

40 New Jersey Biologists, Ecologists, and Forest Scientists OPPOSED to S1085

“Forest Harvest Program on State Land”

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(over please)

Dear New Jersey Legislature:

The above signed biologists, forest scientists, ecologists, and other land use researchers oppose the "Forest Harvest on State Lands" bill (S 1085) that has been re-introduced in the 2012 legislative session.

This forest harvest bill seems to have emerged from a two-pronged situation. The first is a desire to create new early successional habitats (shrubby meadows) for some game and rare non-game bird species, by extensively managing maturing, heavily forested lands for wood products, instead of restoring the ecological integrity of existing and plentiful early successional landscapes. The second is a "*belief*" that forests cannot prosper unless they are extensively harvested. This view is espoused by the president of the NJ Forestry Association in its Spring 2011 Newsletter that "*a well-managed forest will go on forever, but a forest left to its own devices will die and become useless to anyone.*" This view is based simply on outdated, unscientific folklore. It was issued in response to Hunterdon County citizens voicing opposition to a timbering proposal for one of the county's oldest forest tracts, located on county parkland, ostensibly to make the forest "healthy."

As forest scientists, we all agree that our forests face many troubling issues. While our forests have important management needs, we do not believe that the remedy of choice to address our serious forest issues should be a massive harvest program that creates early successional habitat out of intact, closed-canopy, maturing forest. The focus for creating, restoring, and managing early successional habitat should be in existing but degraded young forests and recently-abandoned farmland habitats, where the negative effects of post-agricultural soils, alien species invasions, and the abundance of medium-size predators have led to the decline of many native species of early successional plants and animals.

In New Jersey, where unfragmented, contiguous, interior-forest conditions are declining and being degraded by overabundant deer and invasive species, a plan for early successional habitats to be hewn out of intact forest lacks scientific merit.

The forest harvest program described in this bill will make almost every existing forest problem worse:

- introducing invasive species to new areas, and exacerbating existing invasive species problems by allowing too much sunlight to reach the ground, where deer have removed native shrubs and invasive weeds are waiting to explode into prominence,
- making it even more difficult to preserve our dwindling natural heritage (there are now over 1000 species of rare plants and animals on our state lands, the list is growing rapidly, and VERY FEW of these species will benefit from commercial forestry),
- growing the deer herd even more as a result of over-abundant sunlight reaching the ground and generating an even larger food supply, thus further impacting sensitive species and making it even more unlikely that native woody species will regenerate and outcompete alien invasive species,
- removing huge amounts of sequestered carbon biomass by removing massive canopy trees; even though current research is yielding new understandings toward the importance of these middle-aged forests (they are not old by any stretch). Our forests are now rapidly increasing the rate at which they store soil carbon in the soil, where it can remain sequestered for incredibly long periods of time.

We, the above-signed forest scientists, respectfully urge the legislature to oppose S 1085. Please do not move this bill forward. The challenges we face to restore our public forests are great, but extensive logging driven by an attempt to create a market for wood products is not the first place to turn for a science-based solution. We respectfully oppose this bill and would be pleased to discuss our most serious forest needs with members of the legislature at any time.

27 January 2012