

Aitkin County's Bat Man

Mark Jacobs would likely cringe if you compared him to Bat Man. The Aitkin County Land Commissioner, who oversees the present and future health of 220,000 acres of tax-forfeited land, does not bear resemblance to the fictional superhero who first appeared in American comic books in 1939.

But maybe, upon second thought, there might be some resemblance. Bat Man, who has also been called the "Crusader" and "The World's Greatest Detective," has committed himself to fighting crime. Unlike most superheroes, however, Bat Man does not possess any superpowers; he makes use of intellect, detective skills, science and technology, and an indomitable will in his continuous war to make things right.

Mark Jacobs is a bit of a Bat Man, The land commissioner and his staff ensure that the extensive woodlands in Aitkin County are healthy and growing in a manner that will provide timber and recreation activities like hiking, snowmobiling, ski trails, ATV, campgrounds, and geo-caching for citizens of future generations. They do it, not through any superpowers, but rather through the application of their professional training and science and technology, topped off by their passionate desire to 'make things right' in the state's woodlands.

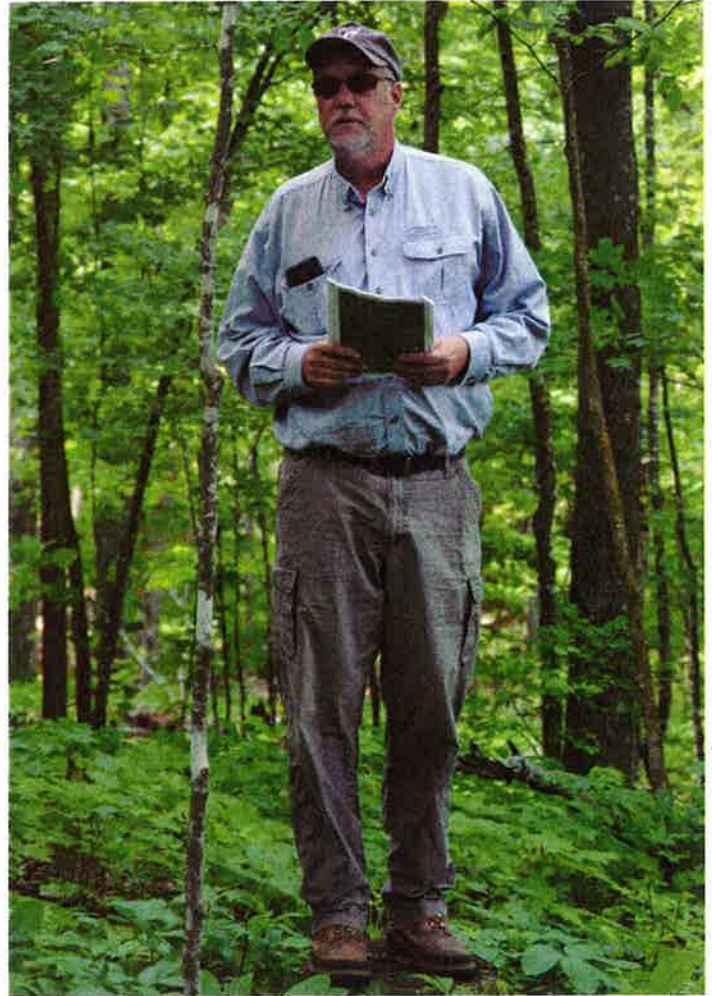
Aitkin County has 700,000 acres of timberland. That is more than five entire states have. The county is leading the way for clean air with its filtering system of trees. (And thankfully so: it has more miles of the Mississippi River than any other county in Minnesota - 103 miles.)

Perhaps this is where one can legitimately say the Superhero Jacobs makes his entrance. Mark has been relentless in his pursuit of educating both his colleagues, the public, and federal wildlife officials about the management of forests - and particularly as that management relates to one tiny little resident species in those county woodlands, among other places in the state: the northern long-eared bat.

