

NATURAL RESOURCES

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October 25, 2005

Thomas Dorr
USDA Rural Development Undersecretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C.

RE: Testimony USDA Farm Bill

Dear Undersecretary Dorr:

You are commended for getting grassroots input for the new Farm Bill. This is critically important in order to make USDA programs effective, delivery practical, impacts meaningful and federal, state and local resources used widely.

My contribution to this process includes the following:

1. Technical assistance to private forest landowners is one of the most productive investments for Farm Bill funds targeting stewardship of natural resources. Landowners who become knowledgeable about the value of conservation practices and how to implement them in a practical, cost effective way, are usually long term implementers of good stewardship. Education and technical assistance has long lasting positive consequences. This approach is less costly and less intrusive than regulatory approaches to get conservation practices in place on the ground.

With adequate funding, forestry technical assistance and education can be delivered through existing USDA Programs such as *Forest Stewardship* in the Forest Service State and Private suite of programs, the *Renewable Resources* program in CSREES and *EQIP* in NRCS.

2. Programs that support volunteerism can multiply USDA dollars. Our goal in New Hampshire volunteer programs, funded through partnerships which include USDA, is to develop long lasting (mostly life-long), individually sustainable volunteerism. The immediate and long term return on investment for USDA is immense.

USDA has the infrastructure in place to support successful volunteer programs, such as through the USFS *Forest Stewardship Program* and the *Urban and Community Forestry Program*. Funding targeted for volunteer development can be funneled through existing programs.

3. Stable funding provides stability of staffing in state partner organizations to solve long term programs that address long term needs. It is not practical to expect the development of long term relationships which lead to solving long term natural resource problems. It takes time and a commitment to work through the process relating to land use decisions with communities and with individuals on permanent



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4. land protection. We will not do well relying on temporary staff who have only short term funding.
5. I suggest that the legal, survey and assessment costs of making donations or bargain sales of land or conservation easements for permanent land protection be cost shared. The upfront cost that a landowner must pay is often the deterrent for altruistic donations of land rights for the public good. Cost sharing to landowners for costs associated with permanent land protection on private lands should be allowable practices under *FLEP* and *EQIP* programs.
6. In New Hampshire where we are 84 % forested – in fact 70% of the state is privately held forest land – we need to continue forest industry technical assistance to help sustain and enhance our forest products component of our economy. Forestry is a necessary economic engine for many rural communities. Retention, expansion and developing associated forest-based businesses are critical to sustaining the economic health of these communities. Advancing renewable energy, creating new building products and capturing the many resources of the forests depend upon the research, technology transfer and practical implementation of economic action programs. We are not the only state with this need. No one is in a better position to meet this need than the Forest Service and Cooperative Extension components of USDA.

Thank you for your quest to get the best information from the people who support and benefit from USDA programs.

Sincerely,



Robert Lee Edmonds
Program Leader
Forestry and Wildlife

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SECRETARIAL USDA

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