

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

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### Witness Statement

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Testimony Presented  
by  
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Before the House Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on  
Forests and Forest Health

### Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. As State Forester I have the responsibility of managing the Bureau of Forestry within the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. This includes the management of a 2.1 million acre State Forest System and 20 District offices throughout the State. The Bureau of Forestry also has responsibility for providing fire protection and protection from insects and disease for all the forests of the Commonwealth. In addition, we provide technical assistance and educational programs to private forest landowners who desire to manage their forest lands. We are committed to the sustainable management of all Commonwealth forests - public and private.

### Pennsylvania's Forests Are Important

Pennsylvania is blessed with wonderful forests. Almost 60% of the Commonwealth (17 million acres) is covered with some of the finest hardwood forests found anywhere in the world. Most of our forest stands originated from natural regeneration following the exploitative harvesting practices which occurred during the 19th century. In most cases, the complete removal of the Pennsylvania forest was followed by severe wildfires and extreme erosion. Today, however, after over a century of protection from fire, and conservation, we have more forests in Pennsylvania than at any time during the last 150 years.

Forests are an essential component of the economic and social quality of life for the citizens of Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania forests contain more hardwood growing stock than those of any other state, and they support a \$5 billion per year forest products industry which employs 90,000 people. In addition, forests support a wide range of recreational activities and are vital to our multibillion-dollar tourism economy. Forests protect more than 25,000 miles of streams in Pennsylvania, which provide clean water for domestic and recreational use. A wide variety of wildlife and plant habitats can be found in the forests, including those of more than 90 species of trees and about two-thirds of our native plants. Forests also provide aesthetic and spiritual value for all our citizens.

All of these uses and values are important to the citizens of the Commonwealth, and we believe that with proper care and management, all of these uses and products are compatible with one another and can be sustained indefinitely.

The ownership of Pennsylvania's forest is diverse. Public ownership, including federal, state and municipal holdings, accounts for 25% of the Commonwealth's forests. Industrial ownership accounts for less than 3% of our forestland. Over half a million private non-industrial forest landowners control most of the remaining 12.5 million acres.

### **State Forest Management Initiatives and Certification**

The **Pennsylvania State Forest** was established in 1898 to provide a continuous supply of timber and wood products, protect watershed and conserve waters, and to furnish opportunities for healthful recreation. Today the Bureau of Forestry manages 2.1 million acres of some of the finest hardwood forests in the United States. We are committed to the concepts of sustainable forestry and ecosystem management. In addition to 1.2 million acres managed for multiple values, the State Forest contains 61 natural areas comprising 70,000 acres and 16 wild areas with over 150,000 acres.

Governor Tom Ridge and Secretary of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources John Oliver have been committed to increasing the level, of management on State Forest lands. Over the last 5 years we have been in the process of expanding the timber management program and we have increased resource management staff to assist with that effort. We are currently harvesting about 75 million board feet of timber annually and plan to expand to about 100 million board feet as the forest matures. Furthermore, legislation was recently enacted, which created a Forest Regeneration Fund. This Regeneration Fund sets aside 10% of all revenue from the sale of timber on the State Forest to be used for practices to ensure that there is adequate regeneration following harvest. Additional staff has also been added for public contact to deal with rapidly expanding recreational user groups. An Ecosystem Management Advisory Committee comprised of natural resource professionals representing environmental groups, government agencies, academia, forestry consultants, and the forest products industry has also been established to ensure that the State Forest is being managed in an environmentally sensitive manner.

In addition, the State Forest underwent a voluntary forest **certification** process. This third-party evaluation was carried out to determine whether the state was managing its forest resources according to practices of sustainable forestry. Scientific Certification Systems (**SCS**) using the guidelines established by the international Forest Stewardship Council (**FSC**) completed the initial evaluation in 1998. The project review team assembled by SCS consisted of a forester silviculturalist, a wildlife biologist, and a forest economist - all were well trained and possessed good working knowledge of eastern forestry practices.

The assessment process included: an in-depth review of our management plan and other pertinent documents; a field assessment including interviews with over 100 employees and inspection of 150 timber sales; and meetings with local and regional stakeholders. Our forest operations were evaluated by standards set in three general categories: timber resource sustainability; forest ecosystem maintenance; and financial and socioeconomic considerations. Certification required a score of 80 or above in each of these categories. We scored 84, 82 and 91 respectively and were certified as "well managed" following completion of the process.

The Pennsylvania State Forest has the distinction of being the largest FSC "green certified" forest in North America. Since receiving the certification we have undergone a series of annual audits with a recertification scheduled at the end of 2003. Pennsylvania and Minnesota were the first states to have their public forestlands certified. Since then the New York state forests have been certified and a number of other states are currently considering the process.

Forest certification has been touted as a market driven process intended to appeal to consumers who will pay more for products obtained from well managed forests. Our reasons for participating in the review, however, were not market oriented. Our primary reason was to achieve outside verification of public land management. We sought the certification to assure the public that its forests were being managed in a sustainable manner. A secondary goal was to have the certification of the State Forests serve as a model for our private non-industrial forest owners.