The northern long-eared bat is a species of bats most impacted by a disease called 'white-nose syndrome.' Due to declines caused by white-nose syndrome as well as continued spread of the disease, the bat received protection by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. (ESA)

At the same time, the Service issued an interim special rule that eliminates unnecessary regulatory requirements for landowners, land managers, government agencies and others in the range of the northern long-eared bat. The final 4(d) rule will be finalized by the end of the calendar year.

White-nose syndrome was first discovered in the winter of 2006-2007, and has decimated many cave-hibernating bat populations in the Northeast. Since that time the disease or the fungus that causes it has spread to 28 of the 37 states. However, there are other activi-



Aitkin County's Land Commissioner: "Bat Man" Mark Jacobs.

ties considered secondary threats that may harm or kill northern long-eared bats. These activities include: cave/mine modifications, human disturbance in roosts and hibernation areas, forest habitat modification, and wind power development.

Now that the northern long-eared bat is listed under the ESA, incidental take of a bat while conducting any of these otherwise lawful activities would be prohibited without a permit or authorization. However, a 4(d) rule allows the Service to avoid regulating activities that may benefit the species or cause only limited amounts of take. This would then allow the Service and our partners to focus on actions that are most important to conserving northern long-eared bats.

Forestry colleagues from throughout Minnesota, including public and private agencies and private forest landowners, have united to share their knowledge and expertise on the management of Minnesota's forests with the USFWS, as well as with those who are concerned about the species and who may or may not un-

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Public and private forestry colleagues, University of Minnesota staff, timber harvesters, and county and state forest management officials responded to an invitation from Aitkin County to spend a day in the field in early June to discuss Minnesota forest management as it relates to the long-eared bat.

derstand how Minnesota's forests are managed via "bat-friendly forestry," and other management applications.

Bat Friendly Forestry, promulgated by Mark and his staff is that 'it's not what you take . . . (from the woods), it's what you leave behind. Things like cavity trees and snags. It means conducting forestry activities that provide diverse forest structure, canopy gaps for bat foraging, prudent harvesting during the bats' roosting season, and monitoring and documenting what is going on and what is being 'left behind.' In summary, it's forest management that is bat friendly.



UPM Blandin Forester Beth Jacquain discusses woodland management principles and terminology with Jill Ultrup of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Twin Cities Field Office.

and 'why' of forest management in Minnesota and alternatives to protecting bat habitat needs.

For more information, go to this Web site:

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/ endangered/mammals/nlba/>

It's not a comic book, but it will tell you a lot about the issues for, and the reasons why Aitkin County's Bat Man is continuous in his commitment to making things right for Minnesota's forests and for the northern long-eared bat.

The Wisconsin NRCS is also emphasizing warbler habitat.

"But the EFI covers only Minnesota. There is almost \$800,000 of EFI set aside here just to do forestry and forest wildlife-related practices. We're hoping to target young forest habitat for the GWW if we find enough interested landowners," Bomier said. The agency also hopes to benefit game species as well, such as woodcock because it is declining, but also white tailed deer, ruffed grouse and neotropicals such as black and white warblers and rose-breasted grosbeaks.

In the new Farm Bill, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the NRCS's parent agency, consolidated its conservation easement programs under the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP). ACEP makes available up to \$366 million to state and local governments, Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations such as RGS and private landowners. The new **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)** empowers USDA to seek partners to leverage a variety of financial resources for the protection of eight critical conservation areas, including areas that hold ruffed grouse and woodcock in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, Mississippi River Basin and the Great Lakes Region.

To start a NRCS partnership on your land, go online to USDA to identify and call your nearest USDA/NRCS office. Have a conservationist come out to see the property, explain to him/her your goals and get a Conservation Activity or similar plan for which there is assistance.

"This is a great opportunity. The time has never been better for landowners to get professional resource advice and money to get wildlife habitat projects implemented to benefit a variety of species," Bomier said. "We don't want to let these programs sit on the shelf and collect dust, so please call us."

During an early May trip to my property to turkey hunt (in which I bagged a nice 22 pound gobbler), the grouse were drumming regularly and the woodcock only reluctantly abandoned their 'sky dancing' grounds as I passed on the many trails leading to and fro.

It was a good feeling knowing that I was giving back for all they have given me over the years.