

For Immediate Release

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Enviro Groups Request Veto of Logging Bill

A coalition of environmental groups has asked Governor Christie to veto S1085/A2837, a bill allowing for commercial logging on public lands. If signed, the legislation would open up some of the most environmentally sensitive areas in our state to logging. The bill requires that a “forest stewardship” plan be prepared for each state park. Organizations are concerned that the bill would hurt our open spaces, biodiversity in our forests, public access, and pristine resources people have worked for decades to protect. The Assembly passed the bill by a slim margin last week, sending the legislation to the Governor’s desk.

“New Jersey’s State Forests and Parks belong to all of us and are held in the public trust. This legislation breaks that trust by allowing loggers to take over these environmentally sensitive lands. This will result in limiting public access and environmental damage to wetlands, waterways, and forest habitats. This bill is not enforceable and supporters of the bill cannot see the forest for the trees. We hope the Governor will veto the bill to protect our lands, uphold the public trust and to stop an open season on our open spaces,” said **Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club.**

The bill does not include adequate protections for natural resources and has no enforcement. The bill ties the “forest stewardship” plans for public lands to the guidance documents of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an outside, non-governmental group. The FSC guidances would still allow logging in sensitive areas such as wetlands and steep slopes, and the DEP stated in a June 10th letter to legislators that they will not enforce the FSC guidelines. Currently, there is only one organization in the entire state certified to produce FSC plans.

“The publicly owned forests in New Jersey are under attack day in and day out from development, invasive species, intrusive human activity, climate change, and natural disasters. We need to protect these forests and the vulnerable ecological assets they hold such as forested wetlands and vernal pools through effective stewardship, not logging and commercially driven ‘management.’ We call on Governor Christie to veto S1085 to uphold his responsibility to the taxpayers who care so deeply about our state forests that they have paid for their protection,” said **Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network.**

Logging operations will close off large portions of our parks to the public. Hiking trails will be turned into logging roads, staging areas will be clearcut, skidders and other equipment will run through streams and wetlands. All this will lead to more erosion and stormwater runoff, impacting pristine streams and reservoirs and aquatic ecosystems. Opening up the canopy will lead to a loss of biodiversity in our forests as more deer and invasive species take over. Invasive species infestations would require herbicide use, which could impact sensitive streams and areas above reservoirs and water supply intakes.

If signed, this bill could also impact future open space purchases. Public support for open space preservation could wane once people see what is being done on land held in the public trust. When public access is restricted for long periods of time and people see logging rigs pulling out 100 year old oaks from our state parks, will they continue to support future open space referenda?

The Office of Legislative Services has already estimated the program would cost \$2.7 million to implement. Loggers would have to take \$2.7 million worth of trees out of our forests just to cover those costs and additional revenue would go to the General Fund. It would not be earmarked for restoration or stewardship projects on public lands.

“If Governor Christie can see the forests for the trees, he will quickly veto the logging bill. He has to choose between preserving our forests and drinking water or looking out for special interests who see forests as a money tree,” said **Jim Walsh, Eastern Region Director, Food and Water Watch**.

There has been no financial analysis to determine how much logging would be required for New Jersey to cover the cost of the program. In the past, the state has received \$75 per tree for oaks that sold on the market for over \$2000. Without a financial analysis this could happen again under this bill. We are giving away our forests for pennies on the dollar.

New Jersey’s forests have been recognized nationally and internationally as important, whether it is the Pinelands National Reserve and UN Biosphere Reserve, the Highlands recognized as nationally significant with the federal Highlands Conservation Act or designation of the Delaware River in the Skylands region as Wild and Scenic by the Department of Interior. These forests are not just state but national and international treasures.

“Our public forests are the jewels of our state, and demand the strictest protections,” said **Doug O'Malley, interim director of Environment New Jersey**. “This bill fails that test, and we urge Gov. Christie to veto this legislation.”

See the letter to Governor Christie here: <http://bit.ly/LoggingBillLetter>