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Property Location: Caribou Lake
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Property Location: Lake Osakis
Douglas County

Jerry Ratigan

Property Location: Big Mantrap Lake
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President's Message

Welcome again to all members. It was great to see many of you at the Lake Home and Cabin Show this year. Keep in contact with us all year with your issues, ideas and suggestions.

I am a firm believer in bottom up management in organizations. You as members generate the direction of MSRPO. If you pass along comments to us, we as a board of directors will try to formulate the policies and plans. Then we turn them over to Jeff Forester, Judy Corrigan and our lobbyists for action.

While legislative gains sometimes seem small, we have done a good job at holding on to what we have in a tough governmental climate. I feel that our PAC program has been of great benefit and will only grow in the future.

During the past legislative session, we made some gains which may have gone under the radar.

- The Rural Woodlands classification now renamed Rural Vacant Land passed into law.
- Payments for land enrolled in the Sustainable Forestry Incentive increased from \$1.50/acre to \$7/acre.
- Assessment practices have been reformed.
- Levy limits of 3.9% for three years are in place for cities with populations of 2500 or more as well as all counties with some exceptions.

Still we must take advantage of these gains by being proactive. I recently had a personal example of this. Many counties now can be accessed by computer websites so that we can look at our property tax records as well as other similar properties.

I looked at my records and compared them to similar properties including properties sold. I discovered a discrepancy and brought it to the attention of the county assessor. They said they had made a computer error and reduced my proposed valuation by over \$16,000. This is below my valuation of two years ago.

We all need to be vigilant and use the tools available. Current benefits are of little value if we don't take advantage of them. Thus a word to the wise. CHECK IT OUT.

Again. Thanks to all members for your continued support. My special thanks to Jeff Forester and Judy Corrigan for all their hard work over the past year.

Dale L. Carlton

President

Forest Ownership Patterns are Changing

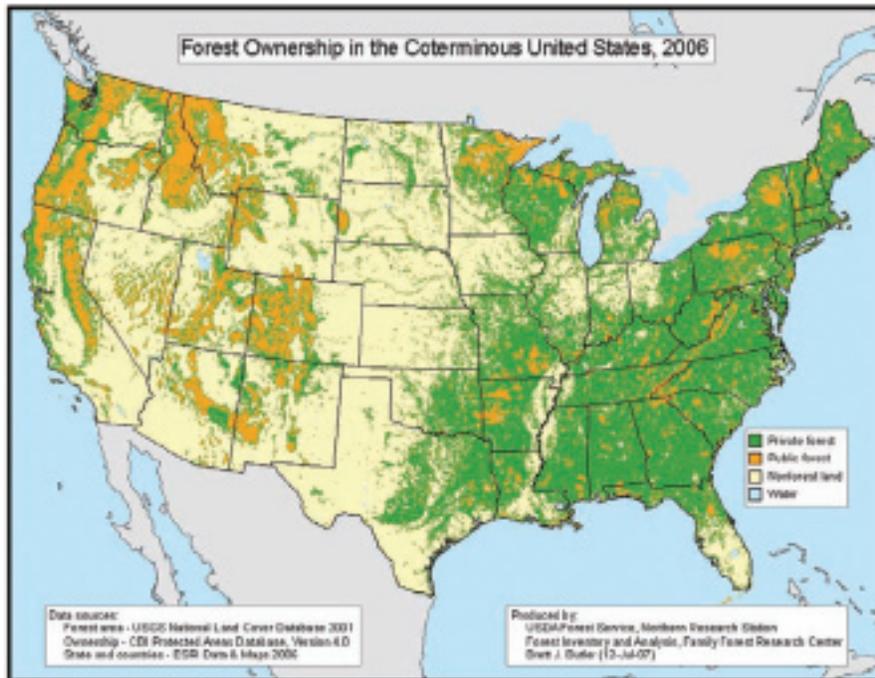


Figure 2: Public and private forest ownership in the United States, 2006.

By Brett J. Butler*

Introduction

The fate of the nation's forests lies primarily in the hands of the people who own and manage (or do not manage) the land. Any report that claims to analyze forest resources must consider not only the biophysical characteristics of the forests, but also the social context in which they exist. It is ultimately landowners, within the social constraints imposed by society, who make the decisions that lead to parcellation, fragmentation, timber harvesting, recreational opportunities, and many other outcomes.

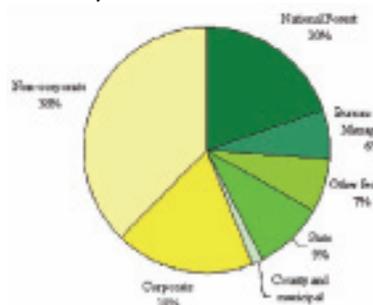


Figure 1: Forestland in the United States by ownership category, 2007. (Note: Data may not add to totals because of rounding)*

Broad Ownership Patterns

Of the 750 million acres of forestland in the United States, 56 percent (421 million acres) is owned by private individuals, corporations, and other private groups, while 44 percent (329 million acres) is controlled by public

agencies (Fig. 1). The federal government controls 76 percent of the public forestland (33 percent of all forestland). State agencies control 21 percent of the public land (nine percent of all forestland) and three percent of the public land (one percent of all land) is controlled by county and municipal governments.

Two-thirds of the private forestland (283 million acres or 38 percent of all forestland) is held by non-corporate private owners. This includes individuals, couples, estates, trusts, non-governmental organizations, clubs, associations and other unincorporated groups. The other third of the private forestland (137 million acres or 18 percent of all forestland) is owned by corporations. This category includes forest industry and forest management companies, timber investment management organizations and other companies that may or may not have forest management as a primary ownership objective.

Due to various historical factors, forest ownership patterns vary considerably across the country (Fig. 2). In general, public ownership dominates in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast regions and private ownership dominates in the North and South regions, but there are notable exceptions, such as northern Minnesota.

Public Ownership

The U.S. Forest Service controls more forestland (149 million acres) than any other public agency in the country. The Bureau of Land Management (47 million acres) and other federal agencies (53 million acres) also control significant acreage. The significance of state and local forest ownership varies widely. More than 20 percent of the forestland in Hawaii, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Alaska, and Michigan is controlled by state agencies. The highest percentages of county and municipal ownership are found in Wisconsin (15 percent) and Minnesota (14 percent). In some states, such as Nevada, less than one percent of the forestland is controlled by state or local agencies.

Private Ownership

In previous reports, we categorized private owners as forest industry or non-industrial private. Due to the large-scale divestiture of forest industry lands (discussed below), we are unable to report these categories without divulging sensitive information and have switched to the current corporate/noncorporate category system.

