

Wisconsin County Forests Association

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Rebekah Luedtke
Executive Director

October 8, 2025

Honorable Senate Committee on Insurance, Housing, Rural Issues and Forestry Members

Senator Quinn

Senator Stafsholt

Senator Jagler

Senator Wall

Senator Dassler-Alfheim

RE: SB456 – Forestry Revitalization Act

The Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) is writing in support of SB456, which aims to financially support a new wood consuming facility in Hayward. This new sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) facility will create high quality jobs for the local community, support the logging and trucking contractors of greater Wisconsin, and help the forests in the Great Lakes region by gaining an important buyer for harvested timber resources.

WCFA represents the 30 counties in Wisconsin with County Forest lands established under state statutes §28.10 and 28.11. Collectively, these 30 counties manage over 2.41 million acres of forests, the largest public ownership in our State. These counties are a major contributor to public land management and rural economic development, and are also highly valued because they provide a reliable source of raw materials for the forest products industry, as well as a tremendous amount of recreation opportunities and abundant wildlife habitat.

Sustainable forests, outdoor recreation and public land management are vitally important to Wisconsin's economic health. Strong and healthy markets are the avenue in which these things are provided. The forest products industry is the 2nd largest for output in Wisconsin, supporting more than 126,000 jobs and contributing over \$42 billion annually to the State's economy.

However, according to the USDA Timber Product Output Survey, Lake States Pulpwood Data, between 2000 and 2019, and exacerbated by the housing market collapse of 2008, the Great Lakes region has lost 20 pulp mills and 4 composite panel mills, equaling a loss of 2.2 million cords being harvested off the landscape annually. Combined with the 2020 loss of Verso's two mills, which consumed roughly 25% of the total raw material harvested in Wisconsin (+/- 600,000 cords annually), there is now a deficit of 2.8 million cords being put into the market each year in the Lake States region. That's over 230,000 truckloads of wood! Furthermore, there hasn't been a new mill built in the region in that timeframe to offset those losses.

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Continual loss of wood markets puts sustainable forest management, including the viability of our healthy forests, in jeopardy. Active sustainable forest management, including timber harvests, provide healthy forest conditions, robust wildlife habitat, clean water resources and offer numerous outdoor recreation amenities and services afforded primarily from timber sale revenues. In Wisconsin, the County Forest programs bring revenue into county coffers to not only fund their programs but to also supplement county wide budgets. For example, the Forestry and Parks department in Rusk County is responsible for 25% of their county's annual operating budget. Other county departments and services, and possibly tax levies, could be significantly impacted if revenues of harvested timber, due to lost markets, fall considerably.

In addition to economic setbacks, counties, and the citizens of Wisconsin, will likely see additional negative environmental and socio-economic impacts as well if markets do not rebound. Simply put, healthy markets equal healthy forests. Healthy forests equal healthy watersheds, healthy wildlife habitat, healthy outdoor tourist opportunities and healthy rural economies.

To that end, the new SAF facility won't just benefit the forests and forest industry of Wisconsin but all of us who live in and recreate in our great State. We all need this facility. Forestry isn't just our job but our passion, our pride and our way of life. We implore you to help keep Wisconsin and the Lake States a national leader in forest products and natural resource management by supporting SB456, the Forestry Revitalization Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration in these matters.
Sincerely,



Rebekah Luedtke
Executive Director
Wisconsin County Forests Association