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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY CONSERVES 21,322 ACRES  
OF FOREST LANDS IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Transaction is Largest Private Land Conservation Deal in State History

MADISON, WI — The Nature Conservancy of Wisconsin today announced a landmark transaction to conserve 21,322 acres of forested land in the Chequamegon Bay watershed on Lake Superior, marking the largest private land conservation deal in Wisconsin history.

The state's largest conservation land trust negotiated the right to purchase the land, located on the reservation of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians, for \$4.5 million from Plum Creek.

The Nature Conservancy immediately transferred its right to purchase the lands to the Bad River Band. The Conservancy also sold, at cost, to the tribe another 2,366 acres -- most of which was purchased from Stora Enso North America in December 2000. All lands are now in tribal ownership for long-term management and protection.

"We are pleased to celebrate the Year of Water in Wisconsin by completing this transaction to protect 24 miles of rivers and streams in northern Wisconsin, conserve wildlife habitat, and help maintain the high water quality in the Kakagon/Bad River Sloughs and Chequamegon Bay," said Mary Jean Huston, state director of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin.

"Each generation bears the obligation to be responsible stewards of Wisconsin's natural treasures," said Governor Jim Doyle. "I applaud The Nature Conservancy, the Bad River Band, and Plum Creek for working together to ensure that more than 21,000 acres of Wisconsin's northern forests will be protected for years to come. This is good for our economy, our environment, and most of all, for those who love and appreciate the beauty of the outdoors."

"Almost since the creation of the Bad River Reservation, the land within the original boundaries has transferred from tribal ownership," said Bad River Tribal Council Chairman Eugene Bigboy. "The heart and soul of any reservation, aside from its people, is its land. This purchase enables the Band to get back precious land that was once thought lost forever."

The lands included in this transaction are composed of multiple parcels ranging in size from 20 to 3,500 acres and covered mostly by forests and wetlands. They are connected through a network of streams and rivers to the watershed that empties into the Kakagon/Bad River Sloughs and the Chequamegon Bay. Water entering the sloughs is filtered by wetland plants, removing many of the pollutants gathered on its way downstream. This clean water filtering through the sloughs into Chequamegon Bay helps keep the bay healthy and highly sought after by anglers, boating recreationists, bird watchers, and other nature enthusiasts.

Wildlife that depend on the area include two timber wolf packs; raptors such as the northern goshawk and bald eagle; and many migratory songbirds. The lands are also an important yarding area for white-tailed deer that come down from the Penokee Hills to use this area during the winter.

Many acres of corporate-owned forest land in the United States have changed hands over the past five years. In Wisconsin alone, more than 90 percent of corporate-owned forestlands have been sold or re-sold since 1997. The Nature Conservancy has worked with Plum Creek and other corporate forest owners in other states across the South and New England to protect some of the most ecologically-important parcels of land.

"This innovative, cutting edge project exemplifies The Nature Conservancy's approach to conservation," said Butch Johnson, Board of Trustees member of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin. "By working closely with diverse partners and striving to work at larger and larger scales, we are able to produce real, tangible results that benefit the people of Wisconsin."

The Nature Conservancy has worked with the Bad River Band since 1987 to protect land in the Kakagon/Bad River Sloughs. Together with other resource managers and conservation specialists, including The Nature Conservancy, the Bad River Natural Resources Department developed an Integrated Resources Management Plan (IRMP), which was completed in 2001 and guides the tribe's management of the natural resources on its lands.

The Conservancy and the tribe have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which describes the two parties' working relationship on this and future conservation projects and outlines common objectives for management of the former Plum Creek and Stora Enso lands. These management objectives, which are consistent with the tribe's IRMP, include protecting water quality in streams, lakes and wetlands; restoring the characteristics of the once-dominant boreal forests rich in red and white pines, spruce and hemlock; maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitat including nesting habitat for migratory birds; and protecting critical habitats for rare species such as the ram's head lady-slipper orchid, bald eagle, wood turtle, and eastern timber wolf.

The Nature Conservancy has an office in Ashland and has been active in the Chequamegon Bay area since 1993. The organization has established a 1,000-acre nature preserve near Mellen at Caroline Lake, the headwaters of the Bad River.

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