

REPORT OF THE
STATE FORESTER, DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACTIONS, CONCLUSIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSERVING THE
COMMONWEALTH'S FOREST SUPPLY**

TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA



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*Annual Report on the Actions,
Conclusions and Recommendations for
Conserving the Commonwealth's Forest
Supply*

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Preface

Code Section 10.1-1119 of the Code of Virginia directs the State Forester to report his actions, conclusions and recommendations to each session of the General Assembly, and to publish such conclusions and recommendations as may be of immediate public interest.

As an agency that coordinates activities among private landowners, special interest groups, educators, consulting foresters, and industry, the Department of Forestry has taken a lead role in providing “a desirable forestry future” that will ensure a healthy protected forest for future generations. Together we can manage forestland as a protected and enhanced resource that will benefit present and future generations of Virginians.

To carry out the mission of the Department of Forestry (DOF), all employees must focus diligently on forest resources. All programs, projects, and activities must clearly support this underlying premise. Since the ownership of these forest resources is not the Department, the mission can only be accomplished by influencing those who either own or control the resources or make policy decisions affecting them. Currently less than 15% of the forestland in Virginia is under management. This means only about 15% of private landowners in Virginia, owning three-quarters of Virginia’s forests, have essential information to enable them to make informed decisions about their forest. The greatest impact will occur when the Department creates an atmosphere of trust, credibility, and reliability with those we serve.

Rapid population growth places ever greater demands on Virginia’s shrinking forest land base. Successful pursuit of the DOF mission hinges on four fundamental achievements: protection of forest resources, conservation of the forest land base, protection of water quality and improvement and continued renewal of its forests. DOF has made outstanding progress in forest protection and pine management. This must continue; but these successes alone will not be enough. If present population growth trends persist, the available forest land base will eventually diminish to the point where it may no longer support the needs of existing forest industry. Our initial assessments suggest that we are approaching this point quickly. DOF must address the issue of forest land base conservation and land-use policy.

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Executive Summary

Forestland is a major contributor to Virginia's economy, and its greatest asset is renewability. With thoughtful planning and informed management, the Commonwealth's expanding population can continue to depend on sustainable forest resources for products, jobs, tourism, recreation and environmental amenities. More than three-quarters of Virginia's forestland is in non-industrial, private ownership. Much can be gained by improving average forest productivity through better management of these lands. Increasing the efficiency of harvesting and processing operations extends the resource so that less wood will be needed to satisfy certain product needs. Working in urbanizing areas will also be an important role of the Department of Forestry (DOF). Professional management and planning in urbanizing areas is critical to tree protection and establishment. Maintaining healthy forests and trees in urban areas will improve the desirability and quality of life for the residents of that community. Virginia's forests are a living, growing resource. If managed properly they will support a prospering Virginia through an expanding forest industry and quality communities, along with increased wildlife habitat, improved water resources and air quality, and greater recreational opportunities far into the twenty-first century.

The DOF must work to reverse the trend of a shrinking forest land base and ensure a large enough forest land base to accommodate the future needs of Virginians. Conserving the forest land base will not only allow us to continue to practice responsible forestry and ensure adequate resources for Virginia's forest industry, but it will also protect the environmental benefits derived from forests, such as improved water quality, wildlife habitat, air quality improvement, noise abatement, and soil improvement and protection. It also protects the scenic beauty and quality of life that attracts people and businesses to locate in Virginia.

Rapid population growth places ever greater demands on Virginia's forest land base. Successful pursuit of the DOF mission strongly hinges on the conservation of the land base. The Forest Inventory of Virginia data shows a direct loss in excess of 20,000 acres of forestland *each year* to development and limited agricultural conversion. Based on population growth distribution studies, the functional loss of forestland is much higher. Development also complicates and increases the challenges of resource management and protection. Virginia's population growth is inevitable. Sensitivity to conservation of natural resources needs to be a major component of urban planning.

Studies of fiscal impact of major land-uses show an overwhelming benefit derived from farms and forestland when compared to residential, industrial and commercial lands. Comparing revenues from and expenditures for various land uses in several piedmont Virginia counties, officials report that for every dollar of tax revenue from forest and farm land only 10 to 20 cents is required for services on those lands. The remaining 80-90 percent of tax revenues from forest and farm land is available to local governments to fund schools and other services for residential areas. The studies also found that without this surplus, tax revenues would be insufficient to meet the cost of services for residential areas.

