

**Testimony of**

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**on behalf of the  
Extension Committee on Organization and Policy - Forestry Subcommittee**

**before the  
House Subcommittee on Department Operations,  
Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry  
United States House of Representatives**

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**FORESTRY PROVISIONS IN THE NEXT FARM BILL**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you very much for this invitation to appear before you and present testimony on how the Cooperative Extension System can help improve the sustainability of the nation's private forests.

My name is Eric Bendfeldt. I am an environmental sciences extension agent with Virginia Cooperative Extension Service and am responsible for educational programming in five counties of Virginia's Sixth Congressional District. The counties I serve are Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge, and Rockingham. I am a forest soils scientist by training, and I am presenting testimony on behalf of the Forestry Subcommittee of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy.

My testimony today will focus on forestry challenges and issues in the Sixth Congressional District, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the nation. There are several benefits of an education and information infrastructure such as the Cooperative Extension System that enables rural and urban forest landowners to make informed decisions.

**FOREST RESOURCES IN VIRGINIA'S SIXTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT**

As the Chairman knows, his district consists of 3.8 million acres, of which 60 percent is forested. Private individuals own 800,000 acres of this forestland. In 1998-1999, they earned \$21 million from the sale of timber.

Forest owners in the Sixth District face increasing challenges as public concern for the environment, including air and water quality, grows. The issues and challenges faced by the forestry and agricultural communities that need to be addressed include: watershed management, total maximum daily load requirements, land conservation, riparian buffers, taxes, conservation easements, and wildlife management. Furthermore, without good planning and the involvement of professional foresters and loggers, many of these forests are high-graded and left in poor condition.

Bill Braunworth, a tree farmer in Augusta County, relates forest management to vegetable gardening. He says, "the forest won't produce the kind of products we need unless it is managed, just as a vegetable garden won't produce the food we need unless it is weeded and tended." He tells his fellow landowners that "the only way to properly manage a forest is to get out and walk through it, walk every acre you have and see how it changes." Bill has forged this intimate and invaluable knowledge through four decades of forest ownership and participation in a variety of Cooperative Extension Service programs.

#### VIRGINIA'S PRIVATE FOREST RESOURCES

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, there are 15.4 million acres of forest, of which 77 percent is owned by 400,000 private individuals. Timber harvesting contributes \$234 million to the state's economy. Virginia's forest products industry represents 9.2 percent of the manufacturing workforce with a payroll of \$1.2 billion. The wildlife and forest recreational values contribute an additional \$11.5 million to the state's economy. There are the additional quality of life benefits, including clean air and water, that are more difficult to place a dollar value on.

But a major concern across the state is forest fragmentation, whether it is the permanent conversion of forests to other uses, or the division of large tracts of forest into numerous parcels that are too small to manage for economic returns. Twenty percent of Virginia's landowners are over 65 years old and own 38 percent of the state's private forests. Much of this forestland will likely be converted or divided into small tracts.

In addition to fragmentation, other statewide issues include fire management, reforestation, water quality, and endangered species. The Virginia Cooperative Extension Service is working across the state with forest owners like Mr. Braunworth to address these issues through the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program, Forestry Bus Tours, one-on-one problem-solving visits, seminars and short courses.

#### THE NATION'S PRIVATE FOREST RESOURCE

Mr. Chairman, the issues and challenges faced by Virginia forest owners are common throughout this nation. Approximately 10 million individual citizens, who own nearly one-half of the nation's forest resource (448 million acres), are committed to ensuring that their forest lands are productive and healthy.

The importance of maintaining the sustainability of the nation's private forest resource cannot be over-emphasized. Nationally, these forests:

- Provide essential habitat to 75 percent of the nation's fish and wildlife species, including many that are threatened and endangered;
- Filter and store large quantities of high quality water for domestic, agricultural and recreational uses;
- Provide 65 percent of the nation's wood and fiber supply for a forest industry that accounts for 8 percent of the nation's manufacturing base and involves significant interstate commerce and international trade;
- Support a recreation industry in excess of \$100 billion through boating, camping and tourism activities; and
- Sequester huge quantities of carbon that would otherwise enter the atmosphere and exacerbate the global warming processes.

However these benefits and resources are threatened by several factors:

- Major reductions in timber harvests on public lands that have resulted in increasing pressures on private lands where unsustainable logging practices often occur;
- Division of large tracts of forest land into smaller parcels, resulting in loss of ecosystem processes that provide for clean water and air;
- Growing per capita consumption of wood and fiber at rates that are higher than any other nation in the world;
- Decreasing societal acceptance of active forest management practices that alter the landscape; and
- Lack of awareness or knowledge by many private forest owners concerning management practices that lead to sustainable forestry.

#### LIFE-LONG LEARNING TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

Informed decision-making by private forest owners is the foundation upon which sustainable forestry practices are implemented. Without an understanding of the various management alternatives and their consequences, landowners have little to base decisions on other than advocacy positions offered by various interest groups.

