

Tiny Unsung State Agency Contributes to Timber Economy: Part of Constitutional Mission

By Tia Nelson



Forty-year veteran BCPL forester Jim Pietila, now retired, scales white birch logs at a timber sale in Oneida County.

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The agency I manage on behalf of the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL) is a very small player among Wisconsin timberland owners. The holdings of private landowners as well as county, state and federal governments dwarf the nearly 77,000 acres we hold in trust for the people of Wisconsin.

Still, we like to think of ourselves as a strategic contributor to the timber industry.

I spent much of 2012 touring sawmills, visiting with paper mill operators and learning from timber producers across northern Wisconsin. As a result, my staff and I have an even deeper appreciation of the enormous challenges facing the industry and how important our land management decisions can be.

Timber, Jobs and Public Access

Sometimes our agency's strategy to consolidate the patchwork of Trust Lands to improve management efficiency and increase public access produces unanticipated benefits in the local economy. Our acquisition of 480 acres of well-managed, high-quality hardwood from Kretz Lumber Company serves as a great example.

The purchase gave the BCPL a much more valuable hardwood resource in Langlade County, including an excellent logging road network and management infrastructure located adjacent to an all-weather highway. It also provided access to previously land-locked parcels and created a valuable opportunity for future consolidation of two important timber blocks. Finally, the purchase maintained excellent public access to a diverse forest area by protecting it from the threat of fragmentation.

Meanwhile, when the Antigo-based hardwood lumber mill received fair market value for its land during the depths of the recession, it was able to tap additional sources of income, maintain its operations and save local jobs.

Results of Land Bank Authority

Back in 2006, a unanimous legislature granted the BCPL "land bank authority." Without it, we could only acquire new land through cumbersome exchanges with property owners willing to trade. For the last six years, we have been able to "bank" proceeds of land sales for future acquisitions to generate greater timber revenue, prevent forest fragmentation, improve public access, and protect water quality and wildlife habitat. The BCPL's Land Bank purchase of 1,360 wooded acres from Wausau Timberland Company was a great opportunity to do just that.

The agency already owned 1,000 acres of productive timberland adjacent

to Wausau's contiguous block of forest with good concentrations of aspen, white spruce and hardwood pulp timber. With the purchase, the BCPL can offer more economically viable timber volumes within a consolidated block – and with critical road access from the south. This new tract stretches from BCPL's former southern border all the way to County Highway A in the town of Sugar Camp in Oneida County. This new road access simplifies land management and improves public access.

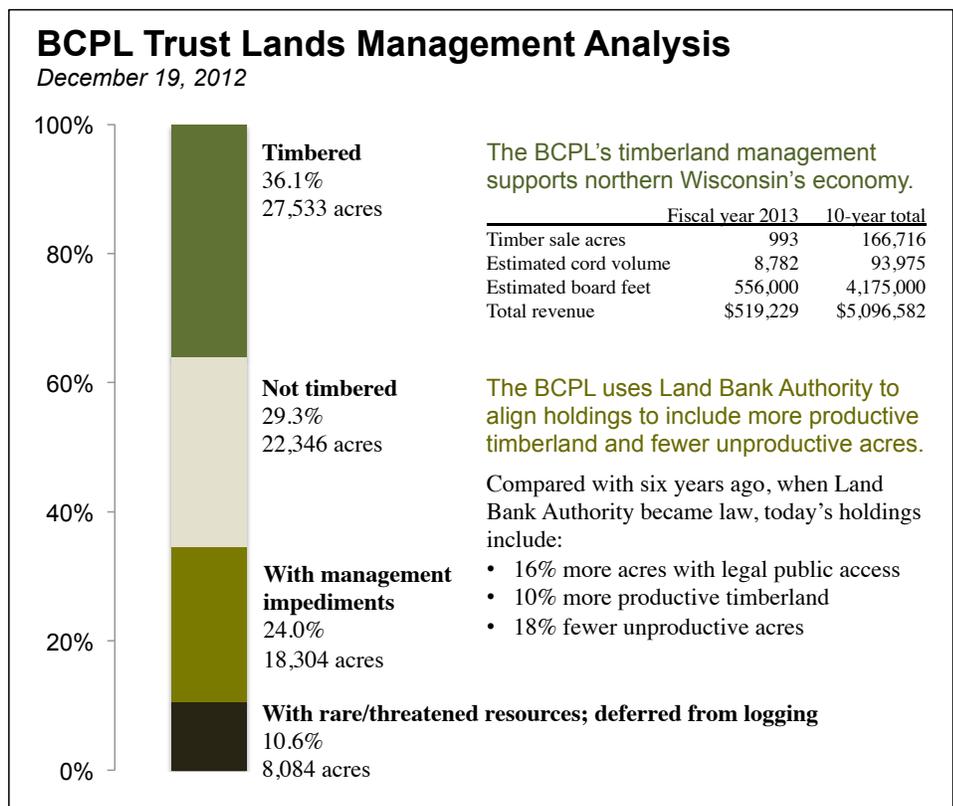
Blocking Wausau Timberland's acreage with the BCPL's holdings to the north and DNR holdings to the east also diminishes the threat of forest fragmentation and the subsequent loss of forest cover, while ensuring a long-term supply of raw material to local mills.