*U.S. Forest Service, Forest Inventory & Analysis Family Forest Research Center Amherst, Massachusetts.

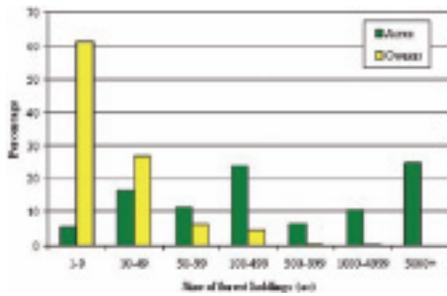


Figure 3: Size of private forest holdings in United States, 2006. (Excluding interior Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, western Texas, and western Oklahoma due to lack of data)

The 412 million acres of private forestland in the U.S. is owned by more than 11 million forest owners. While most (62 percent) have between one and nine acres of forestland, most (66 percent) of the forestland is owned by people or organizations with 100 or more acres (Fig. 3). Owners with parcels of 5,000 or more acres, including many corporate owners, account for 25 percent of the private forestland. A further refinement of our ownership categorization scheme allows for family forests to be examined separately. Family and individual-owned forests, hereafter referred to as family forests, include forestland owned by individuals, couples, estates, trusts, or other groups of unincorporated individuals. These people represent 93 percent of the private forest owners in the U.S. and 62 percent of the private forestland (260 million acres or 35 percent of all forestland). Data from the U.S. Forest Service’s National Woodland Owner Survey shows that the dominant reasons for family forest owners to own land are related to aesthetics, family legacy, and privacy (Fig. 4). There is a lot of activity occurring on these lands, but indicators of sustainable forest management are weak.

For example, 69 percent of the family forestland is owned by people who reported harvesting or removing trees from their land, but only 17 percent of the family forestland is owned by people who reported having a written forest management plan. The NWOS also shows that nearly one in four acres (23 percent) is owned by people who plan to sell or transfer land in the near future. This trend is further supported by the fact that 20 percent of the family forestland is owned by people who are 75 years or older. Their land will change hands relatively soon either by choice or mortality. The transfer of any of these lands will provide opportunities for changes in the ownership objectives, management practices and—potentially—land use.

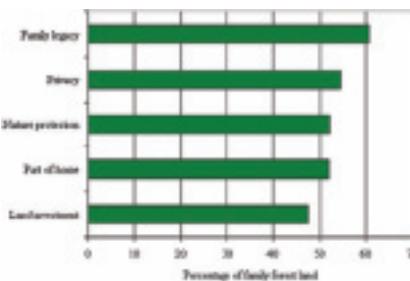


Figure 4: Reasons for family forest owners to own land.

Trends: Past and Future

Forest ownership is far from static. Agencies and owners react to ever-changing internal and external factors and the owners themselves are often changing. Changes in forest policies, divestiture of forest industry lands and the sale of family forestlands will potentially have significant impacts on the nation’s forest resources. Over the past decade, there have been significant changes in forest ownership in the U.S. and it is likely we are going to see more, albeit different, changes

in the next ten years. Between 1993 and 2006, the area of private forestland in the U.S. increased by seven percent and the number of private forest owners increased by 12 percent. The large-scale divestiture of land holdings by vertically-integrated forest industry companies has resulted in the shift of millions of acres of forestland from the forest industry to timber investment management organizations, real estate investment trusts, families and others. Many of the family forestlands will soon be changing hands. It is important that effective and efficient policies, outreach, and services be provided to help current owners meet their needs and bolster their legacies, help new owners meet their objectives, and allow society to continue to receive the goods and services we have come to rely upon.

References

Butler, B.J., Leatherberry, E.C., and M.S. Williams. 2005. Design, implementation, and analysis methods for the National Woodland Owner Survey. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northeastern Research Station Gen. Tech. Rep. NE-GTR-336, 43 p.

Butler, B.J. In process. Private forest-land owners of the United States, 2006. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northeastern Research Station Gen. Tech. Rep. NE-GTR-XXX. NWOA



Regional MSRPO Groups Taking Action...

Last year the MSRPO Board worked to set up regional MSRPO groups to address local issues. Initial meetings were held in the Lake Vermilion area, on the Man Trap Lake chain, and in Meeker County.

MSRPO members in these areas will be tracking local issues, and feeding that

information to the MSRPO Board, who can then work on the state level to find a solution. County and Local Boards that dismiss the concerns of seasonal owners in their districts will find that they now have to contend with an organized group, that reports on local conditions that are being

addressed at the state level, and that they are being held accountable.

If you live in one of these areas and want to get involved, or if you think your area is ripe for a regional MSRPO group, please call Jeff or Judy at the office.

Shoreland Regulations Revision Process

The Minnesota Legislature has recognized the fact that the current shoreland rules, which were created in the 1970s and last revised in the 1980s, have not kept up with today's development pressures, and last year, the legislature directed the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to revise the shoreland rules.

The committee includes stakeholders from across the state representing conservation groups, local units of government, business interests, developers, etc. So far, there have been 2 meetings (about every other month) and participants have begun to identify specific issues to address. This process of identifying issues and crafting new language will take approximately 18 months. MSRPO is tracking these meetings very closely.

Currently, the group is trying to come to agreement on guiding principles. In early discussions, there was some disagreement. The development community and Realtors Association were concerned with short-term economic interests. Groups like 1000 Friends of Minnesota, the MCEA, Minnesota Waters and Ducks Unlimited are promoting long-term rather than short-term thinking, especially when it comes to economics. They posit that science, rather than economics should guide the crafting of shoreland regulations to better protect shorelands, public waters and a vibrant

economy that is dependent on a healthy environment.

The bottom line is that the Minnesota Legislature didn't get this group together to relax the rules, and those of us who own shoreline have a real stake in the outcome

The work of this committee will set the rules for the next 20 to 30 years. By that time, the state demographer's office projects that 1.3 million more people will live in Minnesota. We must help the DNR so they can demonstrate the leadership and vision needed to set rules in preparation for this future, and as major stakeholders in the outcome MSRPO members need to weigh in on this process.

Specifically, you may want to let the DNR know that the new rules should:

Create Incentives, as recommended in the Statewide Conservation Plan, that help shoreline owners keep natural shorelines natural, restore impaired shorelines, upgrade sewer or septic systems and otherwise provide critical ecological services with the manner in which they steward their private land.

