



Missouri Society of American Foresters

February 23, 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 HB 833 that proposes changes to the management of Conservation Department owned lands.

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 resources of Missouri.

To carry out its constitutional mission of managing forest, fish, and wildlife resources, the Conservation Department assembles inter-disciplinary teams to develop management plans for the conservation areas it manages. These teams of foresters and biologists collaborate to develop scientifically sound management plans that produce healthy forest, fish and wildlife resources. They take a balanced approach to address social, economic and biological benefits of management. In addition, the Department has an area planning process by which citizens and organizations can provide input on their conservation areas.

The Department manages approximately 600,000 acres of forestland (only 4% of Missouri's forests). Management is based on a detailed, science based forest inventory. Foresters assign management prescriptions based on forest health, wildlife habitat, aesthetic, and water quality considerations. Harvesting is one of the critical tools used to improve forest health and wildlife habitat. While, on average, 23,000 acres of conservation area forests are inventoried each year, only 8,000 acres of timber is harvested per year with a little over 1,000 of those acres receiving a clearcut prescription (about 4%).

Findings from the cooperative Missouri Forest Ecosystem Project, the long-term forest management research project designed to assess timber harvesting impacts in the Missouri

Ozarks, have found that clearcutting helps regenerate shade-intolerant tree species such as red oak and also benefits wildlife that use young forest habitat.

Clearcutting is also used to salvage dead timber when diseases like Rapid White Oak Mortality and oak decline kill nearly all of the merchantable trees in certain areas of a forest. Eliminating clearcutting would lead to undesirable waste of forest products and increased risk of wildfires.

Clearcutting is a widely-accepted silvicultural regeneration method. It should not be confused with either land conversion or exploitative, intense, unsustainable harvesting (i.e., high grading) that seeks to maximize profits by harvesting only the best timber trees. High grading often occurs on private forestland, which represents 85% of the forest ownership in Missouri. Private forest land management often disregards professional forestry methods and best management practices, resulting in persistent high grading of the best quality trees, reduced wildlife and timber value, and soil compaction and erosion.

With all due respect, Missouri SAF is opposed to HB 833. We believe that HB 833 violates Article 4, Section 40(a) of the Missouri Constitution that gives management authority of Conservation Commission land to the Conservation Commission. We further believe that HB 833 would create unnecessary bureaucratic redundancy and waste, given that forest management activities on Conservation Department owned lands already undergo extensive planning and review. Presently the Conservation Department receives advice from the Missouri Forest Resource Advisory Council. All of the members of the proposed consortium are already members of the council, along with many other organizations.

Lastly, HB 833 jeopardizes the ability of the Conservation Department to sustainably create early successional forest habitats (i.e. young forests) which are critical to a large number of wildlife and for regenerating important tree species. Missouri's Forest Management Guidelines – a multidisciplinary document created by a broad partnership of organizations concerned about the well-being of Missouri's forests, sets forth best management practices under which such management is carried out on Conservation Department lands for creating healthy, productive, and diverse forests and wildlife.

Representatives of Missouri SAF would be willing and pleased to lead a field tour for interested legislators to illustrate the differences between science based, planned clearcutting methods and exploitive high-grading, and to showcase how forest management is used on conservation areas.

Sincerely,



Gregory A. Hoss

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