



P.O. Box 392 • Newfoundland NJ 07435 • (Phone) 973-492-3212

NEWS FROM THE PEQUANNOCK RIVER COALITION

Debate Over Logging Bill

December 19, 2011 - PRC has been following the debate over proposed state legislation that would allow logging on state lands. The senate version is available at http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2010/Bills/S2000/1954_R2.HTM. Here is our take on it:

Many have argued against this bill for the protection of our forests, hoping to keep them in a “primeval” condition. They also say that the bill does not provide for deer fencing or invasive plant management, among other things.

First, the idea that the ancient landscape here in the east was entirely composed of unbroken forest is very debatable. Some experts insist, for example, that “The cumulative impact of burning by Native Americans profoundly altered the landscape. When first encountered by Europeans, many ecosystems were the result of repeated fires every one to three years, resulting in the replacement of forests with grassland or savanna, or opening up the forest by removing undergrowth. More forest exists today in some parts of North America than when the Europeans first arrived.” Even prior to the Native Americans, wildfire or periodic flooding by beavers created large forest openings. In seeking to cover the land entirely in mature trees we may be trying to reproduce a landscape that never actually existed.

In addition, we have found large scale deer fencing (as we see at the Apshawa Preserve) to be either totally ineffective or to have a negative impact on wildlife. In our opinion, fencing new forest openings is a poor idea. We believe it is better, and more humane, to properly manage the deer herd than to attempt fencing them out.

Locally, most of our wild areas are now covered in mature forest. While this is good for those species that thrive in these habitats, including endangered birds like the goshawk, other birds and animals that prefer open land or young forest, such as ruffed grouse, woodcock, or kestrels, are in serious decline. It would be wonderful to see some habitat restoration occur in the clearing of forest for the benefit of these species, but funding for this is mostly nonexistent. Commercial logging, however, if properly conducted, could be a solution.

For these reasons we are not opposed to this legislation. In fact, we are cautiously optimistic that the proposed logging may be beneficial. Invasive plants and overbrowsing by deer in the wake of cutting and protection of steep slopes, wetlands or riparian lands during logging are issues that need to be looked at and addressed. PRC can play a role in this effort. But doing nothing may be worse.

At the very least, we suggest our members keep an open mind on this topic, and listen to a variety of opinions. We’ll keep you posted as this debate continues.

Thanks,
Ross Kushner, Executive Director
Pequannock River Coalition



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