Regulations are not always effective. They are expensive to pass, expensive to enforce. Transporting milfoil from one lake to another is currently illegal, and carries stiff penalties, but the spread of exotic species continues. What if watercraft license tabs

were much higher for boats that traveled between lakes and much lower for boats that never left their home waters? How many MSRPO members would preserve undeveloped shoreline if they could afford to, or would restore degraded shorelines if resources were made available? Incentives are often a more powerful tool than regulation, and families like ours, who collectively manage more shoreline and forests than either the DNR or the United States Forest Service, understand this.

MSRPO members love the lakes. Yet we endure the biggest tax pressure in the state. Undeveloped shoreline is assessed **as if** it were developed, and has the State General Tax levied.

Those who own the lakeshores and forestlands in Minnesota need help to be good stewards, incentives that reward those who are responsible and discourages those who want to make destructive choices. We also need education and resources so that we can undertake restoration projects.

The Director of the Division of Waters at the DNR is Kent Lockkesmoe. His phone number is 651-259-5700 or you can email him at kent.lockkesmoe@dnr.state.mn.us. Weigh in with him, tell him your story. Ask him to present these ideas to the Committee. We will be living with the results of their work for a generation.

Should MSRPO Members "Vote Yes" in November?

This election there will be a Constitutional Amendment on the ballot - the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment - that will impose an additional three-eighths of a cent sales tax, raising approximately \$300 million/year in 2008 dollars. The language in the amendment specifically allocates funding among four purposes as follows: 33% for water quality, 33% for wildlife habitat, 19.75% for arts and cultural resources, and 14.25% for parks and trails. On a ten-dollar purchase, the amendment will add 3.5 cents, and does not apply to tax exempt purchases like food and clothing. The estimate is that the amendment will cost the average citizen \$50 a year.

The exact language of the amendment is: "Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to dedicate funding to protect our drinking water sources; to protect, enhance,

and restore our wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat; to preserve our arts and cultural heritage; to support our parks and trails; and to protect, enhance, and restore our lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater by increasing the sales and use tax rate beginning July 1, 2009, by three-eighths of one percent on taxable sales until the year 2034?"

A number of conservation and environmental groups have endorsed the amendment. More surprising was a May 30th, 2008 joint editorial by former Republican Governor Arne Carlson and DFL Governor Wendell Anderson, in which they wrote, in part:

"We are nearing a tipping point in the fight to preserve what we enjoy today for future generations. Funding for clean water, access to the outdoors, arts access and education, and our parks and trails is at or near 30-year

lows. Forty percent of Minnesota's tested waters are polluted. One million acres of open land are set to be lost over the next 25 years. It is time to invest in the things we value, and that opportunity will present itself this November..."

All MSRPO members know how important our lakes are to the quality of life in our state. And we know first hand how much they have degraded over the years. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has only tested eighteen percent of Minnesota's lakes. Forty percent of those are impaired, meaning that they are not safe for swimming or fish consumption. This is staggering and a cause for grave concern for anyone that loves Minnesota's lakes.

Because so many MSRPO members are also members of local lake associations, and many take leadership roles in helping

to preserve the quality of their lakes, this amendment is of special importance.

For those of us who do not know the status of our lakes, you can use this simple tool to find out how your lake measure's up: <http://www.checkmylake.org/lake/>

The idea of creating a dedicated funding source for water, prairies, wetland and forest protection and restoration began ten years ago with sportsmen in the state. It has since been supported by over 200 outdoor, conservation, environmental and arts organizations in the state.

In July, the MSRPO Executive Committee met to discuss the Amendment and decide

what MSRPO's position on it should be. Detractors of this amendment pointed out that the Legislature should be responsible for raising and spending money, and this amendment will bypass that responsibility. In essence the amendment let's the legislature off the hook from doing its job.

Promoters pointed out the alternatives – the continued degradation of our lakes and a chronic shortage of resources with which to deal with the problem.

The MSRPO Executive Committee voted to endorse and support the amendment. Paul Austin, Executive Director of Conservation Minnesota, noted that funds from this

dedicated tax can be used to help owners make septic and sewer upgrades, and provide resources for shoreline restoration and protection, perhaps even money to mitigate exotic species through the habitat portion of the fund. All of these costs are currently being born by seasonal owners alone.

For this reason, we are urging all MSRPO members to VOTE YES in November. It is not a perfect law, but the Minnesota Legislature has proven that it has neither the discipline or the leadership to take a strong stand in protecting Minnesota's most important natural resources – its waters and lakes.

Federal Use Permit Holders Victims of Double Dipping

*John Murray, MSRPO member
and Jeff Forester*

Almost a thousand seasonal owners in Minnesota have cabins in the National Forests, using Federal Special Use Permits. These permits have heavy restrictions on the size and even color of the cabin. Legally a permit holder is not even allowed to cut trees on this land.

Until recently, the fees for these permits were rather modest. But this year the National Forest Service is reappraising the lands at full market value (what the land would sell for on the open market) and then charging a fee of 5% of that appraisal. Some cabin owners will see their fees go from a few hundred dollars a year to over ten thousand. The federal government returns 25% of the money raised from these permits to the State of Minnesota as Payments in Lieu of Taxes, PILT.

In February, citing a 1958 law, the Department of Revenue instructed local assessors to assess and tax these permitted lands as if the Permit Holder owned the land, essentially double dipping on these cabin families.

This year MSRPO sent a letter to all these permit holders encouraging them to join and fight against this injustice. Hundreds did. MSRPO sponsored legislation to remove the permitted lands from the tax rolls, and tax the value of the modest cabins only. A compromise position at the final hour allowed only Saint Louis County to drop land values.

In July, a number of MSRPO members, Jeff Forester and Henry Erdman spoke before

the Itasca County Board of Equalization. They were dismayed by the new legislation, and voted to keep assessments at 2007 levels until the situation could be resolved. A number of the County Board members told us they appreciated the work we were doing, and would support our Lease Holder's bill in the 2009 session.

The Recreation Residence Program was established under the Organic Administration Act of 1897. On March 4, 1915 the Occupancy Permits Act authorized long-term permits (up to 30 years) to encourage public use, private investment and the building of cabins on the National Forest.

This was among the earliest recreation programs in the National Forests and, for more than 100 years, has provided a forest experience for multiple generations of entire families, their friends, children, the elderly and the physically handicapped. Ninety years later, this particular form of recreation is regularly stated as a "valid use" of National Forest System lands¹. Sadly, however, today in many National Forests this congressionally accepted "valid use," is being threatened.

In 1969, in exchange for 20 year permits, the Forest Service set up a system of appraisals to establish lot values and the annual special use fee, set at 5% of that appraised value. The system of appraisal changed little until recently. The 5% has remained constant, reportedly reflecting historical application going back into the late 1800's. However, we believe it does not reflect the realities of today's market forces.

