



Forest Stewardship Bill A3239

Testimony before the New Jersey Assembly

Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

In support of A3239 Forest Stewardship Bill

May 11, 2009

I am Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director of Delaware Riverkeeper Network. I am speaking in support of the Forest Stewardship Bill on behalf of our 7000 members, many who live in New Jersey. Our members strongly support this Bill and ask the members of the Committee to approve the Bill so it can be passed by the full Assembly, as it was, overwhelmingly, by the Senate.

There are many benefits of a healthy, intact forest ecosystem. Forests nationwide are decreasing, reducing forest-covered land, and the management of the remaining forests is not driven by forest stewardship values.^[1] Dominant management approaches are based on harvest; much of that harvest is required by the income generation requirement of woodlot owners under New Jersey's Farm Assessment Act. While the tax incentive of maintaining a woodlot management plan under the Farm Assessment Program has saved forests from development, it hasn't resulted in forest stewardship practices that aid overall forest ecosystem health, biodiversity, and has not ensured that our forests are functioning as they should. In fact, due to global ecological changes, invasive species, and the pressures of urbanization on the larger environment, our forests are declining in their ecological value and need help. Many forest owners are not aware that there are benefits to forest stewardship that can be gained by the landowner with planning that is based on stewardship. Many are but cannot afford to replace the tax benefits of the farmland assessment program with a stewardship plan due to present rules that require the selling of forest products and trees to meet income requirements.^[2]

I would like to focus on just one of the many functions of a healthy forest today -- the benefits that come with the protection of watersheds, and the streams and aquifers that are at the heart of every watershed. It is well known that forests benefit water quality in receiving streams and also filter and clean rain and stormwater as it infiltrates to groundwater aquifers.

For instance, the organic litter layer found in forests "provides a physical barrier to sediments, maintains surface porosity, high infiltration rates, and increased populations of soil mycorrhizae (a mutualistic relation of plant roots and the mycelium of fungi which aids in decomposition of litter and translocation of nutrients from the soil into the root tissue, and provides a rich source of carbon essential for de-nitrification). The organic soils provide a reservoir for storage of nutrients to be later converted to wood biomass." [3] Preserving the natural forest allows this complex ecosystem to continue to function. Also, high flows during flooding are slowed and soaked up by forested riparian areas, reducing velocity and volume of downstream floodwaters. [4]

When forests are cut for firewood or forest products, the quality of the forest is impacted. The result is cuts into the forest and disturbance of natural features in order to get to the trees and to remove trees or other forest products. The loss of the protection provided by the intact forest and its diverse vegetation can result in more runoff as rain does not get absorbed as well (many forests are located in steep slope areas, rocky areas and fragile terrain since they were not traditionally framed due to these conditions), higher stream flows, soil erosion and stream sedimentation and destabilization, and reduced groundwater recharge and healthy stream base flows. These changes to the stream hydrology and structure harm waterways, eventually impacting downstream water supplies which benefit from healthy base flow and high quality surface waters. Fish and fishlife, aquatic life, herpes and wildlife are all also affected.

The goal of forest stewardship - to improve the overall health of the forest - goes hand in hand with watershed protection and water quality protection. A3239 will allow forest owners to protect those values without losing tax benefits, which are essential to keep our forest lands from development and urbanization. We ask that the Committee consider the societal benefits of A3239 when voting and help the people of New Jersey to both be good stewards of our forests and protect and enhance water quality and our watersheds, for the sake of clean drinking water as well as healthy forests. Thank you.

Tracy Carluccio

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Delaware Riverkeeper Network

[1] Society of American Foresters, "Loss of Forest Land", SAF Council, December 5, 2004.

[2] http://www.safnet.org/periodicals/ncssf/NCSSF_Global_Markets_Forum_Report021605.pdf

[3] DNREC and Brandywine Conservancy, Conservation Design for Stormwater Management: A Design Approach to Reduce Stormwater Impacts from Land Development and Achieve Multiple Objectives Related to Land Use, September, 1997, p. 2-23

[4] Water, Science, and Technology Board, Board of Environmental Studies and Technology, "Riparian Areas: Functions and Strategies for Management", 2002, citing Swanson, et al.