



Blandin Foundation™  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

## Blandin Foundation awards \$7.7 million in grants

Joins broad effort to keep 188,000 acres in Itasca County in working forests forever

GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. (March 31, 2008) – Blandin Foundation trustees approved \$7,752,500 in grants during their March 26-27 meeting, including for forest conservation in Itasca County, implementation of a regional community branding initiative and continued support for local early childhood initiatives. Trustees also made several decisions that will shape Foundation activity in upcoming years related to community leadership development and forestry initiatives.

In action related to governance, trustees seated a new chairwoman, Marian Barcus of Grand Rapids. Barcus recently retired as division manager for Itasca County Health and Human Services in Family and Children Services, had been mayor of Cohasset, and chaired the board of directors of Itasca Economic Development Corporation. She succeeds George Thompson of Rochester, Minn., who had led the board for three years.

In grant-related action, trustees approved a \$7 million grant to The Conservation Fund, one of the largest in the Foundation's history, to help secure the **Upper Mississippi Forest** conservation easement. "This easement will permanently keep intact 188,000 acres of forest lands owned by UPM/Blandin Paper Company (no longer related to Blandin Foundation), contributing to regional wood supply, ensuring public access for recreation and protecting a critical Mississippi River watershed by stitching together 4,000 square miles of public land," said Wade Fauth, Blandin Foundation grants director.

The Upper Mississippi Forest project is a collaborative effort of dozens of local, state and national partners that aims to raise the funds, estimated to be \$48 million, to purchase a conservation easement from the company and to be managed by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The Foundation's grant is contingent on the Minnesota legislature approving the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council's recommendations to fund the balance of the costs.

"The Foundation views this as an opportunity of epic dimensions," said Jim Hoolihan, Blandin Foundation president. "It is especially important to us because of the project's direct tie to the legacy of our founder and former Blandin Paper Company owner, Charles K. Blandin, and the deep impact these lands have on Itasca County."

"This decision by the trustees to make a special distribution comes at a time when financial resources are admittedly stretched," said Marian Barcus, chairwoman of the Blandin Foundation board of trustees.

"The Upper Mississippi Forest project, however, is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help ensure the viability of the region's woodbasket, the very resource that built the paper mill, the Foundation, and this community's way of life—no matter what happens in the future. We're investing in an asset that will be here, contributing to local communities, forever—and we think that's a very good investment."

"The Blandin Foundation's commitment to the Upper Mississippi Forest project is the largest private donation for a conservation project ever made in this state," said Tom Duffus, upper Midwest director of the The Conservation Fund, facilitator of the easement project. "More than 3,200 families rely on this land and its wood supply for their livelihoods and hundreds of others make a living in related businesses. Plus, the conservation easement will keep nearly 275 square miles of Itasca County land open for enjoyment by all and permanently protect forest habitats, creating a legacy that will live forever."

Other grants approved by trustees included \$25,000 per year for two years to **Depot Commons** to implement the research and recommendations resulting from a Grand Rapids and Itasca County branding initiative. The grant will be used to hire a brand manager to work with organizations and businesses in the Grand Rapids/Itasca County area to leverage the communities' new "It's in Minnesota's Nature™" brand.

**Remer** and **Hill City school districts** each will receive \$150,000 in grants over two years to build on their communities' early childhood investments, including training for educators, parents and childcare providers and enhanced work in reading and math.

In program-related action, the Blandin Foundation Board of Trustees accepted a \$425,000 grant from leadership-focused, St. Paul-based Bush Foundation to extend the work of the Blandin Community Leadership Program, adding four additional BCLP workshops in 2009.

"The impressive history of the Blandin Community Leadership Program makes it a natural partner for the Bush Foundation when it comes to leadership development and engaging communities in solving problems," said Peter C. Hutchinson, president. "Such work is at the core of our mission. We expect to learn a lot in this new partnership with the Blandin Foundation. And we have great expectations for the deep impact the combined work of the two foundations will have on the people and communities we serve."

The board also agreed to sunset the Foundation's successful and nationally acclaimed Vital Forests/Vital Communities public policy initiative. Originally designed to have a three- to five-year lifespan, Vital Forests/Vital Communities now is in its sixth year. It was created to promote the connection between a healthy forest-based economy, healthy forest ecosystems and healthy communities. The Foundation has invested more than \$8 million and significant staff resources to initiative goals, and now has approved a capstone grant of \$7 million for the potential Upper Mississippi Forest easement.

Note to editor: A full listing of all Foundation grants awarded at the March 2009 board meeting is attached and is posted on the Foundation's web site: [www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org).

Blandin Foundation, Minnesota's largest rural-based private foundation is located in Grand Rapids, Minn. Its mission is to strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area, through grants, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives.

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## Blandin Foundation grants approved in March 2009

The Blandin Foundation Board of Trustees approved grants totaling \$7,752,500 at its March 2009 meeting. Of the total grants awarded, 98 percent was for the Grand Rapids and Itasca County area.

**Leadership Development Grants** – Grants that assist a community in identifying and mobilizing its economic assets.

Organization	Grant Award
Depot Commons – for support of the Youth Leadership for Vital Communities initiative in Itasca County	\$12,500
	<b>Total \$12,500</b>

**Rural Voice Grants** – Grants to help rural residents be their own voice through supporting new and existing avenues to express the rural perspective in local and statewide policy debates.

Organization	Grant Award
Minnesota Public Radio – for continued support of delivering news programming to rural communities throughout Minnesota	\$125,000
	<b>Total \$125,000</b>

**Educational Attainment Grants** – Grants to support rural communities in strengthening the educational attainment of disadvantaged groups.

Organization	Grant Award
Grand Rapids School District—to develop an Itasca area resource library, parent support group for gifted and talented students and	\$15,000

a multi-district symposium to help Itasca area staff understand the needs of gifted and talented students.	
Remer School District—continued operations of the Northland Early Childhood Collaborative	\$150,000/2 years
Hill City School District—continued operations of the Hill City Early Start program	\$150,000/2 years
	<b>Total \$315,000</b>

**Economic Opportunity Grants/Investment**—Awards that assist Grand Rapids/Itasca area communities or statewide rural initiatives to identify and mobilize economic assets.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Grant Award</b>
Depot Commons Association—project support to implement the Community Branding effort in the Itasca County area	\$50,000/2 years
The Conservation Fund—project support for the Outdoor Heritage Fund in Itasca County	\$7,000,000
	<b>Total \$7,050,000</b>

**Fairness and Opportunity**—Grants toward social justice initiatives, especially those that address root causes.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Grant Award</b>
Itasca County Family YMCA—Operating support for the senior and youth center at the YMCA in Grand Rapids	\$100,000/2 years
Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation—for continued support of the Itasca County Sharing Fund including the communities of Hill City, Remer, Northome and Blackduck	\$150,000/2 years
	<b>\$250,000</b>

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