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Iowa Forest Protects Critical Bird Habitat Yellow River Area Forest is the First in Iowa to be FSC Certified

Minneapolis – A 77-acre forest in northeast Iowa is the first in the state to be certified under international Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) management standards for its protection of native vegetation and ecologically important wildlife, including rare bird species. The project will be highlighted at a land-owner workshop on May 29 at the Yellow River State Forest.

The critical bird habitat is found on forest land situated within the Driftless Area Landscape Region, which includes northeast Iowa, southeast Minnesota and southwest Wisconsin. The Driftless region supports an unusually large number of threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Mississippi River tributaries like the Yellow River provide vital migration corridors for more than half of North America's bird species.

Northeast Iowa is home to a number of rapidly declining bird species including the rare cerulean warbler, red-shouldered hawk and red-headed woodpecker. The Important Bird Area Program (IBA) works to limit habitat loss and degradation, including sites for breeding, wintering and/or migrating birds. The IBA for northeast Iowa covers the Effigy Mounds Yellow River Forest area—totaling 135,000 acres—making it the largest unfragmented forest in Iowa.

Much of this important forestland is privately owned. This spring, 77 acres in the area owned by Iowan Jack Knight became the first in the state to achieve FSC certification, under an FSC group certificate held by the Community Forestry Resource Center at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). Knight is a member of Prairie's Edge Sustainable Woods Co-op, which has 88 members in northeast Iowa. FSC is an independent, standards-based certification system that ensures forestry is practiced in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable way. In this case, FSC certification verifies that Knight's forest management ensures the protection of this important bird habitat, including its ecology and soils and native vegetation.

"My goal all along was to maximize the forest cover, maintain some of the older trees, harvest a small percentage of the growth and increase the already diverse set of species here," said Knight. "In addition, I am starting a seed tree collection of the even rarer native species near the northern edge of their ranges. Through FSC certification I will be able to sell wood to people who appreciate and recognize the lifetime of tree planting, tree hugging and tree cutting I have accomplished and plan to continue."

"Forestry is often focused just on trees to produce lumber, but it is much more than that," said Don Arnosti, director of IATP's Forestry program. "Jack's forest management is a model for what Iowa's landowners can do to protect wildlife and native plants while still growing trees for lumber."

Learn more about how private landowners can help Iowa's birds at a May 29 workshop titled, "Bird Conservation Practices in Forests on Private Lands." The workshop will be held at the Yellow River State Forest, 729 State Forest Road, Harpers Ferry, IA. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m., with programs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. A \$10 registration fee covers coffee, refreshments and lunch. The workshop is hosted by Audubon's Mississippi River Initiative, IATP and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Speakers include resource conservation managers Bruce Blair, Greg Schmitt, Connie Rose, Gigi La Budde and Jon Stravers. Find out more about the workshop by contacting Jon Stravers: 563-886-8046 or hawk@acegroup.cc.

Learn more about IATP's Community Forestry Resource Center at: www.forestrycenter.org.

IATP has Forest Stewardship Council certification from the Rainforest Alliance SmartWood Program. Our certification code is: (SW-FM/COC-000247)

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