



For Immediate Release

## Delegation builds knowledge, partnerships for world-class forest management in Minnesota

*Preece joins initiative to envision more productive, higher-quality Minnesota forests*

GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. (18 September, 2008) –While many of the state’s natural resources policy leaders convene around the topic of forest productivity, **Kathleen Preece**, coordinator of the Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership and a director on the Governor’s forest advisory council, the Minnesota Forest Resources Council, will be in the woods with them. Preece accepted an invitation to participate in a series of forest productivity study tours convened by the Blandin Foundation through its Vital Forests/Vital Communities initiative this past year. The tours, which have taken place throughout 2008, will culminate in a visit to the forests of Sweden and Finland September 27-October 5.

*Seeing the Forest AND the Trees: How to make the Most of Minnesota’s Woods* brings together a cohort of 40 natural resource leaders to experience, over one year, the challenges and opportunities of greater productivity in a variety of forest-dependent regions and countries.

“Population, climate, and global economic swings all have contributed to greater demands on our forests,” said Bernadine Joselyn, director of public policy and engagement for the Blandin Foundation. “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 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. Population growth in the state will near 1.3 million people by 2030, say state officials. Once a wood exporter, the state now is a net importer. And 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.

“It is our hope that, through these first-hand tour experiences and close collaboration, we can turn the challenges facing forest managers in Minnesota into new opportunities to improve quality as well as quantity,” said Joselyn. “It is very valuable to have Kathleen Preece in the field with us. She will be a critical partner as innovations grow out of our learning.”

Preece points out that the upcoming tour of Scandinavian forests will “provide a rich experience to those committed to the sustainable management and stewardship of our forests here in Minnesota.” Preece, who publishes a magazine for private forest landowners, says that as forest land ownership is changing, as are our ways of ‘doing business’ with all the amenities inherent in our woodlands.

“It is my hope that a shared vision for healthy and sustainable forests - across private, state, national, and global boundaries - might be one result of the opportunities these tours are providing.”

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.

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 in September/October 2008 will focus on how they harvest long-term economic, ecological and social health for industry and local communities.

Progress of the "Seeing the Forest AND the Trees" tour can be found at the Blandin Foundation's web site (<http://www.blandinfoundation.org>) and at the Vital Forest/Vital Communities blog (<http://vfvc.wordpress.com>).

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**Attached:** Photo— Kathleen Preece compares Minnesota to Ontario during the May 2008 study tour to Thunder Bay. Roster of participants—see below.

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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.*

*Participants in one or more Study Tour activities:*

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