

# Aitkin County Land Department Sets Standard for Environmental Responsibility

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## CASE STUDY: CERTIFICATION IN MINNESOTA

In 1997, the Aitkin County Land Department (ACLD), a public land manager in Northern Minnesota, became an environmental leader in the United States forestry community by obtaining Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification through the SmartWood program, an FSC accredited certification body.

The FSC began in 1993, offering certification as a way for the land managers and forest products industries to demonstrate a commitment to responsible forest management practices. The FSC seal of approval offers a way for these companies and organizations to establish environmental credibility by verifying that they use sustainable practices that comply with local and national regulations, and also meet the voluntary standards of the FSC.

Aitkin County's nearly 223,000 acres of land were first certified in 1997, and with its five-year renewal in 2002, Aitkin reaffirmed a commitment to the kinds of practices that made it a leader among public land managers.



**Responsible practices allow forests like these to prosper and retain their biodiversity.**

The ACLD frequently offers information sessions and workshops to provide education to others interested in their forest management practices and the FSC program. In addition, Aitkin has extended its environmental responsibility by

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creating programs designed to consider the specific concerns of endangered species and provide alternative management possibilities for various kinds of forest communities.

In recent years, certified wood had gained additional credibility in the marketplace, as major corporations give preference for certified products and create procurement programs that differentiate suppliers. The Home Depot and Lowe's include a variety of certified products as part of their regular stock. The increased market demand offers economic credibility to certification practices, lends hope for the future and increases the possibility that more land managers and forest products companies will participate in certification programs and responsible forest management practices. By adopting these practices and establishing a policy of environmental sustainability, the ACLD sets a high standard of excellence.

They also place themselves in a position to take advantage of the growing markets for certified products. In addition, the ACLD has developed a working relationship with environmental organizations and gained credibility as a group that utilizes responsible management practices to create an industry in which the interests of the economy find a balance with that of ecology and conservation.

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