

## Rural Development Through Forestry

## From the Mine to the Forest - Keeping Rural America Employed

## The Challenge

In 2000 the LTV Steel Company's taconite mine in Hoyt Lakes, Minnesota, closed its doors forever, leaving 1400 local residents unemployed. How can a small, rural community bounce back after the loss of a major employer? How do men and women trained as heavy equipment operators, miners, and drill operators find new jobs without relocating to another community?

## The Solution

Watching news of the mine closure from his West Virginia home, Lew McCreery, Economic Action Program Manager for the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, knew the **USDA Forest Service could help.**

The USDA Forest Service Northeastern Area allocated a **\$30,000 Rural Development Through Forestry grant** to the community. Working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the City of Biwabik, Northeastern Area provided seed money to unemployed miners to develop local forest-based businesses. A workshop was held to introduce residents to employment options. Attendees learned the range of entrepreneurial opportunities available - everything from logging and log home construction to running tourist cabins and guide services.

As a follow-up to the workshop, **potential entrepreneurs could apply for up to \$3,000** each to start a forest-based business. For some this was a chance to turn a hobby or part-time pursuit into full-time employment. While the funding is not enough to outfit a new business it is enough to jump-start a dream and leverage additional resources.

*The Economic Action Program provides targeted financial assistance to strengthen the economic health of rural communities.*



*An example of a new construction company founded with seed money from the USDA Forest Service.*

## Resulting Benefits

- **Over 18 individuals received funding and started their own businesses**, some of which have expanded to employ other residents as well.
- **Influenced a number of individuals to seek job opportunities within the area instead of relocating.**
- Several former mine workers found new employment at comparable pay and benefits.
- Community residents have an increased awareness of forest-based businesses including tourism and special forest products.

## Sharing Success

- The St. Paul Pioneer Press, as well as local newspapers, covered the success of the financial and technical assistance provided by the USDA Forest Service.
- At a USDA Forest Service leadership meeting, Scott Dane, the Biwabik City Planner, gave an overview on the success of the Rural Development Through Forestry Program.



USDA Forest Service  
Northeastern Area  
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