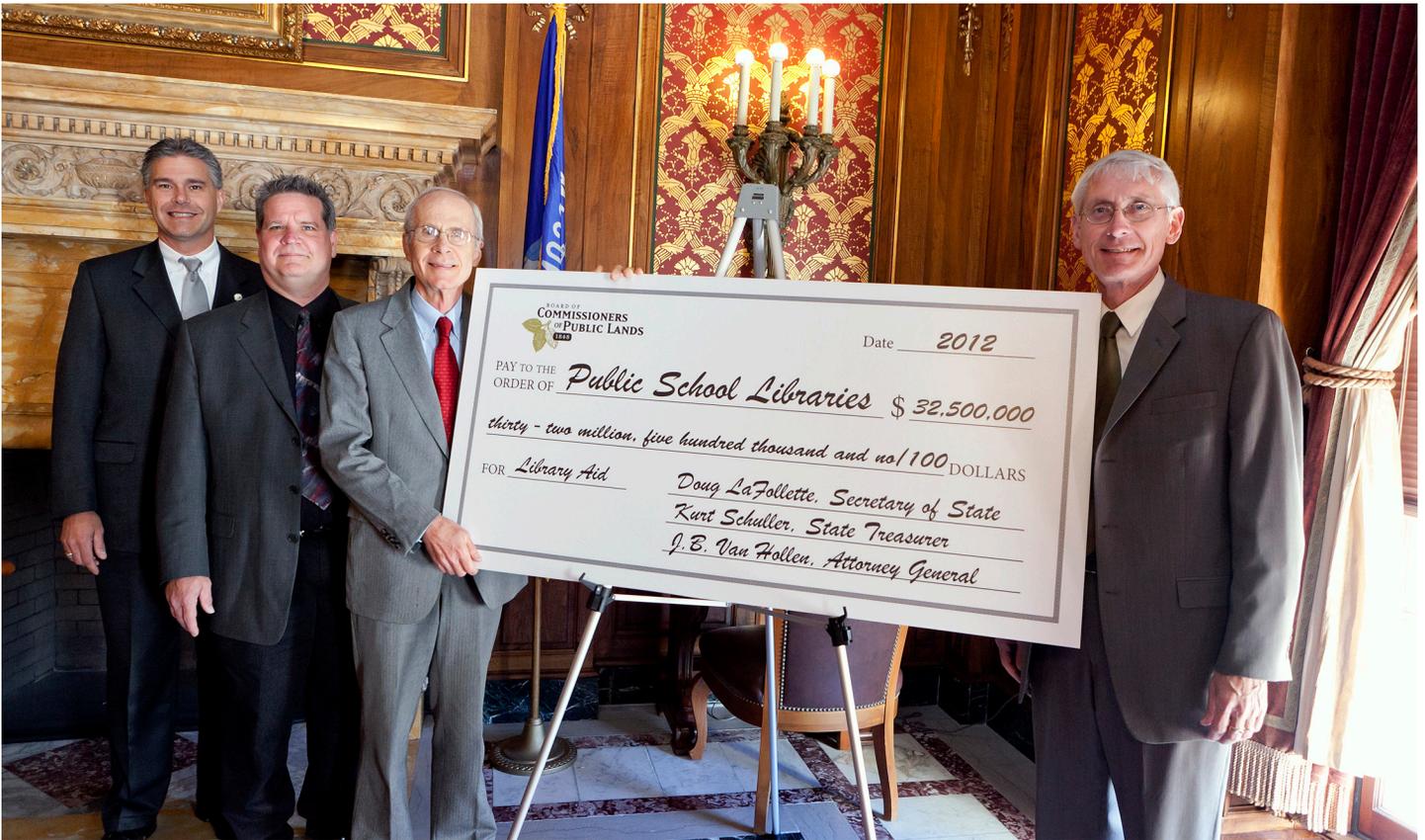
The Full Impact

The best way to see the impact of land bank authority is to compare today's Trust Lands with those held in 2006:

