



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON FORESTRY

Tony Evers, Governor

councilonforestry.wi.gov

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(Acting USFS Representative)

▪

Dr. William Van Lopik

October 20, 2022

Secretary Preston Cole
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

RE: Support for the Pelican River Working Forest Easement Project

Dear Secretary Cole:

This letter is being sent to you on behalf of the Wisconsin Council on Forestry for consideration at next week's Natural Resources Board (NRB) meeting. As you are aware, the Council's purpose is to advise the governor, the legislature, the department of natural resources, and other state agencies, on issues that affect forests located in this state. This letter is being sent to you to express the Council's support for the Pelican River Working Forest Easement Project, which we feel has benefit to Wisconsin's forests and forest industry. Please share this letter or the Council's support with the members of the NRB as you deem appropriate. It is our hope that you, as well as the members of the NRB, will express support this project.

The WI Council on Forestry is interested in what we can do to ensure that those that come after us will have the same ability to access forests and the timber products they supply. Keeping forests as forests and maintaining access to sustainably produced raw materials is important to Wisconsin's vital forest products industry.

In the past two decades, Wisconsin has experienced a loss of more than a quarter million acres of timberland from the large account Managed Forest Law (MFL) program. Not all these acres have been lost to forest management, but along with the transition from industrial land to investment company ownership, to small private ownership comes no-trespassing signs, the loss of recreational access (including snowmobile trails), and in many cases, landowners that consider timber management very low on their list of priorities for owning a part of the Northwoods.

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The current fee owner, while a conservation entity, has purchased the property from a timber investment management business to “buy” time to develop a working forest easement that limits fragmentation, maintains recreational access, and assures the right for the sustainable management of forest products. The continuing threat is that even conservation entities have obligations to their financial supporters, some of which lend money to facilitate transactions like these. They have raised private and federal funds for this project, so the state can benefit from a deal that they would not have been able to negotiate directly.

The Pelican River, and other working forest conservation easement projects like this, ensure forest stays as forest and access for recreation and the production of timber products will be available. The \$4.028M investment of State funds to ensure 56,000 acres stay forested, open to timber harvest, on the tax rolls, and available for recreational access with increased motorized accessibility for those that enjoy that use, seems like a great value for all the people in WI.

Respectfully,



Thomas Hittle
Council Chair



Matt Dallman
Council Vice Chair

cc: Sarah Barry, Steven Little

Council Member abstentions due to professional position considerations, conflicts of interest, and/or legislative or policy considerations, include:

Senator Janet Bewley

Senator Mary Felzkowski

US Forest Service (non-voting Council member) Jim Gries

Chief State Forester Heather Berklund