



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wisconsin “Forests FIRST” Project Aims to Strengthen our State’s Forest Products Industry Health and Economic Future

Wisconsin's forest products industry is integral to our state's environment, economy, and quality of life. To ensure that this important element of Wisconsin's heritage continues to thrive for future generations, a coalition of forest products industry stakeholders is taking a major step forward with the launch of **Wisconsin Forests FIRST** (Forest Industry Roadmap and Strategies for Tomorrow).

Wisconsin Forests FIRST is a statewide initiative created to develop a strategic plan and roadmap to ensure our forests remain healthy and to promote a resilient, sustainable, and competitive forest products industry.

This coalition effort is supported with a \$1 million state grant from the forestry account, which received bi-partisan support and was signed into law by Governor Evers. Currently in the initial planning stages, the project’s overarching goal is to examine Wisconsin’s forest products industry and its role to support and enhance the state’s ecological, social and economic well-being. The “Forests FIRST” project will develop a strategic roadmap designed to ensure that healthy forests and a healthy forest products industry will remain viable for future generations.

The first-of-its-kind project is scheduled to be completed by December of 2027.

The state grant was awarded to the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLTPA) which will administer the funding. GLTPA will work in coordination with the Wisconsin Paper Council (WPC) and the Council on Forestry (COF) to develop the overall strategic planning and deliver a final roadmap report to the Legislature and the Governor by December 2027.

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GLTPA, WPC and COF will partner with a broad coalition of industry, state and community stakeholders to identify forest products industry challenges and workable solutions.

Wisconsin's forest products industry represents over 11 percent of the state's total manufacturing jobs and contributes \$42 billion annually to the economy. Forests and the industry are deeply interconnected: a healthy forest products industry supports sustainable forest management, while well-managed forests sustain the industry. Together, they provide clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities, supporting nearly \$11 billion in outdoor recreation each year.

Rapid changes in global markets, mill closures, and evolving technologies have created new challenges for forest dependent communities. At the same time, emerging innovations such as laminated timber, fuels derived from wood, biochar, cutting edge wood fiber research, and advanced packaging materials are opening new exciting opportunities for growth for the entire industry and supply chain.

Other states are already moving to attract new investment and develop long term strategies for their forest sectors. **Wisconsin Forests FIRST** will ensure that Wisconsin remains competitive by bringing together industry leaders to develop practical solutions that sustain existing businesses and position the state to lead in new and emerging markets opportunities.

The **Wisconsin Forests FIRST** coalition is currently developing a landing page which will provide updates to interested parties as the project progresses. For more information contact Tom Hittle at hittle.tomj@gmail.com.

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