



For Immediate Release

Minnesota delegation of forestry leaders heads to Scandinavia

*Blandin Foundation engages partners to envision more productive,
higher quality Minnesota forests*

GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. (Sept. 26, 2008) –Thirty two of the state’s natural resources policy leaders leave tomorrow (Sept. 27) for Finland and Sweden, the third and final leg of a year-long study tour hosted by the Blandin Foundation. Part of the Foundation’s Vital Forests/Vital Communities initiative, the study tour brings together thought leaders to experience, study and compare best practices in forest productivity in Minnesota, Ontario and Scandinavia.

“Population, climate, and global economic swings all have contributed to greater demands on our forests,” said Jim Hoolihan, Blandin Foundation president. “To sustain our forest-based economies and ecosystems, Minnesota leaders have identified the need to—and opportunity to—do more with our forests.”

Forest productivity is a growing concern for Minnesota. For example,

- Productivity was highlighted as a priority need for statewide focus in a 2007 assessment by the Governor’s Task Force on the Competitiveness of Minnesota’s Primary Forest Products Industry.
- Once a wood exporter, the state now is a net importer.
- Economic pressures to maximize value are leading to parcelization of working forest lands for homes and cabins, breaking up intact and economically and ecologically valuable forested lands.
- World competitors such as Scandinavia produce more than twice the amount of forest outputs as does Minnesota.

“It is our hope that, through these first-hand experiences, close collaboration and plans for action, we can turn the challenges facing forest ecosystem managers in Minnesota into new opportunities to improve quality as well as quantity,” said Hoolihan. “It is very valuable to have these Minnesota forestry thought leaders together in the field with us. They will be critical partners as innovations grow out of our learning.”

Participants in the tour include Minnesota researchers, manufacturers, conservationists, loggers, foresters, economic developers, and policy makers.

Dave Zumeta, executive director of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council has been an active participant in the year-long initiative and will be travelling to Scandinavia with the group. “The main goal of these tours is to prompt Minnesota forestry leaders to develop a clear vision and plan to increase forest productivity and ensure long-term viability of Minnesota’s forest economy in a way that is environmentally sustainable,” he said. “By participating in these tours, several Council members and I are improving our ability to achieve the council’s statutory mission ‘to

advise the Governor and federal, state, county and local governments on sustainable forest resources policies and practices.””

In addition to ongoing learning and collaboration, study tour participants are exposed to three distinct experiences with forest-dependent communities:

Aitkin County, Minnesota: On the southern edge of the pines’ range and in the heart of northern hardwood country, Aitkin County and UPM Blandin Paper Company have invested in innovations such as management by ecological classification and obtaining third-party certification to help meet quality and economic goals. This October 2007 study tour found, first-hand, how critically important forests are as both economic and ecological assets for this county.

Thunder Bay, Ontario: Located in the heart of the boreal forest where large-scale fire disturbances and now clear-cuts are part of the natural landscape, Thunder Bay has been historically dependent on commodity building product and paper-making economies. Facing dramatic swings in these markets, as well as massive “green” energy commitments that both generate demand for woody biomass and drive manufacturing costs, Ontario forest communities are working to reinvent themselves. Province-wide responses, as demonstrated during the May 2008 study tour, include diversification, partnerships that leverage demand for green energy with the need for new economic outlets, and heavy investment in research and technology.

Finland and Sweden: In Scandinavia, intensive, ecologically-based silvicultural practices generate more than double the outputs grown in Minnesota. In the search to maximize quantity, these countries discovered it is best to strive for quality. This 10-day tour will focus on how practitioners and researchers plan for long-term economic, ecological and social health for industry and local communities.

A roster of participants and daily updates from Finland and Sweden can be found at the Blandin Foundation’s web site (<http://www.blandinfoundation.org>).

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Attached: Photo— A Minnesota delegation compares state forestry activity with that of Ontario during a May 2008 study trip in Thunder Bay.

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Blandin Foundation

Blandin Foundation, Minnesota’s largest rural-based private foundation, is located in Grand Rapids, Minn. Its mission is to strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area, through grants, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives.

Vital Forests/Vital Communities is a multi-year initiative of the Blandin Foundation to strengthen and diversify Minnesota's forest-based economy and promote the long-term health and sustainability of the forest resource that supports it.