

Advocacy or Apathy?

You are probably okay with cutting trees given that you are holding a tree product in your hands. But not everyone is of the same mind, and so those of us who work in the forest or who manufacture forest products have to better publically advocate for sustainable, active forest management on all lands—both public and private.

Over the last 40 years, we have experienced a precipitous decline in active management of our public forestlands and a dramatic increase in land use regulations that further restrict forest stewardship of private lands. These trends appear to be increasing as we enter the second decade of the 21st century.

If you use wood or your business depends on the use of wood, you should be concerned and consider efforts to help the public better understand your need to access land for raw wood materials.

The government claims to support an economy based upon “green jobs.” Yet government actions continue to suppress one of the greenest industries on the planet—the wood industry. The wood industry was using renewable bioenergy long before it became “politically correct” to do so. Our wood products are biodegradable and, in most cases, renewable. Yet current regulations lead the public to believe otherwise. For example, we have yet to see an EPA definition of biofuels that includes most of the forestlands in America.

Few people really grasp that when they go to a fast food restaurant, their drink is handed to them in a forest product, their napkin is a forest product, their sandwich is placed in a forest product, and then

all of those products are placed in a forest product (the bag). They walk out the door and, ironically, many of these same people become upset if they learn that someone is proposing a timber harvest in their area.

Some companies that claim to use only recycled wood often seem to ignore the fact that all wood originally comes from trees, and yet the public’s takeaway message can be that tree harvesting is no longer necessary. The same scenario holds for recycled paper. Paper cannot be recycled indefinitely—it has its limits and it comes from trees.

When it comes to lumber and sawn wood products, few citizens understand that by using wood we are locking up carbon in the wood for centuries, and as technologies evolve, that wood will likely be recycled or used as a renewable biofuel. So if we want to reduce carbon dioxide in the air, plant and use trees!

By using and sustaining our forests, we in the wood products industry are the greenest of all industries. We do it all, yet we are sometimes demonized as exploiters of the forest. A message that should be publicly understood is that sustainable forest management is the key to a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

Our wood products industry is regulated to the extent that wood or finished wood products have become as reliant on offshore producers as oil. Yet America has some of the most productive forestland on the planet. If our anti-forestry attitudes and regulations continue, we’ll likely see the day when we are importing fuel wood pellets from Europe. Oh . . . I almost forgot . . . we already are doing that. Here, in the populous state of New Jersey, supermarket food chains sell firewood and firewood kindling grown, packaged, and shipped from Eastern Europe.

Our apathy on the subject of forest management has allowed extremists in the environmental community to convince the greater public that cutting a tree is always bad and will destroy the environment we depend upon. The forest industry, and we foresters, have simply not made the investments needed to sustain the truthful, wonderful, successful story of sustainable forestry in America.

Our forests are the lungs and

“Sustainable forest management is the key to a healthy environment and a healthy economy.”

lifeline of our planet’s environment, but the government does not have the ability to pay for the necessary stewardship of these lands. The required work can only come from the forests paying their own way, with their own renewable forest products.

All who work in wood or forest businesses must begin to tell your story of “greenness.” If you make wood cabinets, or any wood product for that matter, you are part of

the forest story, and you need to explain to people how the wood comes to be. All of us must come together in a united front to allow the story of sustainable forestry to be told.

The decline of our wood products industries is as much a political/social problem as a global economic problem. If we allow the half-truths, myths, and misinformation to control the forestry debate, our industry will continue to decline and our forests will become museums that ensure their own demise.

Preservation of forests is not conservation of forests; we are beginning to see the decline in the health of our forests as well as the loss of endangered species by the myth of preservation.

What can you do? Plenty! Get engaged on all levels. If you saw wood or make a wood product, be sure you provide your customers with information on the need for active forest management. Look in

your state or area and begin to support forestry organizations, or on the national level, support organizations such as the American Forest Foundation or the Society of American Foresters. Our future is actually in our own hands. Get involved with media, TV, magazines, and newspapers. Media is looking for wonderful green stories and wood and forests are as green as it gets.

Our apathy has to change to advocacy and it has to happen now. Our political leadership must hear from us. We live in an electronic age where the voices of extremists often get the most attention. We have a wonderful green story that hits on all eight cylinders. What other industry provides for the enhancement and conservation of our environment, while at the same time, provides an economic engine?

We need to put more Americans back to work and we need to do it in a fashion that protects and sustains our environment while pro-

Making a living in the forest sector—whether manufacturing furniture, logging trees, making paper, or managing forests—is difficult. Most people work long, hard hours and certainly don't do it to get rich. They do it because they love working with wood or being close to the outdoors and working with the land.









It is difficult to advocate for the forests or forestry when one considers the time and resources it takes away from work. Most folks in this business barely have enough time to make a living and pay the bills. And how can we compete with the non-profit, special interest organizations that are subsidized by our tax dollars and get paid to show up at every public meeting on forest policy? Still, we realize that information and education are the tools we need to tell our story and support sound forest policies and regulations.

We have to reach the public with our story in new and interesting ways. To that end, after a year and a half's effort, I have produced a one-hour video documentary entitled

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This video provides a positive, upbeat explanation of what we do, who we are, and how we care for our forests. The story is unscripted and told by real people in real forests. People who own, work in, play in, and study the forests all explain how critical forest management is and help the uninformed public understand all the ways these woods can contribute to their well-being.

This DVD is now being used in many forestry schools across America. It needs to be shown to political leaders, civic groups, high school students, local zoning and permit officials, etc.

For more information, go to www.aworkingforest.com or contact me directly at bob@landdimensions.com or call 856/307-7800, ext 111.

viding long-term economic growth. The Society of American Foresters has a slogan, "Trees Are the Answer," and they are correct.

Forests have fueled the economy for thousands of years. And yes, even today, most wood is being used in third world countries by folks who need to keep warm with wood and cook their food with wood. Lumber production is not the primary use of wood on earth. So we all have a stake in the future of our forests and a social obligation to the great society we live in.

The United Nations has declared 2011 as "The International Year of Forests-2011." We should all take advantage of this high-profile event that highlights the earth's forests. Are we ready to lock up all our American forests as museums to simply walk through and look at while most areas of the planet are exploiting their forests for our economic use? The answer is no. Instead we should be manag-

ing and using our own forests to ensure their ecological integrity, producing products and economic prosperity, all the while teaching the people of the world how to sustain their forest resources as well. We have the best forestry schools in the world and our forest science is second to none. The time has come for us to regain our role as leaders and help the entire world population sustain a healthy environment and a vibrant economy. It's what we do as Americans—wake up and begin to advocate.

The direction our forest and forest economies have been going is doomed to failure. Let's all come together and find the time and resources to have a really green tree future. Advocate, advocate, advocate! ■

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