



# Nerstrand Woods

## Forest Legacy Tract, Minnesota

March 2001

The first tract in a 25-tract conservation strategy to restore the Big Woods forest was protected on March 19, 2001. In Rice County, Minnesota, 111 acres of land was protected from development with the help of the USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program. The land, adjacent to Nerstrand Woods State Park, is currently a field but the property's management plan calls for restoring the native prairie and oak savanna habitat.

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***"In addition to Forest Legacy funds, the Valley Grove Preservation Society received contributions from over 470 supporters."***

Ken Sahlin, Valley Grove Preservation Society

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The property is also adjacent to two churches listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The churches—one built of stone in 1862, the other built of wood in 1894 only a few yards away—were built by some of Minnesota's earliest Norwegian immigrants. The two churches overlook a cemetery and the Nerstrand Woods Forest Legacy Property.



*A view of the churches from the Nerstrand Woods Forest Legacy Property, where prairie grasses have been planted and trees have been started at nurseries in the first year of oak savanna restoration.*

*Photo by Jonathan Larson*

The Nerstrand property was put on the market in 2000. The owners of the churches—the Valley Grove Grace Cemetery Association owns the stone church and cemetery, the Valley Grove Preservation Society owns the wooden church—wanted to protect the property from development. They initiated a fundraising campaign that collected over \$500,000, enabling them to purchase the property on January 2, 2001. "In addition to Forest Legacy funds, the Valley Grove Preservation Society received contributions from over 470 supporters," commented Kenneth C. Sahlin, treasurer of the Valley Grove Preservation Society.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) had been looking to protect the land around Nerstrand Woods State Park for years. The introduction of the Forest Legacy Program in the State provided an ideal opportunity. The State purchased a conservation easement on the property for \$238,000 in Forest Legacy funds on March 19, 2001. "Three or four years ago, concerned people from The Nature Conservancy, the University of Minnesota, and DNR Forestry had the foresight to protect potentially endangered land. As a direct result, Valley Grove is pleased to be the first recipient of the Forest Legacy Program in the State of Minnesota," Ken Sahlin added.

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.

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