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Assessing Forest Parcelization and Development Activity: An Itasca County Case Study

Michael Kilgore¹
Stephanie Snyder²
Steven J. Taff³
Joseph Mundell¹

In 2005, the Minnesota Forest Resources Council identified forest land parcelization, defined as the division of larger blocks of forest land into smaller blocks with multiple owners, as the single most important policy issue affecting the economic and ecological health of the state's forests. Research has shown that a decrease in the size of forest land parcels can lead to a decrease in the economic viability of managing forests for wood products, a decrease in the management of and investment in forest management activities on the part of nonindustrial private forest landowners, as well as adverse impacts on wildlife habitat, water quality, and outdoor recreation opportunities and access. To address this issue, we developed a methodology for utilizing statewide real estate parcel data to assess forest land parcelization and development activity over time. Using this methodology, we empirically quantified the extent and location of forest parcelization activity in Itasca County, Minnesota from 1999-2006. In addition to describing the intensity and spatial location of forest land parcelization in Itasca County, this assessment also characterized the nature of parcelization activity by describing buyer and seller and tract characteristics, and evaluated the extent to which this parcelization is related to development and evaluate the temporal relationship between the two. Major findings of this research will be presented.

Contact Information:

Michael Kilgore
Department of Forest Resources
University of Minnesota
Room 301K Green Hall
1530 N. Cleveland Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55108
Phone: (612) 624-6298
Email: mkilgore@umn.edu

¹ Department of Forest Resources, University of Minnesota

² USDA-Forest Service, Northern Research Station

³ Department of Applied Economics, University of Minnesota