



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON FORESTRY

Tony Evers, Governor

councilonforestry.wi.gov

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July 31, 2020

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Jordan Skiff

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Paul Strong

The Honorable Tony Evers
Governor of Wisconsin
P.O. Box 7863
Madison, WI
53703

Dear Governor Evers:

RE: Task Force on Climate Change, Forestry Recommendations

Forests and a thriving forestry sector are critical for climate adaptation and mitigation in Wisconsin. Forests have a tremendous current role and future potential as a natural source of climate solutions. Action is needed to store and sequester more carbon in forests, reforest rural areas, plant trees in urban areas, keep forests forested, and utilize wood products. These actions will provide many co-benefits such as jobs, rural prosperity, water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreation. Climate adaptation is needed to maintain these forest benefits in the face of climate change impacts. We urge the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change to make forests a prominent part of your report and advance the implementation of our policy recommendations.

Wisconsin's Council on Forestry (COF) appreciates the opportunity to comment on how forests provide climate solutions through the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change. COF was established in 2002 under Chapter 26.02 to advise the governor, legislature, the Department of Natural Resources and other state agencies on topics affecting Wisconsin's forests and forest products industries.

Forests and the forest industry sector are important to Wisconsin for many reasons¹:

- Wisconsin's 17 million acres of forestlands and millions of urban trees significantly enhance the quality of life in our state
- There are over 63,000 jobs in Wisconsin directly related to forestry. Forestry is the number one employer in ten counties and every job in forestry supports 1.7 additional jobs in the state
- Forestry is a \$24.4 billion industry in Wisconsin. Every million dollars of output in forestry creates \$700,000+ of output in other sectors
- Managed forests support a wide variety of recreational opportunities, enhancing local economies, clean water and air, wildlife habitat, and our quality of life in Wisconsin

¹ Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. *Forestry and the Wisconsin economy.*
<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/forestbusinesses/factsheets.html>

Forests provide many essential social, environmental and economic benefits for Wisconsin residents and visitors. Forests and forest products provide a critical natural solution to address climate change by storing and sequestering large amounts of carbon. A strong forestry sector that includes markets for sustainably managed woodlands is essential for Wisconsin to fully realize effective natural climate adaptation and mitigation solutions.

Wisconsin's forests are facing increasing problems from climate change, including extreme storms, wildfires, forest insects and diseases, loss of frozen-ground harvesting conditions, and increased invasive species and deer browse². These changes have impacts on the forest industry, job and employment opportunities, municipal operating costs, public safety, property and homeowner costs, public recreation, and other benefits that forests provide. State, county, federal and municipal governments, tribes, the scientific community, private foresters and land managers, mills, loggers, conservation and environmental organizations, and other private sector firms have critical roles in understanding these changes and implementing adaptation strategies. Forest climate adaptation will result in forests, forest-dependent businesses, and communities that are more resilient to change. Attention to historically underserved communities is critical so that new investments will improve fairness. For instance, increasing canopy cover to provide shade in urban heat islands and sequester carbon should improve equity among neighborhoods.

Active forest management, leading to the production of durable wood products, can offset greenhouse gas emissions, creating win-win scenarios with environmental and local community benefits. Building with wood in the commercial sector is a growing industry trend and provides additional long-term storage of forest carbon and alternatives for materials that emit more greenhouse gases. The expanded use of wood as a building material may require adoption of changes in building codes that have recently been approved by the International Code Council (ICC) and should emphasize the use of wood from Wisconsin to keep building material transportation to a minimum and to deliver local benefits to forest health, job opportunities, and resiliency. Forest products may also provide carbon benefits by substituting for fossil-fuels, including thermal energy and electricity production from woody biomass. Bio-based packaging materials made from wood can mitigate the impacts of single-use plastics.

Action is needed to store and sequester more carbon in forests, reforest rural areas, plant trees in urban areas, keep forests forested, and utilize wood products. Policies that encourage landowners to maintain healthy, resilient, and growing forests can provide greater carbon benefits as well as a full range of co-benefits for water quality, wildlife habitat, recreation, and the economic vitality of numerous local communities. In summary, the Council on Forestry

² Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts. 2011. Wisconsin's changing climate: Impacts and adaptation. Madison, WI. <http://www.wicci.wisc.edu/publications.php>; Janowiak, M. K., L. R. Iverson, D. J. Mladenoff, E. Peters, K. R. Wythers, W. Xi, L. A. Brandt, 2014. Forest ecosystem vulnerability assessment and synthesis for Northern Wisconsin and Western Upper Michigan: A report from the Northwoods climate change response framework project. Gen. Tech. Rep. NRS-136, USDA Forest Service, Newtown Square, PA.

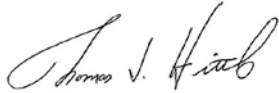
offers the following suggestions as ways to utilize Wisconsin's forests and forest industry to address climate change:

- Promote sustainably managed forests in WI by increasing the amount of public and private lands enrolled in the Managed Forest Law program, certification programs, and working forest easements
- Enhance tree planting on ecologically appropriate unforested or agroforestry lands and increase tree density in forests, in ways that expand the diversity of forest species, ages, and size classes
- Increase urban forestry programs and grants to expand tree cover and species diversity in Wisconsin's cities
- Enhance partnerships for research and development of new markets for durable wood products and products that can be substitutes for higher GHG emitting materials such as plastic and other petroleum-based products
- Facilitate access to voluntary forest carbon markets for groups of family forest owners, with consideration for impacts to traditional wood markets
- Encourage the building of mass timber structures, the use of cross laminated timber and the use of Wisconsin wood in construction of residential and commercial buildings
- Keep forests as forests and enhance forest connectivity by promoting existing and new programs that protect forests from being converted to other uses. For example, consider 1) reinstating the Forestry Mill Tax, 2) reauthorizing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, 3) supporting and increasing the use of federal Forest Legacy Program and Land and Water Conservation Fund, and 4) property tax policy that does not disincentivize sound forestry
- Support small-scale distributed woody biomass energy as a renewable energy source
- Build environmental justice into climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts and policy so that forest benefits and risks are fairly distributed and there is fair access to participate in decision-making, including tribal consultation and inclusion of underserved communities
- Model, pilot, and implement forest management practices proven to increase carbon stocks at larger scales including using climate-smart practices on state-managed forests
- Increase research, planning and responses to wildfire, storms, insects, diseases, and other disturbances across landowner boundaries and through regional collaborations
- Develop and support training opportunities for forest managers, landowners, and loggers on managing forests for resiliency
- Promote public awareness, education, and research on the role of forests and forestry to address climate change

Addressing climate change will require a multitude of strategies, including strengthening Wisconsin's natural forest assets along with energy conservation and renewable energy. Forests, trees, or the timber industry were not mentioned in Executive Order #52 that established the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change. We hope forests and forestry will have a prominent place in the final report, given the important role of forests in storing and sequestering carbon, and the need for climate adaptation to maintain forest benefits.

The Council would be happy to engage in discussions on how to implement the suggestions we offer in this letter. We appreciate the Governor's visit to the Council on Forestry on May 26th, 2020 and look forward to strengthening our partnerships for Wisconsin's forests, economies, and citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Hittle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tom Hittle
Chair of the Wisconsin Council on Forestry

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adena Rissman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

Dr. Adena Rissman
Council on Forestry, Sound Forestry and Policy Committee Chair

*Please note that because the DNR has a representative on the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, Mike Warnke, Forestry Deputy Division Administrator, respectfully withdraws his name as a Signatory of this letter.

Cc:
Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes
WDNR Secretary Preston Cole