

Wisconsin County Forests Association

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Rebekah Luedtke
Executive Director

November 1, 2021

Representative Jeff Mursau
Chair, Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation
Room 113 West
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

RE: Support for AB 682

Dear Representative Mursau,

The Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) is writing in support of AB 682 and request to be registered as such in order that the paper mills in Wisconsin Rapids and Park Falls might be purchased to be put back into operation as soon as feasible. This will help ensure jobs return to those communities and greater Wisconsin, and that our forests will regain important buyers for pulpwood harvested in the State. Please note, these comments are only in support of the first portion of the bill helping to reopen the mills in Park Falls and Wisconsin Rapids.

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 2.4 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.

Sustainable forests, outdoor recreation and public land management are vitally important to our State's economic health. As you know, forest products are the 2nd largest industry in Wisconsin, supporting more than 64,000 jobs and contributing over \$24 billion annually to the State's economy. The two Verso mills which were idled in June 2020 consumed roughly 25% of the total raw material harvested in Wisconsin, including the majority of low-grade hardwood pulp. Losing this market is putting 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 addition to economic setbacks, counties, and the citizens of Wisconsin, will see additional negative environmental and socio-economic impacts as well if markets do not rebound.

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Furthermore, 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 summary, forestry isn't just our job but our passion, our pride and our way of life. We implore you to help keep Wisconsin a national leader in forest products and natural resource management by supporting AB 682. By financially supporting the forest products industry, we can go a long way in ensuring the health and viability of wood markets for generations to come.

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



Norman Bickford
President



Rebekah Luedtke
Executive Director