

Wisconsin County Forests Association

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Wisconsin County Forests Association
Concerns with Proposed FY2016 - FY2017
Wisconsin State Budget

Increased PILT/ Acreage Share Payments to Towns with County Forest Lands

We appreciate Governor Walker's desire to responsibly manage state tax dollars. However, we feel an important item was left out of his budget proposal, one we were expecting to be included.

Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) represents the forestry interests of 29 counties with lands enrolled under Wisconsin's County Forest Law (state statutes §28.10 and §28.11). Collectively our member counties manage nearly 2.4 million acres of forest lands, the largest public ownership in the state. §28.10 and the opening paragraph of §28.11 read as follows;

28.10 County forests. The county board of any county may by resolution establish a county public forest and acquire land by tax deed or otherwise for that purpose.

28.11 Administration of county forests.

(1) Purpose. The purpose of this section is to provide the basis for a permanent program of county forests and to enable and encourage the planned development and management of the county forests for optimum production of forest products together with recreational opportunities, wildlife, watershed protection and stabilization of stream flow, giving full recognition to the concept of multiple-use to assure maximum public benefits; to protect the public rights, interests and investments in such lands; **and to compensate the counties for the public uses, benefits and privileges these lands provide; all in a manner which will provide a reasonable revenue to the towns in which such lands lie.** (Emphasis added)

Our county forests are working forests. Our sustainable forest management practices provide income to offset local tax levies. Our recreation programs are second to none and have been widely recognized for their societal benefits. Our large blocks of forests provide ecological benefits at a landscape level. There is no doubt our county forests are generous contributors to Wisconsin's forest products industry and to the healthy lifestyle many Wisconsin citizens choose to enjoy.

Throughout its history Wisconsin's forestry mil tax (segregated funds) has afforded a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)/Acreage Share Payment to towns containing county forest lands. The PILT/Acreage Share Payment to towns with county forest lands is currently 30 cents per acre, a rate established in 1989.

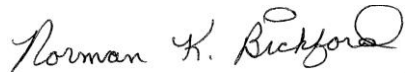
WCFA feels an increase in this payment to towns with county forest lands is long overdue and definitely justifiable. We continue to struggle with transportation issues on town roads used to haul forest products from our lands. The rural transportation infrastructure is extremely important to Wisconsin's \$20 billion forest products industry. As important providers of raw material for this key industry it is critical that our towns receive adequate compensation to meet the state's statutory obligation in §28.11(1). Segregated funds from Wisconsin's forestry mil tax are the appropriate dollars to use in meeting this obligation and an increase in PILT/Acreage Share Payments to these towns is necessary to keep our forest industry strong.

We ask you to consider the importance of our rural transportation infrastructure to Wisconsin's 2nd largest industry. Even though our forests are primarily in northern Wisconsin our forest products provide thousands of employment opportunities in southeast WI and across the state.

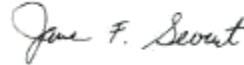
We respectfully request Wisconsin's Joint Committee on Finance to increase the PILT/Acreage Share Payment to towns with county forest lands in The State of Wisconsin's FY16 – FY17 Biennial Budget. We maintain this increase should come from Wisconsin's Forestry Mil Tax Account and the payment should be increased to \$1 per acre.

If we can be of further assistance or provide additional information please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,



Norman K. Bickford, President
Wisconsin County Forests Association



Jane F. Severt, Executive Director
Wisconsin County Forests Association