In the late 1990s problems with the appraisal process became very evident. One lot appraisal came in as high as \$600,000 resulting in an annual fee of \$30,000. Several national, state and local cabin associations became organized to address these problems. A Cabin Coalition was formed and, with the help of three prominent legislators and much input from coalition members, corrective legislation was proposed and passed by Congress into law.

The Cabin User Fee Fairness Act of 2000 (CUFFA) was intended to provide a fair, market-based appraisal of lot values that would result in a 'fair fee' for cabin permits on the National Forests. This necessitated recognizing the full impact of the Forest Service permit restrictions, as well as regional and local restrictions, on market values.

CUFFA was supposed to do this and we believe that was the intent of Congress. However, adjusting for permit restrictions within the appraisal has been disallowed by the Forest Service. Furthermore, we are convinced the 'reduced fee,' 5% of simple market value, does not fully account for the negative impact of all of those restrictions on the use of the lot. This is the heart of the problem. (See Why We Are Concerned following footnotes).

The 5% is said by the Forest Service to be a discounted rate. The presumption is that this supposedly discounted rate adjusts fully and fairly for the market impact of all permit restrictions. It does not. Furthermore, this premise has never been confirmed by publicly shared market research, nor documented by the Forest Service. The

first potentially ruinous appraisals of this appraisal cycle are due to be completed by mid-March, 2008. Initial results foretell huge increases in fees.

The great majority of cabin users come from middle class circumstances and many cabins have been in the same family for generations. Cabin owners care about the forests and the recreation experiences they provide all citizens, including their urban children. Their presence in the forest stimulates local economies² and provides valuable tax dollars to local, state and federal government.³ Cabin owners are first-hand observers of the health of various forest ecosystems and assist the Forest Service in monitoring the appropriate use of the forest and its lands by other recreational users. Cabin owners volunteer time, labor and money, partnering with the Forest Service on a variety of projects. Our

stewardship helps insure that the waters and land that sustain fish and wildlife remain clean and productive.

We teach our children the wonders of the natural world and strive to insure that the gifts of our nation's forests are passed on to our grandchildren and their grandchildren intact and unspoiled.

We strive to see that the 'Last Child in The Woods' is not found in our National Forest. These vitally important values will only be maintained if we, average American families and recreation residence users, are able to continue as permittees in the Forest.

Cabin owners are deeply invested in the forest experience and value these unique environments and the recreation experiences afforded "in the woods." Many cabin owners have made substantial investments in local

water and wastewater infrastructure as well as roads and other improvements. We understand and accept the reality of upward pressure on real estate values throughout the nation. We just ask that fair market value be the real basis for our fees.

A solution to this problem may be simple, even though the process of achieving a solution may be difficult. To be fair to both the United States and cabin permittees: **All restrictions imposed by the Forest Service permit language must be valued and used to adjust the market value of the subject lot**, either through the language of CUFFA or by some other means. MSRPO is currently working with Minnesota's National Delegation to achieve some reasonable interpretation of the CUFFA laws.

1) *Federal Register*, June 2, 1994, page 28727, "Recreation Residence Authorizations." It also is part of *Forest Service Manual Chapter 2340 - Privately Provided Recreation Opportunities*. The heading reads "2347.1 - Recreation Residences. (FSM 2721.23 and FSH 2709.11)" with the text as follows:

"Recreation Residences are a valid use of National Forest System lands. They are an important component of the overall National Forest recreation program and have the potential of supporting a large number of recreation person-days. They may provide special recreation experiences that might not otherwise be available. It is Forest

Service policy to continue recreation residence use and to work in partnership with holders of these permits to maximize the recreational benefits of these residences."

2) A statistical survey of cabin owners indicates that the average cabin owner spends \$6,555 in the local economy (within 50 miles of the cabin) for food, drink, staples, recreation, improvements and repairs every year. Cabin owners also contribute \$549 in donations and provide 56 volunteer hours (\$1051) annually. That is a per cabin total of \$8155 every year into the local cabin community! (NFH Economic Impact Survey, 2006)

3) Recent attempts at state land lease sales on Priest Lake, Idaho, with fees increased from the current 2.5% to 5% of land values, had no takers, even though these lots have lease rights that are denied Forest Service permit holders. Appropriately, the state of Idaho is re-examining this very negative market response. Also, the St. Louis County, Minnesota Assessor has informed us that his county charges 2.7% for their cabin lease fees on county leased lots. This speaks volumes about our concerns in regard to the inaccuracy of the 5% fee for Forest Service cabin permit holders as well.

Why We are Concerned

- 1) The Little Colorado Summer Home Group in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona has received their final appraisal and their fee will be \$10,000 per year! Additional preliminary appraisal data (now in Regional Forest Service offices) likely will result in similar annual fees in the tens of thousands at Priest Lake, ID, Turpin Meadow, WY, Pettit Lake, ID, Lake Wenatchee, WA and many others.
- 2) One appraisal conducted at Lake Wenatchee in 1999, had the pre-CUFFA based fee been fully implemented, would have resulted in an annual fee of more than \$16,000 per year. Unable to afford this huge fee increase, the cabin owners tried to sell their cabin through an auction last year, beginning with a minimum bid of \$50,000, and they had no takers. Current valuations suggest the annual fee will be well over \$30,000 per year. With no relief or sale, these folks will be required to demolish and remove their family's recreation residence.
- 3) Recent attempts at state land lease sales on Priest Lake, Idaho, with fees increased from the current 2.5% to 5% of land values, had no takers, even though these lots have lease rights that are denied Forest Service permit holders. Appropriately, the state of Idaho is re-examining this very negative market response. Also, the St. Louis County, Minnesota Assessor has informed us that his county charges 2.7% for their cabin lease fees on county leased lots. This speaks volumes about our concerns in regard to the inaccuracy of the 5% fee for Forest Service cabin permit holders as well.
- 4) Specific Forest Service restrictions vary significantly from region to region. Yet CUFFA directs a 5% annual fee nationwide in addressing all these restrictions. How can a fixed fee be applied to variable circumstances and yet be considered fair or accurate?

To Lake Association Members

*A request for action from Executive Director
Jeff Forester*

Today, the quality of Minnesota's lakes is threatened by overuse, over development, aquatic invasive plants and animals, and other pollution factors along with increasing taxes on shoreland properties. If not contained, these threats could jeopardize our continued enjoyment of the lakes we love. It's not too late.

