



Missouri Forest Resources Advisory Council

Promoting forest health, productivity, and sustainability

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April 1, 2015

Representative John Diehl
Speaker, Missouri House of Representatives
201 W. Capitol Ave, Room 308
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Speaker Diehl:

The Missouri Forest Resources Advisory Council (MoFRAC), an organization representing 25 member groups, was formed and exists to promote the implementation of sustainable management practices on all forest land in Missouri, both public and private. During the MoFRAC Meeting of March 11, 2015, voting members present respectfully voiced their opposition to House Bill No. 833 that proposes changes to the management of lands owned by the Missouri Conservation Commission. Please note that all state and federal agency members abstained from the discussion and the vote.

To implement its constitutional mission of managing the forest, fish, and wildlife resources, the Conservation Department assembles inter-disciplinary teams to develop management plans for all conservation areas. These teams are composed of foresters and biologists who collaborate to develop scientifically sound management plans that produce healthy forest, fish and wildlife resources. The teams take a balanced approach to address social, economic, and biological benefits of management. Additionally, the Department's planning process solicits input from citizens and organizations.

The Department manages approximately 600,000 acres of forest land (only 4% of Missouri's 15 million acres of forests). Managing the forest begins with a detailed, science based inventory. Foresters prescribe management practices 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 the average, 23,000 acres of conservation area forests are inventoried annually, only 8,000 acres of timber is harvested per year. A little over 1,000 acres is treated with the clearcut prescription (about 12% of the area harvested annually).

Findings from the cooperative Missouri Forest Ecosystem Project, the long-term 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 benefit wildlife that use young forest habitat.

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Clearcutting is also used to salvage dying and dead timber when diseases like Rapid White Oak Mortality and oak decline impact nearly all 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 to non-forested uses or exploitatively, intense, unsustainable harvesting (i.e., high grading) that seeks to maximize profits by harvesting only the best timber trees.

With all due respect, the Missouri Forest Resources Advisory Council 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 lands to the Conservation Commission. We further believe that HB 833 would create unnecessary redundancy and waste, given that forest management activities on Conservation Commission owned lands already undergo extensive planning and review. Presently the Conservation Department staff receives advice from the Missouri Forest Resource Advisory Council and, coincidentally all of the members of the bill's proposed consortium are already members of MoFRAC.

Lastly, HB 833 jeopardizes the ability of the Conservation Department to sustainably create early successional forest habitat (i.e., young forests) that is vital to a large number of wildlife species 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, clearly identifies regeneration harvests as an appropriate tool given the application of best management practices.

Members of MoFRAC 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 show case how forest management is used on conservation areas.

Sincerely,



Lynn W. Barnickol CF
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Society of American Foresters Certified Forester No. 1405
Executive Director, Missouri Consulting Foresters Association

Disclaimer: This correspondence represents a majority view that may not be held by each member