



Robert Bohmann, Chair  
1105 Melvin Avenue  
Racine, WI 53402  
262-498-4605

Larry Bonde, Vice-Chair  
12211 Marken Road  
Kiel, WI 53042  
920-693-8449

Lee Fahrney, Secretary  
7860 McKenna Road  
Hollandale, WI 53544  
608-967-2208

November 22, 2011

Mr. Tony L. Ferguson, Area Director  
USDA Forest Service  
Northeastern Area, S&PF  
11 Campus Boulevard, Suite 200  
Newtown Square, PA 19073

Dear Mr. Ferguson,

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress would like to offer our support for the State of Wisconsin's Central Sands Pines Forest Legacy project under consideration for the FY2013 Federal Forest Legacy Program funds. This project exemplifies the importance of Wisconsin's forests; from economic contributions on the local and regional level to protection of critical habitat and recreational opportunities. As a statutorily created body that represents the citizens of the State of Wisconsin on natural resources issues, we agree that the conservation of the Central Sands Pines will provide a rich legacy for the people of Wisconsin for future generations.

The proposed Central Sands Pines Forest Legacy project will protect over 9,000 acres of privately owned timberland, securing its open, public access for recreational use in perpetuity. The southern block of the land borders the Quincy Bluff and Wetlands State Natural Area, and a mosaic of state and federal wildlife areas and other small public tracts are in the vicinity. Petenwell and Castle Rock Lakes, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> largest lakes, respectively, in the state, are directly to the west.

The Central Sands Forest Legacy project is an exceptional opportunity to conserve one of Wisconsin's unique forest ecosystems. Forest lands, especially in this part of Wisconsin, are in high demand and encroachment by agriculture continues to put added pressure for conversion on these historic timberlands. This land is one of only a few remaining large forested parcels in southern Wisconsin (71% of southern Wisconsin is unforested). Current zoning regulations in this area allow private property owners, including Plum Creek which owns this land, the ability to parcelize and sell the property in pieces. However, parcelization would be devastating to many of the threatened and endangered species, in addition to the more common species, that make their home here. For example, the pine, mixed oak-pine forests, barrens and peatlands of this property provide the specialized habitat needed by the endangered Kirtland's Warbler, Karner Blue Butterfly, and Whooping Crane. Parcelization would also hurt the local economy as the timber industry, tourism, and hunting opportunities bring many dollars and jobs to the area. Also, the area is crucial in maintaining groundwater quality. As part of the watershed of the Wisconsin River, it acts as an important groundwater recharge area and the sandy soil purifies groundwater before it returns to the river.

A conservation easement on the Central Sands Pines is vitally important for keeping productive forestland intact for a strong economy, healthy local tax base, public access for recreational use, conserving critical habitat for important plant and animal species, and for ensuring protected lands for the future enjoyment of generations to come. The Wisconsin Conservation Congress, representing the citizens of the state of Wisconsin, strongly encourages you to support the Central Sands proposal for the Federal Forest Legacy Program funds.

Sincerely,

Robert Bohmann, Chair  
Wisconsin Conservation Congress

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As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.