

Consultant's View of Private Forestry

By J. Tobey Wright, ACF

During the early part of our history, forestlands provided not only wood needed for building a nation, but also when needed, became farms, pastures and towns. The dynamic ever-changing nature of forests is demonstrated by the fact that many of those early farms, pastures and towns have reverted to forest and some are again becoming rural homesteads.



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Private forestland ownership is recognized as a basic strength of American forestry. The non-industrial portion represents nearly 60 percent of the productive timberland in the nation. Industrial and institutional forestland investors hold another 13 percent. The number, diversity and independence of these owners in a climate of free enterprise is responsible for the well-documented success story of forestry.

For 225 years, private owners have managed forestland in their own ways, for their separate objectives and in response to the supply and demand forces of the free market. The result is an abundance of timber, non-timber forest products, environmental benefits (including protection of soil, water and wildlife), as well as recreational and other enjoyment opportunities.

Private owners have faith in the value of land and timber as a secure investment. These solid investments, managed by good forest practices and estate planning, can foster resource productivity and asset longevity while meeting owner objectives across multiple generations.

A large portion of consultants' business is servicing the needs of private forestland owners. These owners are and will continue to be responsible for the largest productive timberland resource in our country.

Our professional responsibility is to bring balance between resource production based on science and environmental protection. Our goal should be to

ensure the survival of this precious resource in a productive, dynamic and ever-changing state. To do that, we must be involved, act and speak to protect not just timberland, but the very system that allows private property ownership. Left unchecked and unbalanced, death taxes, increasing regulations and non-science-based forest management will continue to erode our current productive forest resources and deny benefits for future generations of Americans.

Our hope for the future is to be able to practice our profession in an environment where opportunity abounds; personal initiative is rewarded; markets are unencumbered; and people, as well as forests, are free to grow. •

Adapted from a presentation at the Leadership Luncheon, Society of American Foresters Annual Convention in Winston Salem, NC, October 7, 2002. J. Tobey Wright is past President, Association of Consulting Foresters of America, Inc. and Executive Vice President of Larson & McGowin, Inc. Mobile, Alabama.

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