U of M plan may shift natural resources college

HIGHER EDUCATION: A pending plan will reorganize and consolidate the University of Minnesota College of Natural Resources.

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ST. PAUL - Plans to reorganize the University of Minnesota's College of Natural Resources are watched by Northland lawmakers, environmentalist and representatives of industry.

University President Robert Bruinichs has proposed to merge the College of Natural Resources College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science. Consolidation would strengthen the colleges to offer more to students while saving money, Bruinichs told the Senate's Higher Education Committee Monday.

"I think we should be very concerned about how this reorganization goes," said Sen. Yvonne Prett DFL-Duluth. "With the efforts that are made here to wed industry and the environment to move forward, we have to be concerned," she said.

The Natural Resources Research Institute and Large Lakes Observatory in Duluth as well as a site in Cloquet and a forest research station in Grand Rapids could be affected by the changes.

"Many of our employees are graduates or come out of the College of Natural Resources," said an executive vice president of Minnesota Forest Industries, an association of lumber and paper producers who believes insufficient public input was sought before Bruinichs proposed the consolidations.

"This is a college that's 102 years old, and after about eight weeks of discussion, we are talking about eliminating it," he said. "The Board of Regents should be highly reluctant to act on changes of this magnitude after one two-hour hearing. After all, the citizens of this state are the owners of the university, not the administration."
"We think this is about making wise decisions about resources," Bruinicks said. "We will not be strong in these areas if we do not reorganize and get ourselves prepared for the future."

Many existing programs will continue under the new college, and much of the ongoing research facilities will remain unchanged, Bruinicks said, with much of the projected $20 million in saving in administrative changes.

Deans of both colleges have endorsed the proposal in written statements. But others are critical of the administration's inability to clearly spell out how the consolidation will affect programs or research.

The Board of Regents is expected to vote on the restructure plan in June.

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