The Cooperative Extension System is a source of research-based, unbiased information for private forest owners and provides programs that actively engage them in adopting sustainable forestry practices. Studies have documented the importance of education in motivating forest owners to implement forest management practices. Other studies have shown that forest owners who have participated in outreach programs tell neighbors and friends about the benefits of sound forestry and provide support, encouragement and information to their peers. This peer-to-peer learning has a multiplier effect in the adoption of forest management practices.

When placed in the context of a comprehensive forestry program in the 2002 Farm Bill, there is a logical connection between information, education, research, technical assistance and financial incentives.

## LIFE-LONG LEARNING THROUGH THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM

Within USDA, the lead agency for the development and delivery of outreach education programs is the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES). Through its state-based partners comprised of 105 land-grant colleges and universities, the Cooperative Extension System has a presence over 3000 counties, towns and parishes. Locally, Extension educators work in a variety of partnerships involving industry, forest conservation groups, state forestry agencies, local government, and professional organizations. These partnerships result in significant leveraging of federal funds that reach many more forest owners than any single organization could.

As important as research and outreach education programs are as a foundation for sustainable forestry practices, support for private forest owners has been woefully under-funded. In a June 2000 report by the National Coalition for Sustaining America's Nonfederal Forests, the following statistic is alarming: Based on 10 million private forest owners, USDA-CSREES's investment in forest resources equates to \$3.50 per forest owner, compared to \$148 per farm. Just as the land-grant system led American agriculture to its position as a world leader, it is also positioned to help ensure the sustainability of private forests. It is time for a significant commitment to this vital resource.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2002 FARM BILL

While past efforts by federal and state agencies and private organizations have demonstrated that real, on-the-ground forest resource improvements can be achieved, more needs to be done. To achieve the goal of sustainability on private forests, we recommend the development and funding of a comprehensive forestry program in the 2002 Farm Bill that provides for outreach, research, technical assistance, and financial incentives. This approach has been endorsed by the National Council on Private Forests which represents 16 public and private organizations and agencies. The Extension forestry subcommittee supports and concurs with the Council's recommendations, and offers these four specific recommendations for this committee's consideration:

1. Reauthorize and expand the Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA). RREA was enacted in 1978 with a funding authorization of \$15 million for expanded Extension programming for forests and rangeland. RREA has never been funded at a level higher than \$3.229 million. In order to achieve the national goals of sustainable private forests, RREA should be reauthorized and the appropriation level increased to \$45 million. Every effort should be made to achieve full funding. An expansion of RREA with appropriate funding will provide the following:
  - Increased capacity at the county/town/parish level to engage private forest owners in educational programs that help them achieve benefits that accrue to their personal goals and the public good;
  - Expansion of forest and rangeland education programs through the inclusion of the 1890, 1994, and territory land-grant colleges and universities which will reach currently under-served and minority audiences;

- Creation of a new Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative through which federal funds can be leveraged with private, non-governmental organizations;
  - Establishment of Regional Sustainable Forestry Extension and Research Projects to conduct specific programs to conduct target programs that address regional issues (e.g., wildland fire, forest fragmentation and conversion, ecosystem restoration);
  - Development of distance learning initiatives for forest owners and the natural resources workforce which provides for learning anytime and anywhere.
2. Expand the Cooperative Forestry (McIntire-Stennis) Research Program. Extension and research programs are interrelated; research programs provide new knowledge and Extension provides the infrastructure to translate that knowledge into on-the-ground practices. These research funds are granted directly to land-grant colleges and universities on a matching basis; each federal dollar leverages more than three additional state dollars.
  3. Provide a single forestry financial incentive program under the auspices of one agency in order to better serve forest owners. Financial incentive programs are not the mission of CSREES, but they are an important function in a sustainable forestry program. Currently the Forestry Incentive Program (FIP) and Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) are managed by two different agencies. This creates a fragmented program that is confusing to forest owners.
  4. Establish a national advisory body under the Secretary of Agriculture to develop specific strategies and programs to implement the recommendations of the National Research Council report, *Forested Landscapes in Perspective: Prospects and Opportunities for Sustainable Management of America's Nonfederal Forests* and the National Coalition for Sustaining America's Nonfederal Forests report, *Sustainable Forestry: Addressing the Stewardship of Nonfederal Forests Through Research, Education and Extension/Outreach*. This advisory body should consist of state and federal agencies, forest landowners, forest conservation groups, professional foresters and the land-grant system. This body will advise the Secretary on a broad array of issues related to sustainable forest management on nonfederal forests.

## CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, this committee along with others, has the opportunity to craft a sustainable forestry program in the next Farm Bill that could deliver a seamless and integrated program consisting of outreach information and education, research, technical assistance, and financial incentives. Private forest owners deserve both recognition and support for their stewardship practices and the tremendous public benefit they provide. But more needs to be done. Through the recommendations above, the Cooperative Extension System, and its federal partner, CSREES, can contribute to the sustainability of the forest resource through education programs that enhance informed decision-making. Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I would be please to answer any questions the committee might have.