



Empire State Forest Products Association

The people behind New York's healthy forests and quality wood products
www.esfpa.org

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Memorandum of Support **A 5390-A/S 6191**

Honorable Patricia Fahy
Member of Assembly
452 LOB
Albany, NY 12248
Via Email fahyp@nyassembly.gov

Honorable Todd Kaminsky
Senator
307 LOB
Albany, NY 12247
Via Email kaminsky@nysenate.gov

April 19, 2021

Dear Assembly Member Fahy and Senator Todd Kaminsky:

The Empire State Forest Products Association is pleased to support this legislation as it relates to including and effort to combat biodiversity and the climate crisis in the State's land acquisition policy and establishing a goal of the State to conserve at least 30% of New York 's land by 2030. We offer here also the role that privately owned forest lands can contribute to achieving this goal.

The Empire State Forest Products Association (ESFPA) represents over 300 member businesses, industries and landowners engaged in forest resource production and stewardship of New York's 19 million acres of forest. In total, \$22.8 billion dollars in annual industry production and nearly 100,000 jobs are attributable to operations of various industries within the forest related sectors. There are over 700,000 private forest landowners who own 14 million acres of New York's forests and their stewardship decisions are critical to keeping New York's forests as forests.

On behalf of private working forest owners across the State, ESFPA writes to express our commitment to help New York achieve the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our land by 2030 (30x30), as described in this legislation. **As you assess land for conservation, we would like to draw your attention to the positive contribution private working forests can make to enduring conservation outcomes, showing that working lands can be compatible with conservation goals.** We offer the following comments for your consideration as you legislate to implement the goal of 30x30.

Amounts Matter and Private Forest Lands are Huge

Approximately 14 million acres – or 75% – of the forests in New York are on private land, owned by individuals, families, small and large businesses, and New Yorkers who invest in forests for enjoyment, recreation forest management and retirement. Through a continuing cycle of growing, harvesting, and regenerating, private working forests provide 90% of the renewable supply of wood and fiber needed for lumber, paper, and packaging, and more than 5,000 items that consumers use every day. Research shows that strong markets for forest products keep private working forests and the economic and environmental benefits they provide intact, preventing their conversion to other land uses.

Private working forests are a critical nature-based solution to many of our most pressing environmental challenges. Combined, our public and private forests sequester enough net carbon each year to offset over 26 Million Metric Tons of carbon emissions. Over 70% of this net sequestration comes from private working forests. In addition, wood produced from private working forests reduces the carbon footprint of the built environment, because wood used in building construction has low embodied carbon (the amount of carbon emitted to produce it) compared to other building materials, and it stores carbon for long periods of time.

Private working forests are also home to sixty percent of our at-risk species, making them critical to wildlife conservation. Actively managed working forests provide a full range of species habitat, including new regeneration, open canopy, older forest habitats, and riparian habitats protected through the use of best management practices. Private working forest owners share a deep commitment to furthering conservation goals on their lands. **Collaboration between private forest owners and state and federal agencies is proven to drive conservation outcomes, often precluding the need for regulatory listings.**

While state and federal agencies have a mandate to conserve and protect America's wildlife, all Americans can play a role in achieving positive conservation outcomes. Private working forests provide one of the best opportunities for the Biden Administration's 30x30 initiative to achieve wildlife conservation at scale.

Conservation Tools on Private Lands

There are a few tools available to help conserve forests, public acquisition just being one of them. We want to highlight three additional tools that have proven to work at scale. First, are working forest conservation easement. Under Article 49 of the Environmental Conservation Law the State has the authority to purchase working forest conservation easements. Over the past 30 years this has resulted in over 800,000 acres of easements being acquired. The State buys the development rights while fee owners have invested billions of dollars into their ownership and management of these lands for timber values. In addition, virtually all these eased properties are under forest third party audited sustainable forest management programs not only ensuring good forest practices but protecting biodiversity, species of greatest conservation concern and social justice concerns.

Second, we worked in 2019 for inclusion of the Easements for Land Trusts line in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) which would help finance easements on forest lands (among others) which will bring the easement tool to landowners of all size ownerships. The days of purchasing State easements

on multiple thousand-acre properties is limited and the next generation of easement will be on lands that the State is not interested in purchasing.

The beauty of these two easement programs is that it leverages private investment, allows limited public dollars to purchase more for their dollar value, and stewardship retains with the private landowner. **If we ever hope to achieve conservation at scale, easements are a valuable tool.**

Third, there is the forest property tax program (Real Property Tax Law section 480-a). To date there are just under 1.25 million acres enrolled in 480-a involving just under 4 thousand landowners. The tax program offers an 80% assessment reduction for the rolling 10-year commitment of a forest landowner. The program encourages first management, requires a forest management plan, and has significant penalties should a landowner choose to withdraw early.

Conclusion

These are three lower cost and effective means of conservation on private forest lands. We write to promote the recognition of the conservation values provided by private working forests and the importance of policies designed to keep those forests working. To effectively achieve the 30x30 goals, we urge you to recognize the conservation values provided by all private working lands. Collaborative conservation efforts are an important tool to harness the scale and knowledge of private landowners. ESFPA stands ready as a resource to the Legislature as it seeks to achieve its 30x30 goals.

For Further Information Contact:

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cc: 2021-22 Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee Members
2021-22 Senate Environmental Conservation Committee Members