To insure that future generations can continue recreating on Minnesota's lakes, I invite your lake association to join the Minnesota Seasonal Recreational Property Owners Association (MSRPO)...the only voice at the state capitol working aggressively on behalf of lakeshore property owners to defend shoreland living as an affordable way of life.

While family time at the lake is a value we all share, unprecedented tax pressures on Minnesota's shorelands are driving changes that will impact the future quality of our time at the lake and our waters. MSRPO is working with Paula West, former executive director of the Minnesota Lakes Association and long time political advocate for Minnesota's lakes, to identify and address the leading pressures on lakes today.

"Much of the high quality lakeshore in Minnesota is already developed and seasonal cabins are being replaced with oversized suburban-type homes that can increase nutrient-laden runoff and degrade water quality," West told the MSRPO Board comprised of fifteen shoreland property owners. "Sensitive shorelands, previously thought of as marginal for development, are sprouting up houses in place of the wetlands, emergent vegetation, and adjacent forestlands that serve to filter out nutrients and protect water quality. Plus, aquatic invasive species continue to spread without adequate attention by state agencies leaving lake associations to manage this problem. If these trends continue, we'll end up with more polluted lakes and poor water quality that cannot necessarily be restored. Potentially, property values could decline as evidenced by a recent study at Bemidji State University that showed a correlation between water clarity, an indicator of water quality, and property values."

West further pointed out that over development of shorelands is being

spurred by people selling their family cabins or dividing their homesteaded lots because they cannot afford to pay the taxes that continue to escalate as bigger houses drive up market valuations.

We know the grass roots efforts by residents and lake associations is critical to protect your lake. However, many of the solutions to these complex issues must be addressed at the broader regional and state level. *Joining MSRPO as a lake association will ensure that your concerns are heard in the halls of the state capitol, and through regional representation, to effect policies, laws and regulations that impact the quality and affordability of lakeside living.*

Since 1993, MSRPO has been the loudest and most effective voice for cabin owners in the state. A former DFL House Tax Chair called us "*Devilishly well organized.*" Rep. Morrie Lanning said, "*MSRPO has the best grass roots campaign going.*"

In 2008 MSRPO focused on three key initiatives of benefit to all lakeshore owners.

- **Removal of seasonal properties from the State General Tax Levy**

MSRPO succeeded in getting seasonal properties removed from the state general tax but at the expense, which MSRPO opposed, of now being put back on school excess operating levies. However, this will still be a \$28 million overall savings per year for seasonal property owners.

- **Reinstatement of the Limited Market Value Cap.**

MSRPO succeeded in getting an extension of the limited market value (LMV) until 2009, which caps property tax increases due to escalating market values. MSRPO will continue to work towards permanent tax relief because even past increases will be mild when compared to what shoreland owners' tax bill will be when the LMV expires. For example, if LMV had phased out this year, some lakeshore owners would have seen a 158% increase in their property tax bill in a single year; increases of 70% are not uncommon. To make sure this does not happen, we need your support!

- **Enactment of Blue Waters Legislation to protect Minnesota's water resources.**

In collaboration with the Minnesota Lakes Association, MSRPO has worked

for several years on passing "Blue Waters" legislation that would reduce the tax rate on undeveloped lakeshore—now taxed at the same rate as developed shoreland—to provide an incentive to keep it undeveloped and protect water quality. The DNR reports that over development of lakeshore is one of the main causes of surface water pollution. MSRPO supported new legislation passed this year to lower tax rates on large tracts of undeveloped forestland; this legislation paves the way for passage of Blue Waters...a bill that can go a long way in protecting Minnesota's waters through incentive, not regulation.

In 2009, MSRPO will also provide strong lobbying support of efforts to curb the spread of aquatic invasive species and their continued threat to water quality and property values. It's the DNR's job to protect public waters and when those public waters become infested with invasive species, the DNR should be doing more to contain the spread and manage invasive species, not shift responsibility to lake associations.

We need your lake association's help! To accomplish our mutual goals of affordable and enjoyable lakeside living, we must go back to the basics: strong lobbying and aggressive grass roots political organization. We're going to work on your behalf whether or not your lake association joins MSRPO. However, your financial support by becoming a lake association member of MSRPO will help support our lobbying, education and outreach programs. Plus, we can count all of your members as part of our clout at the state legislature—the stronger our voice the more effective we can be on behalf of property owners.

By joining with other lakes associations and the over 6,000 individuals that support MSRPO and its efforts, your lake association will receive the following benefits:

- **A direct voice at the state capitol** and with state agencies and other organizations to influence regulations and policies related to property taxes and sustainable water quality.
- **An active voice in setting MSRPO's statewide political agenda** through representation at regional meetings with other lake association leaders and MSRPO members.

Continued on back page

Political Contribution Refund

Did you know that you can contribute to political campaigns in Minnesota, and have your contribution refunded? In Minnesota, it costs you nothing to support candidates who are working hard on your behalf.

Individuals can be refunded \$50 and couples \$100 when they contribute to political campaigns.

To be eligible, contributors must be Minnesota residents:

1. When you make a contribution, ask the candidate or campaign to provide you with a receipt (EP-3).
2. Fill out Form PCR (2007 PCR Form, 2008 PCR Form), which can be downloaded at:
<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/publicsubsidy/conrefund.htm>
or call the Minnesota Department of Revenue at 651-296-1721 or 800-657-3889.
3. Attach the receipt (EP 3) to the application (Form PCR) for the appropriate year.
4. Mail the application form and receipt to the Minnesota Department of Revenue at:

Minnesota Political Contribution Refund
Minnesota Department of Revenue
St. Paul, MN 55146-1800

You do not need to contribute to a candidate in your district, but can support candidates in other districts if you wish. These contributions are a powerful, powerful way to make your voice heard, and support candidates who are supporting your issues.

Leading Conservationists Advocate for Human-Focused Approach

By Tom Spitzangle, MSRPO member

“First, we believe many conservationists are in denial about the state of the world and must stop clinging to a vision of a pristine wilderness. One quarter of a million people join the planet every day. More forests and wetlands will be cleared for agriculture, and more ocean species will be fished to depletion. Biodiversity is going to decline. Wilderness separate from human influence no longer exists” assert two recognized American conservationists.

In an article appearing in the October, 2007 issue of Scientific American, authors Dr. Peter Kareiva, chief scientist at the Nature Conservancy (self-described as the world’s leading conservation organization with over one million members and currently managing conservation projects in all 50 states and over 30 other countries), and Dr. Michelle Marvier, Associate Professor and Executive Director of the Environmental Studies Institute at Santa Clara University, challenge conventional thinking with some rather provocative ideas.

