

“WATCHING OUT FOR THE PRIVATE LANDOWNER AND THE FORESTRY COMMUNITY”

By Barbara McConnell, Legislative Representative, NJFA

Mission

The Mission of NJFA is to increase awareness of the diverse public benefits of forests; supporting the sustainable use of forest resources; promoting economic opportunity for forest landowners; and encouraging a viable local forest products industry.

One of the ways we strive to accomplish this Mission is by:

- Monitoring and influencing legislation and regulations that affect private landowners and the forestry community.

Currently, we are monitoring and speaking out on over 93 legislative and regulatory issues that range from Farmland Assessment; Transfer Inheritance and Estate Taxes; Pests and Pathogens such as the Southern Pine Beetle that are attacking our forests; Sustainable Forest Stewardship legislation on both private and public lands; New Jersey’s deer population; and rules and regulations that place a stranglehold on the right to practice forestry.

2011 Forestry Awareness

Sometimes as private landowners it must feel like you don’t get the “respect” and recognition you deserve. However, that all began to change in 2011.

In 2011, the United Nations declared 2011: International Year of Forests to provide a global platform to celebrate people’s action to sustainably manage the world’s forests. This recognition was declared in large part to raise awareness on sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

In New Jersey 62% of our forests are owned by families, not the government, and not big companies, but as private individuals, like you, who are the stewards of our forests. If you ask the average person, “who is taking care of our forests?” chances are most will say, “government”. Not so. That’s why the celebration of our forests during 2011 gave us an opportunity to change that perception and create an awareness as to just how important our family forests owners are.

Benefits of our Forests

New Jersey and Americans have a growing reliance on the benefits family forest stewardship provides – clean air, clean water, recreation; renewable resources that build our homes and communities; good paying jobs; and carbon sequestration.

Challenges for the Landowner

All these societal benefits, and yet you as stewards of the land, are faced with impossible choices. High property taxes, rules and regulations that are sometimes inconsistent with good forest management practices. Massive pressure to sell a piece of land in order to pay your bills, or make the necessary investments to grow and sustain your land. You struggle to stave off pests and pathogens; worry about drought or catastrophic fire; and are in a constant debate with those who feel a “tree should not be cut” or those that believe if it’s “green” it’s healthy.

NJFA’s Forestry Agenda

This is why NJFA has developed a strong forestry legislative/regulatory agenda, and why we are on the ground in Trenton and at the State Capitol representing your interest.

The obstacles you face would be far too great to overcome were it not for the Farmland Assessment Program. And yet, there are legislators and policy makers who believe that forestry is “fake farming”.

That’s why we testified on a Senate Bill last session that would increase the income threshold to \$1,000 in order to qualify for FA; and asked for an *exemption* for forest landowners that have a woodlands management plan, or forest stewardship plan;

- That’s why we appeared before a Senate Committee and testified on the Southern Pine Beetle and stringent rules and regulations facing private landowners in the Pinelands region.
- That’s why NJFA submitted to Governor Christie’s Transition Team recommendations for improving forestry in New Jersey and cutting red tape for good management practices for private landowners. Recommendations included comments regarding the Pinelands and Highlands Regions; Flood Hazard Area Control Act; and concerns with regard to the need for Forest Stewardship on Public and Private Lands.

So What Have We Achieved

- A greater awareness of forestry on the part of policy makers, the press and the public;
- Strengthened our relationships with allied groups;
- Held meetings with the Governor's office and DEP on numerous forestry issues;
- Enacted the Forest Stewardship Act which will be implemented next year;
- Played a leadership role in legislation currently in "play" to enact a *forest stewardship program for public lands* – a significant battle between those of us who believe our forests are in a state of decline; and certain environmental groups who have framed the issue as a "logging" issue;
- Engaged our membership in "grassroots" lobbying, asking them to speak out on issues to their legislators;
- Opposed any changes to the Farmland Assessment program for forest landowners;
- Supported the Department of Agriculture's initiative for the "Wood Made in New Jersey" label;
- Promoted the "International Year of the Forests" and received a Proclamation from the Governor recognizing such;
- Spoken out on the "Southern Pine Beetle"; as well as the onerous rules and regulations facing landowners in the Pinelands and Highlands;
- Contributed to the dialogue about the "deer problem"; prescribed burning; black bears; imminent domain; and estate taxes.

In Conclusion

None of these achievements would have been possible without the support of you; without the knowledge and expertise of our Board and our professional forester friends; or without the alliances we have forged with our conservation partners.

Thank you for your membership and support. Be assured NJFA is "watching out for you in Trenton".