

## **Farm Bureau, environmentalists see timber issue in different light**

By John Commins Nashville Bureau

NASHVILLE — Tennessee's forestry regulations are weak because lobbyists for farmers and the forestry industry kill any bills that strengthen state oversight of private lands, clear-cutting opponents say.

Lobbyists for the farmers and the forestry industry say landowners should be able to use their property as they see fit. In addition, they say, environmentalists have no scientific data to support their claims that clear-cutting forests harms the ecosystem.

Brian Paddock, with Save Our Cumberland Mountains, said the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation and the Tennessee Forestry Association are the biggest obstacles to sensible and sustainable forestry practices in the state.

"The Farm Bureau has a lot of access, and it creates concern and even fear in the minds of some rural legislators that it could be the difference between victory and defeat in some races," Mr. Paddock said. "Their attitude is, 'We are opposed to regulation. It ought to be an area where farmers are not subject to government regulations.'" Rhedona Rose, a lobbyist for the Farm Bureau, did not disagree with Mr. Paddock's characterization.

"The issue is why would we place restrictions on the use of the land? It's private land. The landowner pays the taxes," she said.

The Farm Bureau has more than 550,000 member families and organizations in all 95 counties.

Ms. Rose said the environmentalists' complaints about clear-cutting timber "comes from an aesthetic viewpoint."

"Granted, it may not be much to look at right after you cut a tract of timber, but it's going to grow back," she said. "They want to put in legislation because of aesthetic concerns, but there is absolutely no data that we are aware of that shows there is a problem."

Amanda Sluss, spokeswoman for the state Department of Environment and Conservation, said a recent study showed that about 15 miles of the 60,000 miles of waterways in Tennessee have been polluted by bad logging practices, but she said that may not tell the whole story.

"Keep in mind that is a static look, or a snapshot in time, of what we found," Ms. Sluss said. "It would be good to say one must use the data carefully."

Stewart Clifton, a lobbyist for Tennessee Conservation Voters, said the best environmentalists can hope for is to play defense.

"We've been able to stop some bad bills," he said. Last year environmentalists derailed legislation that would have removed liability for companies involved in hazardous waste spills, he said.

Mr. Clifton blamed the state's weak oversight of forests on the Tennessee Forestry Association.

Tracy O'Neill, a lobbyist with the Forestry Association, said the environmentalists can't get bills passed because "their entire agenda is based on emotion and propaganda."

"Not one piece of their legislation has been backed up by any scientific authority in Tennessee or the United States," she said.

E-mail John Commins at [jcommins@timesfreepress.com](mailto:jcommins@timesfreepress.com)

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