Sustainable Forestry Initiative

The public image of the forest industry has suffered greatly over the last decade because many people believe that the industry is not practicing sustainable forestry and is resisting implementation of best management practices to protect water quality. Many private landowners also have been upset by poor logging practices that have taken place on their property. While some in the industry may deserve their negative reputation, most individual forest product companies are ethical, actively support and participate in logger education programs, and properly implement environmental regulations and sound forest practices.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) is a proactive program by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) to put teeth behind the commitment of the forest products industry to ensure the health of America's forests. AF&PA is the national organization that represents forest product companies. It has committed $50 million to support the initiative which is outlined in the December 1995 booklet Sustainable Forestry: Principles and Implementation Guidelines. This booklet details the minimum standards acceptable by the association to sustain economically and environmentally healthy forests. The measures involve: prompt reforestation; protecting water quality; enhancing wildlife habitat; providing for diversity of wildlife; minimizing the negative visual and biodiversity impact by restricting the size of clearcuts; the prudent use of chemicals to ensure the health of people; and the protection of streams and sensitive areas.

It is easy to be suspicious of SFI as another public relations effort. However, after one-year, it appears that the industry is serious about its commitment. Seventeen companies have been suspended from membership in AF&PA for failure to comply with the initiative, and an additional 24 have resigned their membership in 1996. In 1996, AF&PA published Sustainable Forestry: Best Management Practices to Protect Water Quality. This is one of many planned publications that highlight the standards being expected of its members.

To implement SFI on a state level, AF&PA members in each state have organized a state SFI committee made up of private and public organizations. For private forest owners, dealing with a company who is a member of AF&PA provides some assurance they are reputable operators; and also provides the landowner the opportunity to inform AF&PA of poor practices or find out if they have refused to comply with the standards in the past. Clearly, many logging operators are too small to be members of AF&PA, but involvement by loggers who...
work on your land in educational programs sponsored by state SFI committees, such as Maryland's Master Logger program is a clear indication they support the effort. A guidebook of Maryland Master Loggers that explains why it is important to use Master Loggers for harvest operations will soon be available from forestry and Cooperative Extension service offices. It will also provide a method to identify those who do not act appropriately.

There are three Maryland companies who are members of AF & PA and all are behind this initiative. They are Chesapeake, Westvaco, and Glatfelter Pulp & Paper. For more information on SFI or publications contact the state SFI committee at: Maryland Forests Association, P.O. Box 599, Grantsville, MD 21536 (301) 895-5369.

**Forestry Goes Grass Roots**

The Maryland Tree Farm Committee has organized a new grassroots subcommittee made up of non-industrial private landowners. The objectives of the group are to be advocates for issues that affect non-industrial forest owners, demonstrate the benefits of sustainable forestry to the public, and encourage participation of forest owners in the Tree Farm Program.

The organization of grassroot landowner advocacy groups in each state is part of a national training program by the American Tree Farm System. The intent is to create a network that can mobilize and act immediately on state and national issues that affect private forest owners.

If you are interested in the Maryland effort, contact: Howard A. Anderson, 7141 Old Bayside Road, Chesapeake Beach, MD 20732 (888) 455-7400.

**Income Enterprise Workshop For Nonresident Landowners**

Many Maryland forest owners do not live on their property but they have a real desire to develop some type of income-producing enterprise. Information on natural resource income opportunities is often hard to find, and determining what fits in with your goals and lifestyle can be even more difficult.

The upcoming seminar "Own Rural Land...But Live in the City? Natural Resource Income Enterprises for the Non-Resident Landowner" is your opportunity to learn about different enterprises, gather information, and find out how to get started. The Upcoming Stewardship Events section on page 4 provides contact information.

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**Teaming With Wildlife**

"Teaming with Wildlife" is a hotly debated measure currently being considered in Congress. It would put a manufacturer's excise tax on outdoor recreation equipment, with the resulting funds being used to help ensure the continued survival of non-game wildlife species.

