

**REPORT OF THE
FORESTRY TASK FORCE**

**PURSUANT TO
HOUSE RESOLUTION 13 of 1999**

June, 2001

TO: All Members of the General Assembly

FROM: Representative Scott E. Hutchinson, Chairman
Senator Raphael J. Musto, Vice Chairman

SUBJECT: Report on Legislative Forestry Task Force

DATE: June 20, 2001

Pursuant to House Resolution 13 of 1999, the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee submits the report of the Forestry Task Force. The recommendations adopted and presented in this report are the culmination of efforts on the part of the Task Force and its Advisory Committee. Senator Roger Madigan served as chairman of the Task Force.

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS OF THE FORESTRY TASK FORCE

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Senator Raphael J. Musto

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INTRODUCTION

House Resolution 13, Printer's Number 2113, adopted on June 16, 1999, directed the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee to study the issues concerning the renewal and management of Pennsylvania's forests and to create a task force. The resolution established a legislative task force consisting of four members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly and an 18-member advisory committee. Pursuant to House Resolution 13, the task force was asked to study the following:

- 1. Third-party certification of Pennsylvania's forests and forest products.**
- 2. Long-term forestry research needs of the Commonwealth.**
- 3. Educational programs in sustainable forestry for private landowners and municipalities.**
- 4. Regular and comprehensive assessments of Pennsylvania's forests to assist in the management, development, and marketing of the Commonwealth's timber resources.**

This report is the result of information presented to the Forestry Task Force pursuant to House Resolution 13, and reflects the comments and discussions by the Forestry Task Force and Advisory Committee.

The following organizations presented information to the Task Force:

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry
Kane Hardwood
Pennsylvania Association of County Conservation Districts
Pennsylvania Forestry Association
Pennsylvania State University
USDA Forest Service
U.S. Forest Service, Northeast Research Station

FOREST CERTIFICATION

Environmental certification of forest products and forestry practices is fast becoming an important issue facing the forest products industry. What is forest certification? Forest certification, often referred to as “green certification”, is a system for identifying forestlands that are well managed with an intended goal of sustaining those forests for the future. Certification is a voluntary, nonregulatory means of ensuring that the methods and materials used to make wood products meet predetermined environmental standards. These standards help secure the long-term health and productivity of forests for timber production, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection as well as providing communities with lasting economic benefits. The basis for certification originated through a need to demonstrate that the forest industry is employing sound forest management practices that will ensure a sustainable forest and move beyond the growth vs. removal focus to include environmental and community factors that are essential to healthy forests.

Currently there are two independent organizations which maintain wood product certification programs in the United States: the Smart Wood Program of the Rainforest Alliance, and the Scientific Certification System (SCS). These programs are accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an independent, nonprofit organization made up of environmental groups, timber representatives, forestry professionals and community forestry organizations and certifiers. FSC was founded in 1993 to promote the responsible management of the world’s forests and currently operates the only internationally active, third-party forest certification system. The FSC authorizes the use of an “ecolabel” on all products originating from a certified forest.

Because the forest products industry is a worldwide partnership formed between producers, suppliers, manufacturers and consumers, it is difficult, if not impossible to determine the source or final destination of forest generated products. Certification tracks wood from harvest to final product and enables consumers to support responsible forestry practices by linking consumers to the industry. It also provides forest owners with an incentive to follow scientifically based silvicultural management practices with an emphasis on producing high-value timber products.

Worldwide, nearly 9 million acres of third-party certified forestlands currently exist. As of February 1, 2000, approximately 5.6 million acres of forestland were certified in the United States, with over 5.1 million (91 percent) certified in the Northeast and the Midwest. Pennsylvania has the largest certified acreage in the northeast region with 2.3 million acres, followed by Maine (1 million acres) and New York (717,000 acres).

Pennsylvania's commitment to investing in the state's forests has resulted in the certification of the entire 2.1 million acres of state forestland. In 1997 and 1998, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry (Bureau) participated in the SCS program which included a review by a three-member team of the bureau's management plan and forest inventory. Certification is a three-phase process that looks at timber sustainability, ecosystem management, and socio-economic considerations. This process took two years at a cost of \$200,000. The review and certification is a continual process with annual audits of management practices, and the entire review and certification process is repeated every 5 years.

Since the Bureau's initial certification efforts, the American Forest and Paper Association's Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) has been expanded to include a voluntary third party review of compliance with their standards for sustainability. To date, more than 28 million acres of SFI program forestlands have undergone third-party certification audits, and another 52 million acres are scheduled to undergo SFI program certification by the end of 2001. The SFI program is now the largest sustainable forestry and certification program in the world. The Bureau is in the process of enrolling state forestlands in the SFI and considering an additional review using their standards.

Kane Hardwood, a family-owned lumber operation, was the first company in Pennsylvania to receive third-party certification of its timber harvesting operation. Kane Hardwood has 125,000 acres of forestland in the Commonwealth with tracts as small as 10 acres. The company is the third largest private landowner in Pennsylvania and was certified in 1994.