Gaining momentum among conservationists is an evolving approach to conservation that challenges traditional thinking claim Kareiva and Marvier. Tagged the “ecosystem services” approach, it places human health and well-being at the center of all conservation efforts

in contrast with earlier approaches that often pitted nature and biodiversity against humans.

Perhaps some background information would be helpful at this point. Biodiversity is defined as the measure of the variation of life forms in an ecosystem. An ecosystem can be defined as all plants, animals and micro-organisms functioning together with the non-living physical characteristics of an environment. Ecosystem services are tangible benefits to humans inherent to an ecosystem and include such diverse services as food, recreation, building materials, clean water, storm protection, fuel and inspiration.

Ecosystem services concepts are providing the impetus for forest managers, environmentalists, conservationists and policy makers to reconsider previous approaches for managing numerous worldwide ecosystems. In northern Minnesota where considerable land is publicly-owned, management plans may adopt selected aspects from the authors’ interpretation of this relatively new approach to conservation.

Historical Conservation Strategy

Under commonly practiced conservation approaches, areas with high plant diversity, also known as “hot-spots”, were identified throughout the world and targeted for “biodiversity protection”. People were prevented from living on or using the land in these hot-spots via the enforcement of

patrolled boundaries. Local people formerly occupying these areas were displaced or lost important resources. The authors conclude that this approach to conservation has generally lacked public support and should be discontinued in favor of an ecosystem services approach designed to give priority to people’s dependencies within their respective ecosystems.

The two conservationists assert that “Conservation’s misanthropic reputation has arisen, in part, because millions of people have been forced off their land or have otherwise had their sources of food and income snatched from them so that animals and habitats could be preserved”. For example, in the U.S., loggers are enraged about losing their jobs to save spotted owls and farmers are upset at the loss of water privileges in order to protect salmon. These types of situations have led to a global discontent with many conservation policies, explain the authors.

Despite the proven interrelationships between the well-being of humans and the robustness of animal and plant life (i.e. – biodiversity), the predominant public view is that efforts to preserve biological diversity usually come at the expense of humans. Kareiva and Marvier assert that “To reverse this trend – and to better serve humanity and threatened organisms – we and a growing number of conservationists argue that old ways of prioritizing conservation activities

should be largely scrapped in favor of saving ecosystems that have value to people.”

The authors further argue that previous efforts to protect biodiversity for its own sake in selected hot-spots do not work as a conservation strategy. Instead, the focus should be on protecting ecosystems of importance to human health and material needs throughout the world. Examples of such ecosystems are forests (for medicines and wood products), wetlands (for clean water), mangroves (to shield against storms) and reefs (to sustain fisheries).

Ecosystem Services Strategy Overview

A tight coupling between human social needs and conservation issues is essential to gaining public support for biodiversity protection policies explain Kareiva and Marvier in their article. A well thought out ecosystem services strategy provides this connection - a connection oftentimes missing under previous conservation approaches.

In a nutshell, ecosystem services strategies (as defined by the authors) first involve the identification of people’s dependencies in a given ecosystem. Human dependencies can include factors such as tourism revenues, food, various recreational uses, flood control, spiritual well-being, nutrient cycling, employment, plant pollination, clean water, etc.

Another key step is to then develop a conservation plan that protects the ecosystem while simultaneously benefiting the people who depend on its resources. The goal is to preserve biodiversity without compromising

important human dependencies. It is believed that as people come to better understand their reliance on the ecosystem for health and economic security, their acceptance and support of conservation projects will also grow stronger.

Examples of successful ecosystem services strategies around the world are documented in the Scientific American article noted above. The authors believe that additional successes are possible when conservationists collaborate with development and financial experts, an uncommon partnership to be sure.

In fact, Goldman Sachs Group (a major global investment firm) recently committed \$1 billion for investment in renewable energy and created its own internal ecosystem services structure with responsibility for assessing the impacts of Goldman’s internal projects on ecosystem services. The World Bank is also on board with ecosystem services per the authors, by encouraging nations to consider ecosystem services implications as a part of their national economic and productivity assessments.

Looking Ahead

The authors believe that conservation efforts overall will be more successful if the public better understands its dependencies on the ecosystem and if future conservation plans are designed to more fully accommodate these human dependencies. At the same time, the authors are not backing down on the importance of maintaining worldwide biodiversity.

Perhaps the ecosystem services conservation approach advocated by Kareiva and Marvier may lead to more win-win conservation strategies and fewer win-lose situations such as those resulting from contentious, high-visibility federal court battles – a process that, in recent years, has detracted from the public’s embrace of conservationism (and environmentalism for that matter) and is thought by many to be a relatively unproductive use of limited public conservation resources.

There are other interpretations of the ecosystem services approach to conservation beside the one advocated by Kareiva and Marvier. Some of these place more emphasis on a system of incentives in which stewards of ecosystem services would receive compensation from society for their stewardship efforts. For example, a private landowner might be compensated via property tax breaks for maintaining a wetland that benefits the public by providing it with cleaner water. This form of compensation would hopefully prevent the loss of the wetland through filling for eventual use in agriculture or development.

To learn more about the U.S. Forest Service’s current interpretation of ecosystem services and to be able to contrast it with the approach advocated by Kareiva and Marvier, go to www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices.

Note: quotations used in this article were reprinted with the permission of *Scientific American* magazine.

Clean Your Boat, Protect Your Lake, Win Free Gear

Every day, boaters and anglers unknowingly introduce harmful invasive species into their favorite lakes. These plants and animals hitch a ride in boat hulls, propellers, muddy boots, and other equipment.

Because invasive species such as zebra mussels and round gobies aren’t native to our waters, they are safe from the predators and diseases of their native habitat. As a result, they

reproduce exponentially and out compete native fish and wildlife. They can also ruin boat engines, affect human health, and reduce property values. At least 185 aquatic invasive species are already established in the Great Lakes, with a new one discovered every seven months.

Each year, the United States spends \$9 billion trying to control the spread of aquatic invasive species. If detected early enough, it

may be possible to eradicate them. But in most instances, it is too late. That’s why it is important for boaters and anglers to inspect and clean their boats every time they leave the water. This keeps invasive species from spreading to new waters.

To learn how to properly clean your gear, visit www.cleanboats.org. There, you can enter to win the ultimate \$2,500 boater’s shopping spree and other great prizes.

Essay Winner-Bobby Shusta

Bobby Shusta, of Ely, won 1st place in the Minnesota Seasonal and Recreational Property Owners, MSRPO, student essay contest and received a \$500 savings bond towards his college education. Bobby wrote about his grandparent's cabin on an island in Lake Vermilion.

