



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Wisconsin's Dedication to Forestry and Paper Goods

Wisconsin's forestry and paper goods industry began in 1848 – a mere couple of months before our state was formally entered into the union. Our commitment to success and growth within the industry increasingly led to Wisconsin becoming our nation's top producer of paper products. In order to celebrate our achievements, we have proclaimed April as Forestry and Paper Products Month. Our annual tradition of commemorating Wisconsin's contributions to this industry acts as another reminder to Wisconsin residents that we must continue to safely manage our forestlands.

With over 64,000 employees, the forestry and paper goods industry comprises 13.5% of all jobs in Wisconsin. In total, \$3.4 billion is contributed to our economy annually through the wages of our hard working foresters. Despite some decline over the past few years in paper production, Wisconsin continues to remain the United States' highest paper producing state. We are confident that with recent changes in forest management policies, we can increase our harvests in a safe and efficient manner so that Wisconsin remains the top producer of paper goods.

One way we have been able to reinstate local forestry management practices is through the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress expanded the GNA allowing the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to enter into cooperative agreements with states to perform forest management activities. Wisconsin was the first state to take advantage of this program east of the Mississippi.

During the last legislative session, as part of our work on the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC), we drafted a budget amendment granting authority to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to begin working with the federal government on an agreement that would be the frame work for future GNA projects in Wisconsin. Since that time, the department has had over seventeen timber harvest sales on 2,678 acres – generating almost \$2 million in proceeds.

These seventeen completed sales represent a milestone in federal-state partnerships. Completed sales of federal land show that cooperation between different levels of government can work. State resources can now be utilized to maximize the capacity of work completed on the National Forest System, which will prove beneficial for our environment and for our sportsmen. By expanding the GNA to more projects in northern Wisconsin, we can ensure that Wisconsin lowers the large backlog of harvests on its national forests.

A great example of how the GNA has benefited the Northwoods is in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNF). The Wisconsin DNR is now preparing, awarding, and administering all timber sale transactions on the CNF that have completed their planning work. Essentially, the WDNR is lending its resources to the U.S. Forest Service to ensure that we are maximizing the amount of timber offered for sale. In fiscal year 2016, the DNR reported that there was more than 100 MMBF (millions of board feet) of timber sold from the CNF. The DNR concluded that without the GNA, only 85 MMBF would have been sold in fiscal year 2016. Just six years ago, the CNF was selling around 60-65 MMBF. The success of the GNA can be seen very clearly, and we look forward to watching its ongoing success.

Biennially, the JFC, along with the Governor, and ultimately the legislature, work on crafting the budget for the state. Our region, for a second biennial session, has representation from both houses on the JFC. We both sit as members on the sixteen-member committee from our respective legislative houses.

During the 2015-17 Biennial Budget, we worked tirelessly to ensure that changes to our state's managed forest land (MFL) laws truly benefitted our local communities. Because of the changes in the MFL laws, \$19.6 million will be returned to local governments by the end of the 2018 fiscal year. The highest expenditure local governments usually spend this money on is transportation, specifically road repair and maintenance. We are excited to give our local communities more financial independence along with more funding to address concerns in their area. Additionally, we have worked to finally streamline the timber cutting notice process. Under these changes, anyone who has hired a forester that is participating in the DNR's cooperating forester program will receive automatic approval of their timber cutting notices. An overwhelming amount of these notices receive the approval, but due to previous policies, they were often delayed, costing the participant both time and money.

As of this week, the JFC has begun to meet with various agencies across the state to begin the formal budgeting process. We look forward to working with our colleagues on the JFC to ensure that the taxpayers of the Northwoods receive a maximum return on their taxpaying dollars.

One of the proposals that was included within the 2017-19 biennial budget was the relocation of the DNR Forestry Office to an already existing state-owned facility north of Highway 29. In addition to the movement of the Chief Forester, the move would also include the fifty-five remaining Madison-based employees. This will allow for the department to be located closer to the resources that it manages. Additionally, by shifting the office closer to the resources, we will be able to expand our pool of qualified candidates who work in the field and wish to remain closer to their homes. Across many government agencies, there has always been a back-and-forth between the northern parts of the state and Madison. This change will simply make it easier for the Forestry division to maintain the resources and land that they manage. Finally, the choice to move this location to an already existing state-owned facility will ensure that we are not wasting taxpayer dollars to build and maintain a new facility for the Forestry Office.

Wisconsinites take pride in their forests. Many of us choose to live up north because of the beautiful forests that we have in Wisconsin. As we get closer to April and we celebrate Forestry and Paper Products Month, it is important to remember the commitment we have made to sustainably manage these forests. We must guarantee that with each harvest, we are maximizing our forests' potential to ensure that Wisconsin remains our nation's largest paper producer.

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Submitted by: State Senator Tom Tiffany and State Representative Mary Felzkowski (Czaja)