



**Public Briefing Paper for
FSC® Forest Management Certification Re-Assessment of
Aitkin County Land Department
in
Aitkin, Minnesota, USA
January 16, 2023**

Introduction – Preferred by Nature is conducting Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®) Forest Management and Chain of Custody certification re-assessments of Aitkin County Land Department with an office located in Aitkin, Minnesota. Aitkin County Land Department has been certified by Preferred by Nature (formerly NEPCo) since 1997 (NC-FM/COC-000028). The re-assessment includes forest in Aitkin County totaling approximately 90,866 hectares. The re-assessment will begin on February 28th, 2023.

Scope of the Certification Re-Assessment – The forest management certification re-assessment will assess the environmental, silvicultural, and socioeconomic aspects of the certified forests managed by Aitkin County Land Department, using the *FSC-US Forest Management Standard (v1.1)*. To obtain a copy of these guidelines, please visit the FSC-US website (at <https://us.fsc.org/en-us/certification/forest-management-certification>) or contact Preferred by Nature directly by telephone, fax, or e-mail as listed below. Preferred by Nature is accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council™ (FSC®)¹ and this re-assessment process must follow procedures which have been approved by the FSC.

Re-Assessment Team Composition – The re-assessment will be conducted by:

- Geoff Morris, Lead Auditor, Forestry.
- Charles Levesque, Forestry; Socio-economic

Re-assessment Steps and Schedule – Following is a short description of the certification process and a tentative agenda:

- ◆ Re-assessment organization – The Preferred by Nature auditors and Aitkin County Land Department staff will meet at Aitkin County Land Department's office in Aitkin County on February 28th, 2023.
- ◆ Field assessments – The auditors will visit sites managed by Aitkin County Land Department that are included in the scope of the certificate from February 28, to March 1, 2023.
- ◆ Re-assessment briefing – Prior to departure, the auditors will meet with Aitkin County Land Department managers and other parties to finalize their data collection and present preliminary findings.
- ◆ Stakeholder consultation – The auditors will conduct interviews with stakeholders prior to, during, and after the re-assessment.

¹ FSC® A000535

- ◆ Draft report production – The auditors will produce a confidential draft report that will be circulated for comment to Aitkin County Land Department. This should occur 45 days after completion of the re-assessment field work.
- ◆ Certification decision – Upon receipt of comments on the draft report from Aitkin County Land Department and other general stakeholder comments, Preferred by Nature will reach a certification decision. Barring unforeseen obstacles, this should occur by April 21, 2023.

Your Input Sought – As a part of the forest certification re-assessment process we invite stakeholders to offer comment and feedback on Aitkin County Land Department’s forest management in relation to conformance with the requirements of the forest management standard referenced above. We welcome input, either public or confidential, in whatever form is easiest and most secure for you. Your input will be valuable at any stage of the re-assessment process, but we would prefer to receive your comments either prior to the re-assessment, during the re-assessment, or prior to February 28th, 2023, so that we can take them into consideration in reaching a certification decision by April 21, 2023. Your options for communicating your observations to us are as follows:

1. Meet with the Preferred by Nature audit team during or shortly after the fieldwork.
2. Call and give comments to Geoff Morris, the Preferred by Nature staff person responsible for coordinating this certification re-assessment.
3. Submit written comments by mail, or email to Geoff Morris. Unless you request otherwise, these comments will be kept confidential and are solely for the purposes of auditing Aitkin County Land Department as described in this briefing.

Contacting Preferred by Nature

Geoff Morris, Forestry Specialist, Task Manager and Lead Auditor

- ◆ Email: gmorris@preferredbynature.org
- ◆ Website: www.preferredbynature.org
- ◆ Telephone: 715-790-8795
- ◆ Mailing address: 4618 Twilight Lane, Eau Claire WI 54703, USA

The source of any information provided will be kept confidential and will be available to only the FSC and Preferred by Nature staff.

Stakeholders who may wish to dispute any aspect of the forest certification process or decision can access Preferred by Nature’s Complaints, Appeals and Dispute resolution procedures at <https://preferredbynature.org/certification/fsc/complaints-and-resolutions>.