

# PROPOSED WHITE EARTH STATE FOREST LAND TRANSFER

[insert date]

Dear [insert name of person to whom email is being sent]:

I am writing to you to protest Minnesota legislative bills that have been proposed in the House “Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee” - HF3783 & HF4304 **AND** in the Senate Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee - SF3480 & SF3557. It is my understanding that the bills have not been carefully drafted, do not adequately address the real issues, and will unnecessarily result in additional land problems. For these reasons, the bills should be tabled in committee for the remainder of the legislative session.

[insert brief introduction of yourself, for example: “I have been a property owner on Bad Medicine Lake in Forest Township, Becker County within the White Earth State Forest since [insert date]. During that time, my family and I have enjoyed time together at our lake property and participating in recreational activities within the White Earth State Forest. The proposed legislation will put our future at risk. We want you to table the proposed legislation until the public has been fully informed of its impacts and, if the legislation is continued in the future, that it be fair to all parties involved.]

In particular my issues with the legislation, as currently proposed, is that it would needlessly create hardship:

1. My family or my neighbors access tax-forfeit land that may be sold or through MN State Lands which would be transferred to the tribe. This would create right-of-way issues that need to be addressed through permanent easements before sale or transfer to the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.
2. My family and my neighbors have contributed financially to the extensive Aquatic Management Areas on Bad Medicine Lake which were acquired by the Bad Medicine Lake Area Foundation through financial contributions by property owners, other concerned parties, and grants and given to the MN Department of Natural Resources to protect sensitive shoreline. We do not want our contributions to be given away.
3. My family, friends, and neighbors have used the proposed transfer lands for recreational purposes [for example - hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, ATV use, and hiking] for generations. The North Country National Scenic Trail is an example, as it crosses proposed transfer lands. Any transfer or sale of land to the tribe must ensure protection for those activities prior to any transfer.
4. Loss of PILT [Payment in Lieu of Taxes] money which comes from the MN State Lands and tax-forfeit lands from the state instead of taxes. PILT payments amounted to more that 18% of Forest Township’s levy in 2023. Our taxes would have to increase to compensate for the loss.

Other issues:

- Transfer or sale of land to the White Earth Tribe likely will likely have implications for the tax status of the land and other factors. Tribal land held in trust by the Federal govt can not be taxed by counties or townships. Trust status for land generally involves action by US Congress. Until the transferred or sold land is accepted by Congress as “trust-status,” it may be subject to taxes by Becker County or Forest Twp levy. There may also be legal questions regarding the impact of Becker County and Forest Townships zoning ordinances for the tribe.
- Concurrent with the proposed land transfer legislation, the White Earth Tribe is asserting management control over resources within the reservation boundaries. Currently those management issues appear to be focused on agricultural activities (irrigation and pesticide uses), but may extend to other resources in the future.

- Currently there is a dispute between MN and the tribe regarding White Earth Reservation boundaries. Following allotment legislation for White Earth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the four NE townships above Forest Township were ceded by the tribe for sale of land and timber as the Federal govt deemed those lands were surplus to allotment needs. MN state maps exclude the four townships from the reservation, Federal maps include them. Jurisdictional issues are affected.

It is my position that the four bills under consideration by the state legislature be tabled until the issues above are fully resolved and that any land transfers of MN State Land or sales of tax-forfeit land to the White Earth Tribe require permanent legal access for affected property owners (and for emergency responders) prior to transfer or sale. Further, that any such transfers or sales would require permanent access for recreational use by non-tribal members.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[insert your name]