The Forestry Task Force learned that while certification offers certain advantages to landowners, it also has some limitations. For example, certification has the potential to enhance how environmental organizations and consumers of forest products view silvicultural activities, and provide credibility to claims of good management practices. At a minimum, the certification process can enhance biodiversity, preserve land values, and promote economic stability within communities. Certification may also create access to untapped markets that favor certified wood products and yield premium prices from consumers. However, there are limitations. The Forestry Task Force learned that markets for certified wood products are small but on the rise. Distribution of forest product information and forest industry advocacy have made certified products more visible. The Home Depot, a national home improvement chain, recently committed to purchasing certified forest products. This has been instrumental in increasing the interest in certification among wood producers.

Costs for certification may also be an obstacle. Direct costs of certification vary widely, ranging from \$.20 per acre to several dollars per acre depending on

the size, location, and details of the assessment. Sound management of even small parcels of land can be important. Thousands of acres of forests are owned by families with woodlots of fewer than 500 acres. In addition, the costs of maintaining certification through annual audits and the recertification process need to be considered, and this may be too costly for small landowners. A possible option to defray the costs of certification may be to hire a certified forestry consultant or land manager. This would allow lands managed by a consultant/manager to be eligible for certification.

Recommendations:

- ◆ **Analyze the current demand for certified wood products in an effort to promote forest certification throughout the Commonwealth.**
- ◆ **Educate the non-industrial or private landowner about the benefits of forest certification and encourage the use of certified land managers or consultants where costs of certification are prohibitive.**
- ◆ **Encourage third-party certified forest owners and managers to market certified wood products to Commonwealth agencies.**

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR PRIVATE LANDOWNERS

Currently 55 percent (17 million acres) of Pennsylvania is covered by commercial forests capable of producing sustainable forest products. Of this land nearly three quarters (12.5 million acres) are privately owned. The average size of forestland in private ownership in Pennsylvania is only 23 acres, with the majority of these landholdings in the 20 to 99 acre size class. Ownership of these lands often changes frequently, with possession of private forests lasting less than 15 years. The average size of private forest ownership is becoming smaller as larger tracts of land are broken into parcels and sold. These ownership patterns suggest that between 40,000 and 50,000 parcels of forestland change hands each year. Short-term ownership often results in highly variable land management practices and often limits traditional forest uses such as timber production, hunting, recreation and water quality protection.

Forest fragmentation and the tenure of land ownership suggest that private landowners and municipalities need land management and forest assessment information to help them make sound decisions about future land use directions. University and industry cooperative educational and informational outreach has

the potential to be the most significant mechanism for advancing forest management and technology throughout the Commonwealth.

Outreach is defined as a process of providing educational expertise and resources to the public through teaching, research and service to address environmental and social issues facing the Commonwealth. Outreach has the ability to provide a framework for making forest information resources available to a large number of forest managers, local community planners, researchers, contractors, private landowners, and local communities. Outreach and education can also ensure that forestry research remains relevant and accessible if extension activities and information are delivered quickly and effectively.

The question is “What do private landowners want and need to know about land use and forest management, and how can that information best be provided?” To answer this, the Pennsylvania State University (PSU) presented information to the Forestry Task Force concerning the university’s Outreach and Cooperative Extension Program. Among the many issues to be addressed are forest fragmentation, harvesting, land management, pest control, biodiversity, regeneration and sustainability, recreation, habitat protection and restoration. Although the new Outreach and Cooperative Extension partnership is in its early stages of development, PSU has recently expanded its outreach program to become the largest such effort in American higher education. PSU Outreach is offered in all 67 counties in Pennsylvania and reaches 2 million people in the Commonwealth. The programs are offered through on-site and correspondence instruction, video, and the internet.

Outreach has many positive outcomes. It helps landowners make informed choices about multiple land management options and multiple land values including recreation, clean water, timber management, and the presence of endangered or threatened species. The objective of such outreach efforts is to promote practices and tools that will lead to diverse and sustainable land uses, and in turn support local economies and silvicultural practices.

Recommendations:

- ◆ **Enhance public broadcasting and access to technology for local communities.**
- ◆ **Increase the number of field staff that dispense forestry education materials to current and potential landowners.**
- ◆ **Distribute forestry information, educational materials and land management options in land transfer and property deed transactions.**

LONG-TERM FORESTRY RESEARCH NEEDS

On a national scale, from 1985 to 1995, the total number of research scientists in the United States Forest Service declined by 37 percent. Since that time, a comparable reduction in the number of scientists at the Northeast Forest Experiment Station in the Allegheny National Forest has also occurred, and the station has experienced a 15 percent decrease in inflation adjusted dollars. Within the Commonwealth, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Ecosystem Management Advisory Committee identified additional needs for long-term monitoring and research to increase the understanding of the effects of forest management on state forest ecosystems.

