



Northern Forest Lands Council

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PRESS RELEASE

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Northern Forest Lands Council Meets in Presque Isle, ME

PRESQUE ISLE, ME -- The Northern Forest Lands Council held its regular bi-monthly meeting Wednesday, July 8 at Keddy's Motor Inn in Presque Isle, Maine. There were approximately fifty members of the public in attendance, and extensive public comment followed each agenda item. Chairman Robert Bendick of the New York Department of Environmental Conservation welcomed the public, saying "It is a pleasure to have so many people attending our meeting and taking an interest in the work of the Council. People in each of the four states have different perspectives on the future of their northern forests. It is critical to the function of the Council to hear these points of view." The Council's charge is to develop recommendations for the states and Congress on strategies to maintain 26 million acres of northern forests in Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont as a viable, working forest.

The Council revisited the mission statement revised at its April meeting. Responding to public concern for the process used to amend the mission, the Council opened another public comment period through September 1, 1992.

Council work is accomplished through five subcommittees. The chairmen of the subcommittees gave status reports on their latest activities. Each is gathering information to support future recommendations. (An interim status report compiling all completed work will be available this fall. The report will be distributed for public review and comment, and will be forwarded to each states' Governor and the US Congress.)

*** Property Taxes:** Vermont's Peter Meyer outlined the subcommittee's goals to 1) assess the economics of timberland management in the region and 2) evaluate current use valuation programs. The first goal was accomplished through a recent discussion paper by Dr. Hugh Canham documenting the severe impacts of property taxes on long-term forest land ownership. The second will be achieved through a study of programs to reduce such property tax impacts and identification of alternatives to such programs. A request for proposals for this study will be distributed later this month and the report should be final by year-end.

*** State/Federal Taxes:** Edward Johnston of Maine described a pending study of the economic and social impacts of state and federal taxes (other than property taxes) on timberland management, including a cost/benefit analysis. The report should be available by the end of September.

*** Land Conversion Subcommittee:** Jerry Bley of Maine reported on investigations of the motivations for converting land from timber production to other uses. A first of its kind study is underway to quantify land conversions throughout the four state area over the past decade. A fall forum evaluating the region's attractiveness for timberland investment from a national perspective will accompany the study. The project should be complete by October.

*** Local Forest Based Economy:** Vermont's Richard Carbonetti described two pending

products. One is a summary of the proceedings of an economic development practitioners forum; the second is a directory of the region's economic development organizations and related programs. The subcommittee is now considering commissioning a presentation of the forest based economy's impact on the local and regional economies, as well as an evaluation of the regional forest based economy's relationship to the emerging global marketplace. This work should be underway by late summer.

*** Biological Resources:** Paul Bofinger of New Hampshire described a tentative December forum to assess the biological resources of the Northern Forest and recommendations the Council could make to encourage the maintenance of the region's biological resources.

A draft Public Involvement Strategy was reviewed by the Council. Once in final draft form later this month, the strategy will be reviewed by each state's Citizen Advisory Committee.

The establishment of a regional Citizen Advisory Committee was evaluated. Most members felt the existing state committees were valuable and information should be better shared between these committees before establishing another structure. Jerry Bley of Maine suggested the regional committee concept be revisited once specific recommendations were developed.

Other business before the Council related to land conservation. A resolution supporting the Forest Legacy Program of the US Forest Service was passed unanimously by the Council. Forest Legacy is a new program seeking to purchase conservation easements on timberland from willing sellers to promote long-term forest management and ownership. The Council found the program goals consistent with its mission to reinforce traditional land use and ownership patterns of large forest areas, and supported Forest Legacy as one tool promoting the integrity of the working Northern Forest. The resolution will go to the

Governors, state legislative leadership and Congressional delegations of the four states.

The Council also reviewed a New Year's Resolution of fifteen conservation organizations recommending support of programs to acquire forestland through purchase of land or conservation easements from willing sellers. The conservation organizations cited 9 critical parcels to illustrate their view of need. Vermont's Richard Carbonetti stated, "It's not appropriate to discuss individual parcels. That is not our charge. We are engaged in evaluation of overall strategies for conservation of forest land." The Council felt it most appropriate for the specific information to be passed to the states for their consideration.

To receive copies of documents mentioned, call or write the Council office at 54 Portsmouth Street, Concord, NH 03301, (603) 224-6590.

The Council's next meeting will be October 20, 1992 in northern Vermont. The location has not been determined.

The Northern Forest Lands Council is a 17-member advisory, non-regulatory organization with four Governor appointed members from the states of Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont, and a seventeenth member from the US Forest Service. The Council follows the work of the Governors' Task Force on Northern Forest Lands and the Northern Forest Lands study. Its purpose is to (1) advise the states and federal government on forest land conservation and natural resource based economic development within the 26 million acre Northern Forest area and (2) seek out and recommend a comprehensive series of strategies to conserve the traditional uses and ownership patterns on these lands. The Council's anticipated lifespan is through September 1994.