MSRPO's contest, "Cabins Are Where Family Happens" was announced last year. Bobby's grandmother, Debra, discovered it on the MSRPO website, and then saw

Building Memories

By Bobby Shusta

Our family cabin is on Lake Vermilion in Northern Minnesota. It has been in our family since my great-great-grandfather purchased the island around 1950. My grandmother started taking me to the cabin when I was 2 years old, just as she took my mother when she was little. Our family travels by boat, in rain or shine, and packs all of our food and clothing for our stay. Everyone looks forward to going to "the lake" and spending quality time together.

What I'd like to share with all our readers is that our family island is filled with memories that we share when we sit on the dock, by the fire, or when we are taking a sauna. We laugh and remember those who shared our family cabin through the years. Even when we get in bed, and the gas lamps are low, we talk about the fun times we've had I really laugh when grandma and great-grandma tells us stories about fishing, boat rides, blueberry picking, and even those stories that turned scary when high winds, lightening, storms and waves came up unexpectedly.

We have all caught our share of fish, both big and small from the shores of our island, from the dock, or in our boat. At one time there were trophies of bigger fish caught, the jawbones nailed to some of the trees. They are long gone, but memories are alive as we talk about a few of the bigger ones and some that got away.

I enjoy the little things, like watching fireflies blinking off and on, or listening to loons calling one another, or sitting at the table after my sauna all flushed and hot from the day in the sun and being squeaky clean from a good cleansing. These are little things, but are so much more, because these smells and sounds stay with you all through your life. They get in your blood. The adults say, "you'll remember this time when you're an

a story in the local paper. When Bobby, a 6th Grader, came to visit her in Hibbing she suggested he write an essay. The two sat down, and Bobby described to her what the cabin meant to him, how he felt about the time he spends there with his family. Then he started writing. Said Bobby's grandmother, Debra Mayerich, "When my mother read it, she was in tears."

Bobby lives in Ely with his mother Jennifer Shusta. His younger sister Jade is in kindergarten.

old man, believe us, you will." All the smells are unique to a family cabin experience. You can smell the pine and cedar trees, the smoke from the sauna drifting across the lake, or the rain as it comes down making everything fresh and woody. It just makes me happy to be out in the woods with my family. On 4th of July, we watch fireworks light the night sky. I can hear the boom echoing over the lake and it's lots of fun to light sparklers and wave them in the air while our country celebrates our freedoms!

My cousins come and share in a summer of fun. We take our boat and travel to the local beach, fish along the shores and bays catching bass, walleye, and northern pike. We stop and catch crayfish in our nets and have a contest to see who can catch the most. The pails fill up quickly and my cousins and I put them back to catch them another day. On a really hot day we all sit in the shade, or play on the dock, taking turns doing flips off the end into the water. Swimming and playing games most of the day, ducks and geese swim by and we throw breadcrumbs for them. Eagles nest in nearby trees and we can watch them teach their babies how to fly.

Winter brings a new type of travel to our family cabin, snowmobiles, four-wheelers and snowshoes. We travel across the frozen lake to spend the day fishing through the ice, having a lunch over a fire, usually polish and baked beans. I know at the end of the day the tiredness I feel is from fresh air and hard work making wood for our fire. Late February and early March brings a warmer sun and we can take off some of the heavy clothing and feel the warmth of the sun on the snow and ice which covers the lake. Spring isn't far away.

I may be only 11 years old, but I know I'm a lucky boy. Our family has worked hard to keep this small island for our family.

Said Mrs. Mayerich, "At the cabin Bobby has learned what is important and what matters, to be respectful when you hunt and fish and to keep that as a tradition." Bobby is on the school patrol, captain of the peacekeeping squad, plays hockey and clarinet. He likes to hunt and fish and be in the woods with his white lab. His family has had the place on Lake Vermilion for over eighty years. Bobby hopes to spend time there at the cabin with his children and grandchildren.

It's tradition. Every spring we go to our boathouse and clean up to prepare for the summer months. In the Fall of the year, we burn brush and clear up the shoreline, making it look nice. We've updated the cabin with new siding and a deck. The island has all the luxuries we need. There is no electricity and we all voted to keep it that way, the reason being is that we don't want to have a TV distracting us, or video games to play when we can enjoy the lake and all it offers. I like spending time talking with my family and having fun like all those who came before me on the island.

My grandmother lets me steer the boat and ride with her in the back. She tells me that is how her grandpa taught her when she was my age. She remembers sitting next to him and learning how to put gas in the motor, how to start the motor, steer the boat, and to land the boat in the channel without banging into the dock. She is teaching me and sharing things she has learned. My grandmother spends time making sure I learn to respect the forest, lakes, and letting me know how lucky we are to live in Minnesota.

I know how important our cabin has been to everyone in my family. We try hard to keep it nice and to share it with friends and others who come to visit in the summer. Everyone who has been to our island says how lucky we are, how thankful they are that we invited them, and look forward to the trip by boat, which many people seem to find the exciting part of going to the cabin.

My future goal is to be able to share our traditions with my children one day. I can teach them, as I have been taught, how to enjoy the time spent with your family at a cabin, on a lake, and during any time of the year, to gather memories by an evening of talking and laughter in the glow of a campfire, or lamp, at the family cabin.

Cabins are where family happens in Minnesota

Summer is Here... and so is all that Garbage!

May Xiong, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

It's that time of the year again; getting rid of your old household wastes and garbage may be more difficult than expected due to inconveniences and rising costs, particularly for those that do not have regular garbage service. Burning your garbage may be a tempting option because it seems simple enough. Strike a match and the garbage disappears. Not only is that a bad idea because it is illegal for most Minnesotans but more importantly, burning your garbage also creates harmful pollutants that effect not only our environment but you and your family's health.

Over the last 50 plus years, the content and composition of our trash has changed. Plastics, packaging, and chemically treated materials make up much of what we now throw away and when you burn those materials, they release toxic chemicals and particulates. Even seemingly harmless items, like paper, mail, packaging, and cardboard can give off toxic emissions. These pollut-

ants can cause serious health problems for people and the ecosystem.

One major pollutant produced from backyard garbage burning is dioxin, a cancer-causing contaminant. Dioxin is classified as a persistent, bio-accumulative, and toxic pollutant because it is a long lasting substance that can build up to harmful levels in the food chain. In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated that one pound of waste burned in a burn barrel can emit up to 10,000 times the pollutants than the same pound of waste burned in a municipal waste combustor. The dioxin released by the backyard burning of 20 families' trash for a year is equivalent to that released by a state-of-the-art combustor serving 150,000 families! Municipal waste combustors burn at a much higher temperature - over 2000 degrees. Emission controls minimize and collect pollutants before they enter the environment.

