



## Rhode Island Forest Conservator's Organization, Inc.

October 14, 2005

Mr. Mark Rey, Undersecretary  
US Department of Agriculture  
c/o RI USDA-NRCS  
60 Quaker Lane, Suite 40  
Warwick, RI 02886

Re: 2007 Farm Bill Comments

Dear Mr. Rey,

We are writing to provide comments as part of the USDA 2007 Farm Bill Forums. These written comments supplement the verbal comments provided at the Rhode Island Forum held on this date. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the development of the 2007 Farm Bill programs.

RIFCO is a non-profit organization that represents the woodland owners in Rhode Island, and we are affiliated with the National Woodland Owner's Association. Rhode Island is approximately 60 percent forested, with most of that land being privately owned by about 6,000 forest landowners (9 acre +).

USDA Farm Bill programs that affect forest landowners include those that are administered by the state's Division of Forest Environment and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. In reference to item 3, Farm Program Benefits, the Stewardship, FLEP, WHIP, and EQIP programs that were funded in the current Farm Bill have been inadequate in meeting the technical assistance and incentive needs for forest landowners. The diversion of funds to other uses from the Forest Service's State & Private Forestry budget severely hampers the ability of our state forestry agency to provide the needed assistance to promote the conservation of our forested resources, and the agricultural interests receive priority for NRCS programs. We recommend fully funding programs that support our state forestry agency's efforts, since they are the ones who have been working with the forest landowner for about 100 years now.

In reference to item 5, Rural Economic Growth and item 6, Expansion of Ag Products, Markets, and Research, an increase in emphasis on utilization of low-grade wood for biomass energy sources would help us achieve energy independence, lower carbon emissions, and improve our woodlots for future value. Programs should help improve markets for forest biomass products and assist forest landowners with harvesting operations to assure that the products are being harvested sustainably.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment.

Respectfully,

Milton Schumacher, President