



Washington State Department of Natural Resources 2007 Farm Bill Forum Comments

My name is Mark Gray. I work for the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. I am here to provide comments on behalf of the Washington State Forester, Pat McElroy.

Farm Bill Programs are important to keeping family owned forests producing economic products and ecosystem services in Washington State and throughout the nation. Nearly 60 percent of the nation's timberland is classified as non-industrial private forest, owned mostly by family forest owners. These forests provide public benefits like clean air and drinking water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities, as well as almost two-thirds of the nation's timber and wood products.

The Farm Bill plays an important role in keeping family forests working and producing these public benefits. To meet these needs there should continue to be a Forestry Title in the Farm Bill. While forest owners are sometimes eligible for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), programs targeted at farm producers do not meet the specific needs of forest owners who are growing a crop that will likely be harvested only once in their lifetime. These owners often need technical assistance more than financial assistance to apply sustainable practices to their forests. These producers need a program like the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) that can be tailored by the State Forester to provide education, technical or financial assistance to help landowners provide public environmental benefits.

We also request that forestry practices be fully incorporated into Conservation Title Programs, such as the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Non-industrial forestlands provide some of the best and most cost-effective opportunities to meet the environmental goals of the Conservation Title.

Future Farm Bill programs for forest owners, and all other producers, should be focused on priorities, the age of first-come, first-served access to programs is past. Monitoring and evaluation will be the key to demonstrating that Farm Bill Programs are providing public benefits.

I hope the next Farm Bill will encourage policies that help spur private markets for ecosystem services

Finally, the Farm Bill should provide support for renewable fuels development – bioenergy – for both farm and forest producers.

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