According to the Minnesota DNR, backyard garbage burning also contributes to nearly half of all wildfires in Minnesota

each year. Keep in mind that you are legally responsible for damages from any fire that gets out of control, as well as the firefighting costs.

The fact is if you're burning garbage, you're making poison. Please use available alternatives to backyard garbage burning when you're cleaning this spring and every year after. Instead of burning old items, think about giving old clothes and household goods a second life via garage sales and charitable donations. Use local recycling and garbage services or drop-sites and educate your family and neighbors about the hazards of burning garbage. To find more information about local recycling and disposal options at home or at the cabin, call your county solid waste or environmental office or visit:

www.pca.state.mn.us/burnbarrel for contact information for all 87 Minnesota counties. Tackling the chores of spring-cleaning may be a major undertaking for you and your family, but maintaining a healthy and safe home is worth the time you will spend.

Who Do You Trust To Care For Your Cabin When You're Gone?

By MSRPO member Lee Coulter

Cabins are a place for relaxing and enjoying good times with family. For many Minnesotans, these places are not just structures of log and stone, but sanctuaries that allow people to forget about their busy lives and responsibilities. For many, going to the cabin stirs up nostalgic feelings of long ago, including childhood memories of the lake and a simpler time gone by. Therefore, nothing could be worse than packing up the car and heading to the cabin, only to find it has been destroyed by a family of squirrels that took up residence in the unoccupied home over the winter.

The reality is cabins require a lot of care, and if not properly maintained a visit to the cabin could result in vacation spent repairing damage, rather than relaxing and playing. This applies whether the cabin is a small two-room building in the woods that is completely shut down in the winter or a sprawling 14,000 square-foot work of art that is heated and maintained year-round. Which begs the question of caretakers.

Whether you own the little cabin in the woods or the fancy log home surrounded by

an iron gate, you need to be cautious when handing over your key and entrusting the care of your cabin to another party.

My husband and I run a home watch and concierge company in Crosslake, about 25 miles north of Brainerd, called Home Halo. This is a professional company owned and operated by a husband and wife, which has been caring for cabins since 2005. Since then, we have seen and heard it all: Rodents ransacking house and home, septic systems backing up into finished basements, vandals destroying unoccupied homes, and caretakers gone bad.

Unfortunately we have been hearing more and more lately about careless caretaking companies. This type of business is attractive to people who do not truly understand how much work goes into this, including being on call 24/7 responding to security system alarms, for example. Many people are starting to do this "on the side," while holding other full-time jobs and managing a family. As a result, they are often unable to properly care for the homes left in their charge. When things go wrong the homeowner is left with a bill from the caretaker, stuck handling the

problem that the caretaker was hired to do in the first place, faced with taking their key back, and having to change security system codes. Not only that, the often-disgruntled caretaker is still out there and knows the home is vacant most of the year!

At Home Halo, we would like to see Minnesota require this profession to be licensed, and MSRPO is supporting these efforts. This is in the best interest of the cabin owner. The International Concierge and Errand Association, is currently working on developing certification for the concierge profession, which includes home watch duties. This process will take up to two years. In addition, Rep. Torrey Westrom, District 11a, is working on getting the profession licensed or certified.

Until then, take some due diligence when finding a caretaker, check references, talk with other MSRPO members or Lake Association members, or even local resort owners to find good prospects. Don't just pick someone out of the Yellow Pages. Find someone you won't mind giving the keys to your cabin to when you are gone from the area.

2008 MSRPO Annual Meeting

Incentives Are Critical Tool in Conserving Minnesota's Resources

Wednesday October 15, 7-9 PM

Ramada Mall of America (formerly the Thunderbird Hotel)

2300 East American Boulevard, Bloomington, Minnesota 55425-1228

Phone: (952) 854-3411

The 2008 Annual Meeting will focus on the recommendations of the new State Conservation Plan. Sen. Tom Bakk, who chairs the Senate Tax Committee, will speak.

The Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, released on June 30, 2008, lists "Protect critical shorelines streams and lakes" and "Protect priority land habitats" as the top two top recommendations for the protection of habitat in Minnesota. The reports urge the state to increase its use of incentives to achieve ecological goals.

Since families like ours own more lakeshore and forestland than the national forests, the State, industry or the tribes, we must have incentives that can protect us from the terrible pressures of escalating land values and subsequent property taxes. This is the very heart of our Blue Waters legislation.



Sen. Tom Bakk

Continued from page 7

• **Informative communications to keep you up-to-date on property tax and other relevant issues** through regular printed newsletters, email legislative alerts, and website resources at www.msrepo.org along with articles for your newsletters and websites.

• **Access to a network of statewide resources to build grass roots effectiveness at the state capitol.** In order to keep the attention of legislators, we must keep our members well informed and active...your letters and phone calls do make a difference.

Please support MSRPO.

Use the application form below for your lake association to join MSRPO.

The suggested membership fee is a sliding fee based on the number of members in your association:

1-50 members:	\$50
50-150 members	\$100*
151-300 members	\$150
300 members+	\$200

* This is where the majority of lake associations will fall.

Please pass this information on to your lake association president and ask the board to consider MSRPO membership at their next meeting. Working together we can make a

difference. From the grassroots to the state level, let's make sure future generations can enjoy Minnesota's greatest natural heritage....its lakes.

Jeff Forester
Executive Director

Please give this membership application to a cabin/lakeshore property owner, neighbor, friend or lake association president and encourage them to join MSRPO now!

Yes, I want to help in the effort to achieve tax fairness for cabin/lakeshore properties!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

State: _____

Phone: (____) _____

Email Address: _____

Mail this form and make check payable to:

MSRPO Coalition, Inc.

PO Box 50868

Mendota, MN 55150

Membership is not conditioned on any level of dollar contribution but any amount to can give is greatly appreciated.

Lakesore property Information

Lakeshore Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

County: _____

Lake/River Name: _____

Lake Association Name: _____

Enclosed is my contribution of:

Individual/Family

\$50.00 (14¢ a day)

\$75.00 (21¢ a day)

\$100.00 (27¢ a day)

\$200.00 (54¢ a day)

Other _____

Lake Association

\$50.00 (1-50 members)

\$100.00 (50-100 members)

\$150.00 (151-300 members)

\$200.00 (300+ members)

As we call on you to advise/discuss issues and events that are relevant to your particular seasonal property locale, it is important that you complete all this information. Since MSRPO is a lobbying organization, according to IRS rules your contribution is not tax deductible.