Forestry research provides the information needed to develop responsible policies for forest use and management. Changing land ownership patterns, forest industry consolidation, and decreased support for forest productivity research calls the future of long-term forest research into question. There is a strong case to be made for enhanced long-term forestry research funding.

Research of forest ecosystems is important on many levels and has long-term implications for resource managers and planners, the forest industry and environmentalists, among others. With diverse and competing demands on the forest industry, and concerns of the recreational community and wildlife and environmental organizations about forest health and accessibility, long-term research is crucial. In the past, forestry research *and* extension services have been able to address a wide variety of problems related to fundamental biological and technological forestry issues that cross state, regional, and national boundaries.

State and federal budget cuts and shifts in funding priorities have left funding for forestry research at levels too low to assist land managers in answering difficult questions about forest management. Most often, finding answers takes more than a few years. Research professionals from the Allegheny National Forest (ANF), Pennsylvania's Bureau of Forestry, and Pennsylvania State University's School of Forest Resources provided the Forestry Task Force with information concerning the long-term forestry research needs of the Commonwealth.

For each year that long-term research continues, it brings the Commonwealth closer to fully understanding forest ecosystems, resource values, forest management practices and community needs. Demonstration forests in the ANF have provided volumes of valuable resource data addressing forest regeneration and species decline, disease and insect infestation, biological diversity within forest ecosystems, and wildlife densities and their effect on regeneration and habitat. For the past 50 years, the Northeast Forest Experiment Station, located in Warren and

Kane, Pennsylvania, has been the only consistent source of practical research and information on management and silviculture practices in the Commonwealth. The research and philosophy of long-term research on demonstration forests in the ANF combines the activities of forest researchers, public advisors, and forest businesses to produce new and applied forestry knowledge. This research has been a tremendous asset to the Commonwealth.

At a time when forestry is facing new challenges, research efforts need to be focused in many directions and over lengthy time periods. To meet this challenge, research funding needs to be adjusted to address the diverse needs of the private landowners and to specifically enhance the productivity of state, federal, and private forestlands.

Recommendation:

- ◆ **Grant the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, the legislative authority to increase funding for long-term forestry research within the Commonwealth.**
- ◆ **Establish public/private funding partnerships to increase and enhance the continuation of long-term forestry research.**

FOREST INVENTORY

The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) is a national program of the USDA Forest Service charged with conducting and maintaining inventories of forest resources throughout the United States. Approximately every 10 years, the congressionally mandated FIA assesses past trends, current status, and future potential of forest resources in each state. The FIA program, as it is known today, began with “The Organic Act of 1897” when Congress acknowledged the need for information regarding the condition and supply of the nation’s forests. More than a century later, the continuous update of information is invaluable.

Nationally, 82 percent of the work done through the FIA is conducted on private land and is funded through the Forest Service Research Fund. Funding for the remaining percentage must be negotiated with each of the National Forest Regions. The USDA Forest Service Northeast Research Station’s Forest Inventory Analysis Unit, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry is conducting the fifth inventory of Pennsylvania’s forests.

The inventory uses a three phase approach - *Phase 1* classifies the state using satellite imaging - *Phase 2* involves ground sampling - *Phase 3* includes a more thorough ground sampling with an emphasis on forest health issues. The inventory measures vegetation and land characteristics, including ownership, productivity for timber production, the kinds and sizes of trees, tree growth patterns, and mortality rates.

In recent years, the lack of funding has resulted in increasing the time between inventories from an average of 10 years, to 13 or 14 years. There has been an initiative calling for inventories to be conducted every five years, but insufficient funding threatens this proposal. Implementing a five-year annualized system would provide the necessary coverage to accommodate Pennsylvania's forests. When the forest inventory is complete, the results will describe the quantity and quality of timber on forestland and recent trends on growth and timber removal. Information is also being collected on wildlife habitat, climatic changes, and insects and disease problems.

The USDA Forest Service and the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry provided the Forestry Task Force with information on the current status of the FIA in Pennsylvania. They conveyed the importance of the inventory to Pennsylvania's forests and offered insight into the future direction of the program. From each agency's perspective, an accurate up-to-date forest inventory is essential to the sustainability of Pennsylvania's forests, and may possibly be the most important work the Forest Service conducts.

The need for an accurate accounting of what exists on private and public forestland is essential. A current and accurate forest and ecosystem inventory allows the private and public forest agencies to address changes in land use, growth and productivity, policy alternatives, and economic and environmental impacts. Accurate and current inventories will also allow Pennsylvania to effectively participate in international discussions about forest resources, global environmental policies and forest health issues.

Recommendations:

- ◆ **Shorten the inventory cycle to start moving toward the five-year inventory average.**
- ◆ **Urge Pennsylvania's congressional delegation to advocate a separate line item in the U.S. Forest Service budget for FIA, commensurate with its responsibilities to conduct an inventory.**