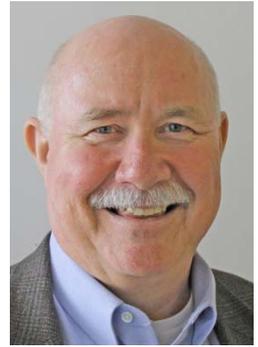


Back to the Future?

By Bob Schaefer, North Carolina Forestry Association Executive Vice President

"Wait a minute, Doc. Are you telling me that you built a time machine out of a DeLorean?"
-- Marty McFly from the movie, *Back to the Future* (1985).

Ok, you will have to forgive me for sharing a little Marty McFly humor before I am dragged into yet another discussion on the sustainability of North Carolina's forests by agenda-driven environmental groups seeking to create a crisis. The difference is that the DeLorean that McFly was piloting took him back 30-plus years to the 1950's.



It's been just 12 years since the Southern Forest Resource Assessment (SFRA) was published and highlighted in every major newspaper in the country. Commissioned in 1999, the SFRA was a comprehensive collaborative study that examined the factors impacting the forests in the South. The collaborators included the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The study was prompted by the same environmental groups that complained that the forest products industry was clear-cutting the South's forests to make paper products. The perceived villains were chip mills, simple facilities that chip small trees into chips for the production of such non-essential products as toilet paper. These scare campaigns are nothing more than fundraising efforts.

The study was over 1,000 pages and it made several findings. None of them cast a negative light on the forest products industry. In his conclusion, David Wear, a co-leader of the study with the USFS, stated, "It appears that population growth and urbanization are the most significant challenges we face in sustaining forests."

Urban sprawl remains the top threat to the survival of working farms and forests. The slow economy, which has eliminated or damaged markets for forest landowners, probably ranks as a close second.

The good news is that according to the most recent data from the USFS and the North Carolina Forest Service, North Carolina has 18.6 million acres of forestland, which is an increase in acreage from survey data in the early 2000's.

More good news is that the majority of North Carolina's forests (85%) are privately owned, and two-thirds of these privately owned forests are designated as non-industrial private forests (NIPF) which are owned by individuals and families. These private landowners rely on healthy markets to sustain their forests. Our state's strong private property rights and our nation's free market system allow them to pursue this opportunity.

So if a market emerges where there is an abundant supply of trees, who is truly surprised? No one. Who benefits? Forest landowners, of course, that now have another market for their trees and a better path to conserving their forest legacy for the next generation.

A recent Wall Street Journal article pointed out that one of Europe's attractions to the American market for wood pellets beside the abundant supply of privately held, well-managed forests, is the existence of state and federal regulatory oversight over harvesting operations. Loggers' compliance with the North Carolina's Best Management Practices (BMPs) is over 93% and compliance rates climb even higher when the logger is a graduate of the NCFA's logger training program, ProLogger.

North Carolina, the birthplace of American Forestry, has a proven track record of conserving our only natural, renewable resource through incentive based public policy that promotes private property rights and healthy forests. Markets may change, but our state's commitment to its forestry tradition is proud and unwavering.

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Since 1911, the North Carolina Forestry Association has promoted the health, diversity and productivity of North Carolina's forests through its work in the political, professional and public arenas. The NCFA membership includes 4,000 members across the state. Bob Schaefer is a Certified Forester and has over 35 years working in the forest products industry across the Southeast. He can be reached at (800) 231-7723 ext. 5 or bschaefer@ncforestry.org.