



Michigan Forest Association

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To: Hon. Mark Jansen, Chair, Senate Regulatory Reform Committee
From: William Botti, Executive Director, Michigan Forest Association
Subj: Presentation on Forester Registration, SB 481; 484

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the forestry-related bills under consideration today. Michigan Forest Association is an association of landowners, foresters, educators and others dedicated to the wise management of our forests. We were pleased to testify before the House Natural Resources Committee last spring in favor of several bills related to management of private forest lands and we also spoke to the House Regulatory Reform Committee on the issue of forester registration. The recent attention given to management of the private forest resource by the state Legislature has been gratifying. However, the bills being considered today appear contradictory to the aims of the bills just mentioned. We respectfully oppose bills 481 and 484, based on how we perceive them to affect our members and the forest resources under their control.

More than half of Michigan's forests are in private ownership, thus, they represent an immense resource, both geographically and economically. As the state's only forest landowner association, we frequently receive requests for advice on managing these private forests. Many of our members have been approached by would-be buyers of timber, who promise much more than they intend to deliver in terms of management services. Sometimes they represent themselves as "foresters"; sometimes they tell the owners that there is no need to hire a forester, as they have many years' practical experience in logging and they know much more than the 'book-learning' that a forester would have. They usually skim the very best trees out of the woods and often leave a mess of ruts and broken trees. Such operators are an embarrassment to the industry – rather like the unscrupulous "used car salesman".

The term "registered forester" has provided a convenient way to describe the minimum qualifications needed in a trustworthy buyer or advisor. A registered forester must be a graduate of a 4-year degree program in forestry and must have at least 2 years of professional experience. Such a person could be a private consultant, a government employee, or an industry representative; in any case he or she possesses the minimum qualifications of education and experience and the desired reputation to merit our recommendation.

At first glance it appears that the term *registered forester* has simply been replaced by *qualified forester*, but there is a marked difference between the two. Whereas *registered forester* requires a 4-year degree in forestry and must have at least 2 years of professional experience, a *qualified forester*, according to the definition in HB 4380, can be a *resource professional* or a *conservation district forester*. A resource professional is one with a degree in a natural resource field related to forestry and with no required professional forestry experience, according to the definition under the DNR's Forest Stewardship Program. We see this as a dilution of the qualifications and we would not be comfortable using the term *qualified forester*

in the same context as we have used *registered forester* in the past. It is like saying anyone with a law degree can be a law enforcement officer. There's more to it than knowing the law. And there's more to being a forester than knowing trees.

The governor held a Forest Products Summit conference in Lansing on April 23. At this conference participants were challenged to explore ways to enhance the existing forest products industry in Michigan. This industry currently contributes \$14 billion to the state's economy and employs 26,000 Michigan residents. Our association participated in this event and we look forward to future opportunities to share ideas and work toward a comprehensive forest policy for Michigan.

It seems to us to be contradictory for the state government to be targeting the forest products industry for growth while simultaneously erasing its professional ranks from the occupational code. We hope you will elect to retain *registered forester* in the occupational code and help our forest landowners get the quality assistance they are accustomed to and that they need to maintain the health and value of the resource that is under their control.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

