

Balsam Bough Partnership

The Challenge

Special or “Non-Timber” Forest Products (SFP) such as balsam boughs for decorative wreaths are gaining in importance to rural economies.

One of the most important specialty products in Minnesota is the balsam bough. Approximately 4,000 tons of boughs are harvested annually from Minnesota forests and made into wreaths and garland for use during the Christmas holiday season. Balsam bough wreaths and decoratives are a \$23 million plus annual industry in Minnesota. The industry employs thousands of people, many on a seasonal basis.

Bough harvest takes place on all land ownerships. The harvest had been somewhat loosely regulated by permit on public ownerships and was largely unregulated on private lands until approximately 12 years ago. Serious concerns about resource and industry sustainability began to emerge.

The Solution

In response to resource sustainability concerns about 12 years ago, the Balsam Bough Partnership (Partnership) was formed through the efforts of industry representatives and government land managers. Membership is voluntary, and consists largely of these same industry members and government land managers. The purpose of the Partnership is to promote sustainable harvest of the bough resource in order to maintain the resource and industry long-term. Through educational efforts, this group and its members have promoted the adoption of sustainable harvesting techniques. Through legislative efforts, selling and transport of boughs is now regulated by a license required of bough buyers. Through resource assessment efforts, the condition of the resource and industry’s impact on it is now much better understood.



A Minnesota balsam bough wreath

Resulting Benefits

The Partnership has improved both forest and rural economic health by:

- Cooperating on an assessment of sustainability of the balsam bough resource and industry in Minnesota. The study was funded by several grants from the USDA Forest Service.
- Educational materials have been produced and distributed, including fact sheets, brochures and a video to promote sustainable harvesting techniques among harvesters.
- A licensing system for buyers of balsam boughs has been established, helping to improve available information about the industry and also to promote sustainable harvest among buyers and harvesters.

Sharing Success

The report of the industry and resource assessment is available online at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/um/index.html>
Although the study focuses on Minnesota only, it is hoped that applications could be used in other states with a balsam bough resource.

“The Balsam Bough Partnership has been a model of industry and government cooperation to address resource sustainability concerns”

– Keith Jacobson, Forest Product Utilization Program Leader, Minnesota D