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Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 367

Assembly Committee on State Affairs

June 2, 2021

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill (AB) 367 today. I appreciate having the opportunity to work with Representative Krug, Senator Testin, and Senator Felzkowski on this important legislation.

When the Verso paper mill closed last year the impacts were felt far outside of the Wisconsin Rapids area. Prior to its closure, this mill utilized approximately 25% of all the pulpwood harvested in Wisconsin. With this major customer gone, many timber professionals who sold to this mill have struggled to find new buyers for their product. I have heard from loggers in my district who lost 50% or more of their business when the Wisconsin Rapids mill closed. A large number of them have been unable to find new customers to replace the loss of Verso.

Beyond the impact on the timber industry, the closure of the Wisconsin Rapids mill has also negatively impacted the budgets of many northern counties. Many counties across the Northwoods receive a significant amount of revenue from timber sales out of their county forests. For example, my office spoke with the county forest administrator in Rusk County who estimates that lost timber sales from the closure of the Verso mill has resulted in a reduction in revenue of around \$300,000 for the county. Other counties in my district and around northern Wisconsin are facing similar challenges.

Outside of the financial impacts, the harvest of timber is an important part of forest management. If the reduction in the harvest of pulpwood caused by the Wisconsin Rapids mill closure is not reversed the health of our state's forests could suffer resulting in an increased fire risk amongst other problems.

AB 367 would make a big difference in northern Wisconsin by providing the necessary funding to reopen the Wisconsin Rapids paper mill and return a very important customer for Wisconsin's timber industry.

Mr. Chairman and members, I ask you to join me in supporting AB 367 and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.