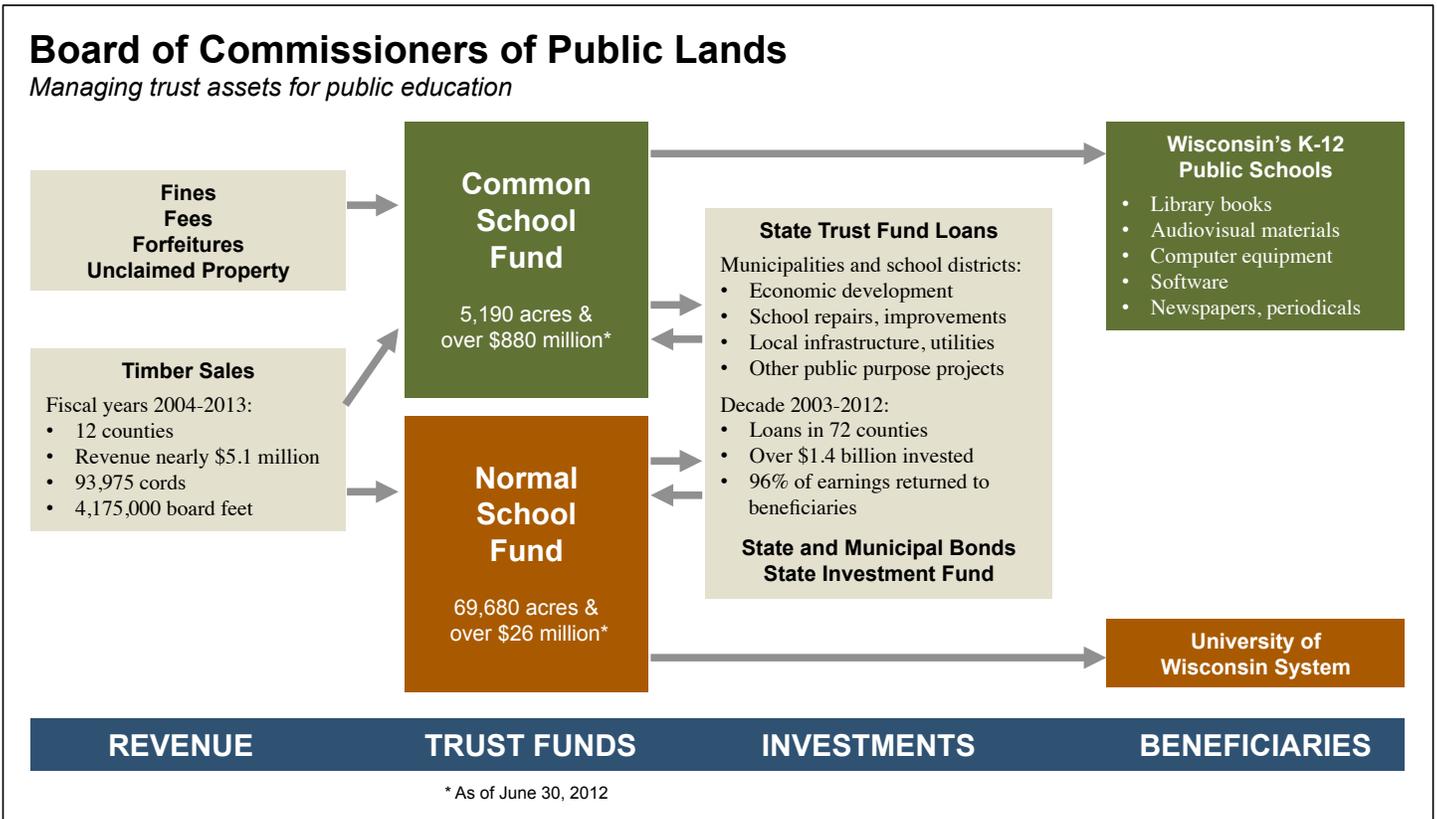
- 16% more acres with legal public access
- 10% more productive timberland
- 18% fewer unproductive acres