A similar source of funding already exists to support game species. For over 50 years, hunters and anglers have paid user fees on hunting and fishing equipment through the Pittsman-Robertson and Wallop-Breaux trust funds. These funds have restored habitat and populations of many game species, and many non-game species have benefited as well.

The demand for non-consumptive wildlife-related recreation has increased steadily in recent years. According to a 1991 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) survey, approximately 76 million Americans participated in wildlife-related activities and spent $59 billion on trips and related equipment. Taxing such equipment would generate substantial revenues nationwide, with a possible $5 million for Maryland alone.

Specific taxes suggested in "Teaming with Wildlife" include: a 5 percent tax on camping equipment, water recreation and ski equipment, mountain bikes, binoculars and other sight augmenting items, wild bird feeders and houses, and field guides; a 3 percent tax on photo equipment; and a 0.25 percent tax on recreational vehicles, not to exceed $100 per unit.

The new fund, which is now supported by more than 900 groups representing industry, sportsmen, and conservationist will allow proactive management of fish and wildlife to prevent species from becoming endangered or threatened. The fee would be collected at the manufacturer's level and be distributed to the states by the USFWS according to a formula. For more information, contact Edith Thompson, Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Division, Tawes State Office Building, Annapolis, MD 21401, (410) 974-3195.

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**Branching Out**

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Branching Out is published quarterly and distributed to 8,300 woodland owners, resource professionals, and others interested in forest stewardship. Calendar and news items are welcome. Items must be received by October 10 for the next newsletter.

The sponsoring agencies' programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, or disability.
Taxing Confusion

The practice of forest stewardship is a long-term commitment and, at best, involves only periodic sources of income from forest products. With increasing development and rising land values, it is unlikely that many landowners could afford to practice sound forest management if the land was taxed at fair market value. The State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT) allows land under forest management to be taxed for agricultural use, thereby allowing long-term forest management and the protection of open space for the citizens of Maryland.

Many forest landowners lack a good understanding of how the woodland assessment works, their options, and how the assessment relates to estate taxes at the time of death. This primer will provide some basic information.

Property Tax Options

If forestland is part of a farm, it is usually assessed at a rate of $100 per acre. However, many non-farm landowners purchase smaller woodland acreages (ex. 5-25 acres). In some cases, the property may be assessed at a residential rate of thousands of dollars per acre. Two options exist to reduce your valuation for practicing forest management.

1) Forest Conservation and Management Agreement (FCMA): Any owner of 5 or more acres of forest land is eligible to enter into this FCMA contract with the Department of Natural Resources. House sites, crop land, and other non-forest open spaces are not eligible, but land recently planted to forest tree seedlings or Christmas trees is acceptable. A written forest management plan must be prepared by a registered professional forester. It will outline necessary forest practices to meet the landowner’s objectives. The FCMA must be drawn for a minimum of 15 years and can be extended. This a a legal agreement and is recorded on the deed at the courthouse. In return, the property is assessed at $100 per acre, regardless of where you live in Maryland. The plan can be adapted with agreement by the forester. The entry fee for the FCMA is equal to 0.55 percent of the fair market assessment, but not less than $50. Additionally, an inspection fee to check compliance with the plan will be charged every 5 years equal to 20 percent of the entry fee but not less than $100. A brochure on the FCMA program is available from your local forester or Cooperative Extension Service.

2) Forest Management Plan (FMP): The SDAT provides another tax option for landowners who practice forest management, but do not want to be tied to an FCMA agreement. A forest management plan must be prepared by a registered professional forester similar to that described above. The plan is submitted to the county assessor, but there is no legal agreement involved. There is no entry fee for the program, but most counties do require an inspection every three years by a professional forester to make sure the plan is being implemented. Many consultant and industrial foresters do not charge an inspection fee for existing clients. In return, the land is valued at $150 per acre, rather than the $100 per acre under the FCMA. In most cases, the difference in the actual tax bill between the two tax options is quite small. However, the FMP option may save on inspection and entry fees.