Forest certification may not be suitable for all forest owners; however, we believe our forestry efforts have benefited from the certification process. An outside review is good for any organization and the FSC certification provided a good technical review of our management practices. The review also reinforced and verified many of the management principles and practices we had already implemented as a result of working with our own ecosystem management and silviculture advisory committee. It has also helped in improving our internal communications between our central office and field staff and generated support for needed resources. Most importantly, the certification has brought us a great deal of recognition and credibility with our citizens and constituencies.

Since our initial FSC certification efforts, the American Forest and Paper Association has been promoting and implementing their Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). We have assisted with that effort and believe that it, too, will have a positive effect on the management of our forests. Recently SFI has been expanded to include a voluntary third-party review of compliance with their standards for sustainability. We are presently in the process of enrolling our lands in the SFI and considering an additional review using their standards.

We believe that both FSC and SFI certifications have a place in improving the management of our forest lands. In the future, however, we hope that all certifiers could agree upon a single set of sustainability standards, which would be used in all certification schemes.

### **Our Relationship with USDA Forest Service Programs**

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry has had a close working relationship with all three branches of the U.S. Forest Service.

### **National Forests - The Allegheny National Forest**

The **Allegheny National Forest (ANF)**, with over 500,000 acres is the primary public land manager in the northwest portion of Pennsylvania and manages much of the forest land in Warren, McKean, Forest, and Elk counties. For almost three-quarters of a century the ANF has been managed for multiple values for all the citizens of the United States. By providing timber, oil and gas, and recreational opportunities, the ANF has been a major provider of jobs and a significant part of the economy in this four-county region and the surrounding counties as well. With about a third of all the high-grade black cherry timber in the world, the ANF, arguably, controls one of the most valuable wood resources in the United States.

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry has had a close working relationship with the U.S. Forest Service and the staff of the ANF for much of this century. Like us, they are committed to the concepts of ecosystem management and the management of forests for multiple values and uses for all citizens. Staff from the ANF serve on our Ecosystem Management Advisory Committee and collectively we are working to manage the public forest resources in the northern half of the state in an ecologically sound manner. In recent years it has been frustrating and disheartening to see their management efforts stagnated and delayed as a result of

conflict.

In Pennsylvania we have a unique situation where two large blocks of public forest land, less than 50 miles apart, one in state ownership and the other federal, have been managed in much the same manner using essentially the same management techniques and research base for most of the last century. While our state forests are receiving recognition and awards for environmental sensitivity the management of the National Forest has been halted in a quagmire of regulation from multiple agencies, lawsuits, and appeals.

### **State and Private Forestry**

The **State and Private Forestry** branch of the Forest Service has a long history of working cooperatively with the states and providing technical support and funding to implement non-regulatory, incentive-based programs which assist private landowners in designing and achieving sustainable management objectives. Over the years we have benefited greatly from federal Forest Service programs in cooperative forest management, forest stewardship, rural fire protection, forest health, urban and community forestry, and rural economic development. In Pennsylvania, most of the funding provided in these programs has gone directly into programs with little overhead and staff costs. Federal money in most cases is matched many times over by state, local, and private sources. The federal investment in state & private programs also provides a mechanism for enabling interagency response to major problems such as wildfire, forest insects, and disease. All states do not require the same programs. Program needs will vary depending on ownership patterns, local economics, and resource characteristics. There is a need for federal programs to be flexible and allow for variation and program delivery depending on the state's specific needs.

### **Forest Service Research**

The USDA Forest Service Research branch is a crucial part of the nation's forestry research community. The **Northeast Forest Experiment Station** is the research arm of the Forest Service in our part of the country. For the last 50 years, the Allegheny station, located at Warren and Kane, Pennsylvania, has been the only consistent source of practical research and information on management and silviculture of Pennsylvania's cherry and northern hardwood forests. They have been great partners, and a tremendous asset to our state. Unfortunately the research from this station only covers a portion of the state. Management of our forest has never been more important or complex than it is now. We need to continue the current research being done at the station and we need expanded research on the oak forests of the state.

The Forest Service has historically carried out the **Forest Inventory and Analysis** program at 10-year intervals. In recent times lack of funding has resulted in increasing the interval between inventories to 13 or 14 years. We need more frequent inventories and, with the advent of ecosystem management, we need more complete inventories. The recent program shift to an annualized forest inventory at 5-year intervals is greatly appreciated and has been applauded by the states and forest industry throughout the country. However, insufficient funding for this program in next year's budget already threatens the demise of the initiative. From the state's perspective, an accurate up-to-date forest inventory is essential and may be the most important activity that the Forest Service carries out.

### **Conclusion**

At the federal level I believe that forest policy discussions must become more holistic than they have been in the past. The forest policies of the US must consider all of the forests of the country and not just the National Forest System in the West. Due to changes in policy, particularly in the West, the Forest Service

has significantly reduced the harvest of timber on the National Forests. It is clear that in order to meet consumer demand for wood products, the harvest will shift to the southern and the eastern parts of the U.S. where much of the forest is privately owned. Already in parts of the South the harvest of timber is exceeding the annual growth of wood. As demand continues to increase, the present-day economic opportunities in Pennsylvania and other parts of the northeast and south will be short-lived if we do not provide technical support and improve the management of these private forests.

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