



Environmental Groups Torn Over Forest Stewardship Bill

Posted on July 10, 2013

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NJ Today

The video can be viewed at <http://video.pbs.org/video/2365043131>

The [bill](#) calls for developing a forest stewardship plan for each state park. Supporters say harvesting or cutting some trees is necessary to make room for new ones on New Jersey's 600,000 acres of state-owned forests, even if it means allowing commercial loggers to do the work.

“We felt this was a bill that was going to allow logging on state-owned lands, which we of course opposed, but with the stipulation that all forest stewardship plans would require independent certification from the Forest Stewardship Council, the bill became more about stewarding our forests than about logging,” said New Jersey Highlands Coalition Senior Policy Analyst Elliott Rouga.

That's why Rouga and several environmental groups support the measure. But others do not because they fear commercial logging will adversely impact open spaces, biodiversity, public access and natural resources.

When asked if the forests need to be managed, Dave Pringle of the New Jersey Environmental Federation said, “They absolutely do, but there's a right way and wrong way to do it. And saying we need to kill the forest to save the forest is the wrong way to go.”

What's wrong with the bill, says Pringle, is that there's no enforcement component. But Rouga says that's not true.

“There is enforcement. Forest stewardship plans are essentially contracts written by DEP and if you don't follow it, you don't get paid,” Rouga said.

“They have more faith in contract law and environmental law than we do. There's a reason that all of New Jersey's environmental laws aren't enforced by contracts but through a criminal and civil code,” Pringle said.

The stewardship plan for each park will have to meet the guidelines of the Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC, a non-governmental group. Opponents argue there's been no financial analysis to determine how much logging would be required for New Jersey to cover the cost of the program.

Meanwhile, David Glass, of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, says the agency does not need its work validated by the FSC because the DEP is the steward of New Jersey's environment. And he believes this provision of the bill could add significant costs to the program, which could reach about \$100,000 in the first year.

The New Jersey Audubon Society is the only organization in the state certified to produce forest stewardship plans, which Pringle says is a conflict of interest. Our calls requesting a comment from the Audubon Society were not immediately returned.

If the governor signs the bill, the public will get a chance to offer input on these plans.

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