



Wind Chill Warning, Wind Chill Watch

NRCS' Healthy Forests Reserve Program helps owners preserve, manage tracts

By [Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources](#) on Nov 8, 2018 at 9:30 a.m.

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BAXTER—When Camp Ripley's Sentinel Landscape partnership received \$2.8 million through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program in 2017, the infusion of federal dollars broadened conservation opportunities.

Among them: the conservation partnership's Healthy Forests Reserve Program. Within Camp Ripley's Sentinel Landscape, it combines a 10-year cost-share program with permanent easements to protect private forestland from development. Ginger Kopp, an Natural Resources Conservation Service forester specializing in easements, works solely on Healthy Forests Reserve Program within the Sentinel Landscape.

"In assisting Camp Ripley and forming the buffer that they need for their mission, we can also maintain the ecology of the area for all of the other things that making living here really nice — such as clean water," Kopp said in a news release.

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program helps private landowners maintain working forests.

"Oftentimes it's kind of hard to hold onto in this area," Kopp said. Development pressure increases both property value and taxes, enticing owners to sell—particularly when their children don't want the land.

Enrolled landowners receive a management plan tailored to their property. For the first 10 years of a permanent easement, they receive cost-share to carry out elements of the plan

—which might include timber harvest, planting, site preparation, brush management, disease and invasive species control.

Easements purchase only the development rights. Landowners maintain ownership and other uses of the property.

Kopp works with landowners from start to finish. She receives applications and determines eligibility. She walks the property with the landowner and lets them know how many acres of forest are suitable for the program. While there is no minimum acreage, larger parcels are ranked higher.

Based on her survey, she writes a separate forest management plan for each stand—defined by species and age. To stay on track plans should be reviewed every 10 to 20 years.

Kopp works with landowners to decide if any property—such as future house sites for family members—should be excluded.

Timber harvesting, snowmobiling, all-terrain vehicle riding and hunting are among the allowed uses—as long as none harms the program's three priorities.

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program aims to help endangered or threatened species recover, improve biodiversity, and enhance carbon sequestration.

The Northern long-eared bat, threatened by the deadly white-nose syndrome, is the species being protected here. Within the Sentinel Landscape, populations exist where Morrison, Crow Wing and Cass counties meet. Preserving forestland—especially trees with snags and loose bark, which make good maternity roosts—preserves bat habitat.

"Should there be a cure ... at least bats that recover would have places to go and strengthen their population," Kopp said. "When you're managing for Northern long-eared bats, you're also managing for other species that prefer an older forest—deer, bear, turkeys."

The biodiversity priority excludes plantations from the program.

Carbon sequestration would occur naturally with older forests in the mix.

"It's important for our ecology to keep forests as working forests," Kopp said.

While landowners might prefer the look of overly mature trees, maintaining an even-aged stand isn't the best in the long term.

"We want to see a mosaic of forest cover types (and stand ages)—your oaks, your mixed oak-pines, your aspens—there's a wonderful mosaic cohort that's still here," Kopp said.

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