

Council of Forestry – Legislative Update for November 2021

AB 640: Timber sales on public lands:

Increases threshold for small timber sales from \$3000 to 10, 000 or 500 cords, whichever is less.

- Bill passed State Senate on a voice vote
- Bill passed Assembly Committee on Rural Development 15-0. We've asked for the bill to be on the calendar for the next floor session.

AB 672 / SB 615: Report on access to public lands owned for managed by the DNR

Bill would require the DNR to prepare a report that identifies public access opportunities on all lands owned or managed by DNR, land acquired under the Stewardship program, and open MFL. Guidance from the legislature has been to increase access to lands funded by public dollars. Over the past decade additional emphasis included providing vehicular access on established roads. An aging hunting population often finds these roads gated and blocked by providing inadequate access.

- Passed full senate 28-4
- Was assigned to our Assembly Committee and we'll hold a public hearing on the bill, but haven't scheduled it yet.

AB 682 – Verso and Park Falls Mills

The bill has two parts:

1. First part provides some assistance to the mills in Wisconsin Rapids and in Park Falls that is intended to keep both mills viable in anticipation of the future.
 - A. The assistance to the Wisconsin Rapids mill would be to provide up to \$1 million to keep the Wisconsin Rapids mill in a nearly-operational condition in order to allow time for a sale and reopening to happen using as much existing equipment as possible. (The proposal is being made to ensure that the mill and equipment in it are kept in an easily-reusable condition over the winter and not allowed to freeze, which would damage the equipment and make a sale of the mill more difficult.) Under the bill, \$1 million in GPR transferred to the Wisconsin Economist Development Corporation (WEDC) to make a grant to an eligible recipient. (The "eligible recipient" would be the seller of the mill, Verso Corporation.)
 - B. The bill would also assist with the reopening of the Park Falls paper mill by providing \$15 million for a loan guarantee to secure financing to reopen Park Falls. The loan guarantee would come from GPR funds transferred to WEDC. If the guarantee is not in place by June 30, 2023, the funds go back to the general fund. If the guarantee is in place, the funds would go back to the general fund when the loan terms are complete.
2. The second part of the bill deals with substance abuse prevention on transportation and public utility projects. These provisions stem from discussions held during deliberations on the 2021-23 state budget bill, which was passed this past summer.

- Passed full Assembly 96-2
- Senate has introduced their own bill that removes provisions related to substance abuse testing

Managed Forest Land Bill

We will reintroduce the 2019 AB 856 bill as amended. The bill passed the full assembly last session, but the senate wasn't able to take it up before things were shut down because of the pandemic.

The DNR has asked for some technical changes, and we're currently working through that with the drafter to make sure that we understand the intent of the changes. Once that it is completed, we'll have the bill drafted for introduction. We believe we can get the bill passed through both houses this session.

- Retains the 20-acre minimum requirement, but allows the 20-acre parcel to be composed of two 10 contiguous acre portions, that are not contiguous to each other, if they are on a tract of land under the same ownership.
- Removes the minimum three acre requirement for additions and allows a parcel of any size to be added if it is contiguous to MFL land under the same ownership and meets eligibility requirements under original enrollment order.
- Would allow certain structures, fixtures, and buildings used exclusively for storage on MFL property
- Allows, rather than requires, DNR to assess a withdrawal tax and fee on transferred MFL land that is withdrawn because it does not meet eligibility requirements.
- Specifies that a statutory change does not constitute a material change to an MFL order unless the act that makes the change states that the act or provision in the act makes a material change to order entered under prior law.
- Clarifies that if the land remaining after either type of withdrawal will not meet the eligibility requirements under the owners MFL owner, the DNR must withdraw the entire parcel from the program.
- For small land sales, the bill retains the voluntary withdrawal for the sale of the land, but retains the voluntary withdrawal option as a construction site
- The bill authorizes DNR to promulgate rules that subject large ownerships to management plan requirements that are different from the plan requirements in the MFL statute
- Removes remaining statutory restrictions on leasing land in MFL