Minnesota. The Nature Conservancy's Minnesota chapter has also been supportive of Big Woods protection efforts and has contributed staff time to help secure State cost-share dollars.

The four properties were protected in a single week in December 2002. A conservation easement on 45 acres valued at \$105,900 was purchased from landowners Robert and Emily Nesvold for \$95,000. A \$387,400 conservation easement on 148 acres was purchased from landowners Gale and Betty Roush for \$330,000. An easement valued at \$10,000 on 20 acres was purchased from landowners Dirk Peterson and Marilyn Danks at full valuation.

The fourth property is owned by John and Bobbi Maakestad, who have held their 80 acres in Seven-Mile Woods since 1956 and have gradually developed a long-term vision for the property. "I've known for 20 years or more that I wanted to give this land back to nature," said John Maakestad. It was the threat of home sites cropping up all around them that convinced the couple that a permanent easement would be the best option to ensure that their property could never be subdivided or sold to developers. When the Forest Legacy Program became available in the area, they were among the first to sign up. Their bargain sale of \$5,000 for an easement valued at over \$210,000 shows their commitment to ensure that their vision is upheld.

The appraised values for conservation easements on the tracts totaled \$713,400. The USDA Forest Legacy Program contributed \$440,000 towards the \$470,000 purchase price of the four conservation easements, with the State contributing \$30,000. The balance of the appraised value, \$243,400, was donated by the landowners in varying amounts as a bargain sale to the State of Minnesota. The State also provided funds for acquisition services, including appraisals and surveys. The Minnesota DNR Forestry Division will conduct annual monitoring visits to each of the tracts, ensuring that the landowners continue to abide by the conservation easement terms.

The Forest Legacy Program protects important forests from conversion to nonforest uses.

These forests provide essential wildlife habitat, protect water quality, offer outstanding recreation opportunities, afford outstanding scenic views, are home to historic sites, and/or provide the opportunity to continue traditional forest uses. A Federal-State partnership allows landowners to keep their land private while ensuring it remains forest forever through the use of conservation easements.



The forests of Seven-Mile Woods are some of the best remaining areas of Minnesota's historic Big Woods.
Photo by Richard Peterson