



# Missouri Society of American Foresters

February 25, 2015

Hon. John Diehl, Jr. Speaker  
Missouri House of Representatives  
Jefferson City, MO

Dear Speaker Diehl:

The Missouri Society of American Foresters (Missouri SAF), the organization representing over 200 professional foresters in Missouri, appreciates the opportunity to comment on HJR 27 that proposes a reduction of the conservation dedicated sales tax from 1/8<sup>th</sup> of one percent to 1/16<sup>th</sup> of one percent.

In 1937 the citizens of Missouri approved an amendment to the state constitution that created the Missouri Conservation Commission to manage the activities and approve all regulations promulgated by the Conservation Department. The goal was to keep politics out of conservation and let public opinion and research help guide the management of forests, fish and wildlife. In the last seventy-eight years Missouri has seen tremendous improvements in its forest, fish, and wildlife resources. Deer and turkey populations have rebounded from critically low numbers to healthy, huntable populations that contribute tremendously to the social and economic well-being of the state. Quality fishing opportunities exist across our state. The number of destructive wildfires has been greatly reduced, resulting in improved timber quality and wildlife habitat. Forests now occupy 15.4 million acres of Missouri's landscape and contribute \$8 billion to our economy, employing over 42,000 people. In 1977 Missouri citizens again showed their support for the Conservation Commission's management approach by passing a dedicated conservation sales tax amendment to the state constitution. This amendment, brought by initiative petition, dedicates one-eighth of one percent of all state sales tax revenue to the Conservation Department. This stable revenue source has allowed the Conservation Department to achieve the outcomes mentioned above. As a result of these critically important amendments, the Missouri Department of Conservation is widely regarded as one of the leading conservation agencies in the nation.

Respectfully, Missouri SAF is opposed to HJR 27. We believe that HJR 27 would jeopardize many of the gains the Conservation Department has made in the management of Missouri's forest, fish, and wildlife resources. At the present time the dedicated sales tax accounts for approximately 60 percent the Conservation Department's annual budget. Reducing the tax rate from one-eighth to one-sixteenth of one percent will catastrophically affect the Conservation Department's ability to achieve its mission for Missouri citizens. This is a mission that the citizens of Missouri overwhelmingly support.

Missouri SAF is particularly concerned with the impact HJR 27 would have on the forest resources of Missouri. The Conservation Department is the leading agency when it comes to Missouri's forest resource. Using budget dollars as leverage, the Conservation Department is able to secure hundreds of thousands of federal dollars to fund programs that enhance and protect Missouri's forest resources.

Reduced Conservation Department funding would divert those federal funds to other states and negatively impact many aspects of forest management in Missouri. Below are just a few examples of how the Conservation Department benefits the forest resources of our great state.

The majority of the forestland in Missouri is under private ownership (83%), therefore, the key to maintaining the health of Missouri's forest is sustainably managing private forestland. Every year Conservation Department foresters provide assistance to approximately 1,700 landowners totaling owning over 100,000 acres and make approximately 200 referrals to private forest consultants.

The Department supports over 800 rural fire departments in protecting trees, property and lives from wildfire. Fire departments in the state benefit from a grant program that provides over \$300,000 in federal and state money for wildland firefighting needs. The Department also operates the Rural Forest Fire Equipment Center which has provided \$80 million in equipment to rural fire departments.

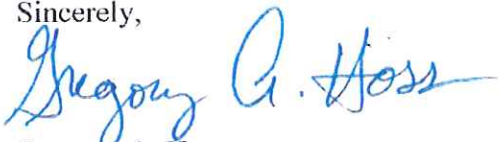
The Department partners with the Missouri forest products industry to increase the value of Missouri wood products and promote robust and sustainable timber harvest opportunities for landowners. Projects include: developing a MO Wood Products branding strategy, supporting Master Logger Certification, supporting the Professional Timber Harvester training program, developing voluntary Missouri Forest Management Guidelines, and partnering with the Missouri Consulting Foresters Association to publish the Timber Price Trends Report. This report aids thousands of landowners in determining the value of their timber.

The Department works to protect Missouri's communities and forest products industry against devastating and costly diseases such as Emerald Ash Borer, Thousand Canker Disease of black walnut, and Rapid White Oak Mortality through monitoring, research, outreach, education, and developing action plans.

The Department helps communities and landowners create great places to live through the planting of trees and shrubs. In 2014 the state nursery grew and distributed nearly 3 million trees and shrubs for planting on public and private land. The Department partnered with the Department of Transportation to give away 249,000 free trees through the Trees for Tomorrow program, and also provided \$324,000 in grants to both large and small communities across Missouri to help manage their community tree resources. After the devastating tornado in Joplin the Department placed an urban forester in Joplin to coordinate replanting efforts and provided grants and trees to assist in recovery efforts.

Missouri's forests have recovered and become a significant economic driver since the inception of the Department of Conservation and funding that allows for long range planning. HJR 27 puts the future sustainability and productivity of our forests at risk. MOSAF encourages you to not support HJR 27 for these reasons. The passage of this resolution will put Missouri's trees and forests at risk.

Sincerely,



Gregory A. Hoss

National Society of American Foresters Board of Directors, District 9 Rep.  
Missouri Society of American Foresters - Historian