Many of tomorrow's forestry opportunities will occur only as a result of a coordinated cooperative effort by the entire conservation community. The story of responsible forest management and forest land base conservation needs to be told.

Recommendations

The Department of Forestry has developed five main goals to work toward reversing the trend of a shrinking forest land base and ensure a large enough forest land base to accommodate the future needs of Virginians:

- 1) Protect the forest resources from wildfire.
- 2) Conserve the forest land base.
- 3) Protect water quality associated with silvicultural activities and riparian areas.
- 4) Improve and renew forest resources.
- 5) Create an organizational environment that enables employees to effectively protect and develop healthy, sustainable forest resources.

Background and Recommendations

Protect the Forest Resources from Wildfire

Forest resources in Virginia require protection. Forests support an industry that contributes \$9.8 billion annually to the Commonwealth's economy while enhancing the health and well-being of its people. It accounts for over 228,370 jobs. When you factor forest related value, the forest resource of Virginia contributes \$11.5 billion to Virginia's economy. The estimated value-at-risk for the state's 16,347,000 acres of productive forestland is \$1,022 per acre; the total risk is over \$16 billion!

Records show that most of Virginia's wildfires are caused by people. Residential developments in forested areas are increasingly common. This increases the risk of wildfire, complicates fire suppression and requires continued fire prevention and protection activities.

Conserve the Forest Land Base

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Protect Water Quality Associated with Silvicultural Activities and Riparian Areas

The forests of Virginia are critical to maintaining water quality. Forests play an important role in filtering and absorbing sediment and nutrients before they reach streams. The Chesapeake Bay Report stated that "Acre for acre, forests are the most beneficial land use in terms of water quality". Acting as a living filter, forests capture rainfall, regulate storm water and stream flow,

filter nutrients and sediments and stabilize soils. When streams are buffered by surrounding forest, runoff washing into the streams is greatly reduced. This is extremely important to watershed management, especially if those watersheds supply drinking water for communities.

Healthy forested riparian areas also provide critical habitat for numerous animal, plant and aquatic communities. As Virginia's population continues to grow, the need for clean water will increase. For people and businesses to continue to prosper, sources of quality water will be essential. The DOF will need to work with landowners to establish and maintain streamside forestland to help protect future water supplies. The presence of forests will guarantee water quality.

Improve and Renew Forest Resources

Forestland is a major contributor to Virginia's economy, and its greatest asset is renewability. With thoughtful planning and informed management, the Commonwealth's expanding population can continue to depend on sustainable forest resources for products, jobs, tourism, recreation and environmental amenities. More than three-quarters of Virginia's forestland is in non-industrial, private ownership. Much can be gained by improving average forest productivity through better management of these lands. Increasing the efficiency of harvesting and processing operations extends the resource so that less wood will be needed to satisfy certain product needs. Working in urbanizing areas will also be an important role of the Department of Forestry. Professional management and planning in urbanizing areas is critical to tree protection and establishment. Maintaining healthy forests and trees in urban areas will improve the desirability and quality of life for the residents of that community. Virginia's forests are a living, growing resource. If managed properly they will support a prospering Virginia through an expanding forest industry and quality communities, along with increased wildlife habitat, improved water resources and air quality, and greater recreational opportunities far into the twenty-first century.

Create an Organizational Environment that Enables Employees to Effectively Protect Land Develop Healthy, Sustainable Forest Resources

Changes in demographics, population growth, landowner values and the forest land base of Virginia, have resulted in increased demands on DOF. Changing customer needs require the DOF workforce to have the ability to adapt to meet those changing needs while staying focused on the forest resource (promoting management based on good science). In order for the workforce to be truly effective, the organization must have focus and direction, ensure effective communication and provide employees with the appropriate level of training, career advancement, compensation, and resources.

Appendices

Appendix I: §10.1-1119 – Preservation of evidence as to conserving forest supply; reports to General Assembly

APPENDIX I

§ 10.1-1119. Preservation of evidence as to conserving forest supply; reports to General Assembly; publications.

The State Forester shall preserve all evidence taken by him with reference to conserving the forests of the Commonwealth and the methods best adapted to accomplish such object. He shall report his actions, conclusions and recommendations to each session of the General Assembly and from time to time publish for public distribution, in bulletin or other form, such conclusions and recommendations as may be of immediate public interest.

(Code 1950, § 10-41; 1984, c. 750; 1986, c. 567; 1988, c. 891.)