By acquiring productive timberlands from industrial sellers and managing sustainable timber harvests of 75 percent to 85 percent of net growth on all our lands managed for timber, we keep working forests working. By improving public access, we keep these lands available for hunting, fishing, trapping and other outdoor recreation opportunities, which in turn support the area's tourism industry. And by making payments in lieu of taxes ("PILT") at the previous owner's property tax rate for properties acquired with land bank authority, we help to pay for local government services.





J. B. Van Hollen, Commissioner and Attorney General; Kurt Schuller, Commissioner and State Treasurer; and Doug LaFollette, Board Chair and Secretary of State present Common School Fund earnings totaling \$32.5 million to Tony Evers, State Superintendent, Department of Public Instruction.—Photo courtesy of Ting-Li Wang, WI State Legislature



But land management is only one small part of our agency's story, and only one small way we support communities around the state.

Constitutional Stewardship Using No Tax Dollars

The BCPL was established in 1848 to accept millions of acres of land granted by the federal government to the new state of Wisconsin for various public purposes. Most of these lands have since been sold to create principal in the State Trust Funds, the largest of which is the Common School Fund.

As specified in Article X of the Wisconsin Constitution, earnings of this fund are exclusively used to support and maintain common schools (now known as K-12 public schools) and "the purchase of suitable libraries and apparatus therefor." The Common School Fund continues to grow through the addition of "clear proceeds" of all fines, fees and forfeitures that accrue to the state, including unclaimed property.

We invest most of the Common School Fund principal in loans to municipalities and school districts through the State Trust Fund Loan Program. Over the past 10 years more than \$1.4 billion in State Trust Fund Loans has been used to spur economic development, improve roads, bridges and schools, purchase snow plows, ambulances and other public safety equipment and finance other public purpose projects in all 72 Wisconsin counties.



As specified in Article X of the Wisconsin Constitution, earnings of the Common School Fund are exclusively used to support and maintain common schools (now known as K-12 public schools) and "the purchase of suitable libraries and apparatus therefor." For many schools, this is their sole source of library aid.

ATTENTION DEER HUNTERS



The Wisconsin Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL) invites hunters to visit our property this deer season.

The BCPL manages nearly 80,000 acres of School Trust Lands, primarily located in nine northern Wisconsin counties. All BCPL Trust Lands are open for hunting, fishing, trapping, and public recreation. Many parcels have a high concentration of deer, which adversely affects our ability to regenerate some important timber species due to excessive deer browsing.

To locate a BCPL parcel near you, visit our website at <http://bcpl.wisconsin.gov> and click "BCPL Ownership Maps" under "Quick Links" on the home page. You may also call our office in Lake Tomahawk at (715) 277-3366 for answers to any questions you may have about BCPL's School Trust Lands. Forestry staff is frequently in the field so please allow 24 hours for a reply to your call.

These lands have been held in trust for the benefit of public education since Wisconsin gained statehood in 1848. Please treat them respectfully.

We wish you a safe and successful hunting season.

Permanent hunting structures are prohibited on BCPL Trust Lands. ATVs are allowed on designated trails only.



District Office
7271 Main Street
Lake Tomahawk, WI 54539
(715) 277-3366



Oneida County alone has benefitted from nearly \$5.5 million in State Trust Fund Loans since 2008. Cassian's town hall, Woodruff's plow and fire trucks and the ABX development in Rhinelander are just three examples.

The BCPL has been making general obligation loans through this program since 1871 without experiencing a single default. But what really sets us apart is that over 96 percent of all interest paid on State Trust Fund Loans is returned to Wisconsin communities in the form of aid to public school libraries.

In 2012, these library aids totaled \$32.5 million.

Tiny Agency, Big Impact

The BCPL also maintains an extensive archive of documents and maps relating to the original Public Land Survey of Wisconsin and to lands granted to the state by the federal government.

We manage nearly a billion dollars of assets, invest in communities in every corner of the state, and support public education with only eight full-time staff and no tax dollars. ■

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