Estate Taxes

The above programs reduce your property taxes, but do not usually affect the fair market value used to assess an estate. This is a point of confusion for many landowners and may cause you to undervalue your assets. For more information, request the following publication from your local Cooperative Extension Service office: Keeping It in the Family (FOR 1).
Guide to Great Forestry & Natural Resource Publications (NR91): This is a catalogue of publications written by university Extension specialists. It lists more than 1,300 publications and videos under 25 subject categories and explains how to order them. $7. Order from your local Cooperative Extension Service office.

North American Maple Syrup Producers Manual: First published in 1978, this publication has been completely rewritten and reillustrated for the 90's. It is the basic handbook for sugarbush management and the production and marketing of maple products. To order, send a check for $9.10 (payable to Ohio State University) to Ohio State University Extension, Publications Office, 2021 Kottman Hall, Columbus, OH 43210-1044. (614) 292-1607.

Maryland Forest & Wildlife Extension Publications & Videos: A partial list of publications & videos is provided below. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office listed on page 3 to order:

- *How to Determine Your Property Boundaries (FS619)*
- *Where to Get Help (FS 624)*
- *Developing a Forest Management Plan (FS625)*
- *Alternative Income Enterprise Resource List (FS626)*
- *Maryland Forests: Past, Present & Future (FS627)*
- *Marketing Forest Products: The Sales Contract (FS628)*
- *Measuring Your Forests (FS629)*
- *A Guide to Logging Aesthetics (NR60), $6*
- *Enhancing Wildlife Habitats (NR64), $20*
- *17 wildlife management fact sheets (WMP), $10*
- *Controlling Deer Damage in Maryland (EB354), $1.50*
- *Natural Resource Income Opportunities video, $18*

### Upcoming Stewardship Events...

- **September 5:** Maryland Tree Farm Committee Meeting: Held in Western region of state. Tree farmers are welcome to attend. Contact: Bill Cheeseman (410) 957-1521.

- **September 21:** Project Learning Tree Workshop: Wicomico Demonstration Forest, Parsonsburg, MD. Curriculum materials and instruction on their use provided. Contact: Dave Reinecke, Maryland Forest Service, (410) 543-1950.

- **October 5:** Maryland Chapter of the Walnut Council: Meet at J.S. Ayton State Tree Nursery to discuss walnut seedling production and then tour Bartley Furniture Co. Contact: Bert Thornton, (301) 371-8980.

- **October 20:** Project WET Facilitator Training: Sheperd's Spring Retreat Center, Sharpsburg, MD. Workshops for those who have already completed an educator's workshop. Contact: Jen Cline, (410) 974-8474.


- **November 2:** Maryland Forests Association Annual Meeting.: Ocean City, MD. Contact: MFA, P.O. Box 599, Grantsville, MD 21535 (301) 895-5369.

- **November 2:** Mid-Atlantic Forest Stewardship Seminar: Frederick Comm. Coll., Frederick. Forest owners' seminar covers a variety of forest and wildlife management topics. Contact: Frederick County Cooperative Extension Service, 330 Montevue Lane, Frederick, MD 21701, (301) 694-1594 ext. 3577.

- **November 2:** Own Rural Land...But Live in the City? Natural Resource Income Enterprises for the Non-Resident Landowner. Western Maryland Research and Education Center., Keedysville, MD. Opportunity to learn about a range of natural resource-based enterprises. For information contact: Steve Bogash, (301) 432-4492.

- **November 9:** Central Maryland Forest Stewardship Seminar: Oregon Ridge Nature Center. Forest owners seminar covers a variety of forest and wildlife management topics. Contact: Harford County Cooperative Extension Service, P.O. Box 663, Forest Hill, MD 21050. (410) 638-3255.

- **November 9:** Northeast Agroforestry Conference: Hagerstown, MD. Contact: Tim Hand, R,C&D, (301) 733-2973.