

Letter to Editor, Chattanooga Times Free Press, March 24, 2004

Tennessee's forests owned by select few

The Tennessee Forestry Association and the Farm Bureau use half-truths and deception to portray themselves as protectors of the small landowner when, in fact, they are protecting a few large corporations from much needed regulations.

One of these deceptions is the perpetuation of the myth that the ownership of Tennessee's forests is spread equally among thousands of small landowners.

Just as the nation's wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, so is the ownership of the forests.

According to the Southern Forests Resource Assessment, fewer than 6 percent of the forest landowners own 70 percent of the South's forest land. Less than 1 percent of the owners control 65 percent of the timber intended for harvest.

When the TFA says that the "forest industry" owns only 17 percent of the forest on the Plateau, they don't mention that the definition of "forest industry" is limited to companies that own production mills. It does not include the big timber and land companies that cut the majority of trees.

This concentration of forest ownership allows a few to cause extreme environmental and economic damage.

The TFA should be ashamed of itself for using half-truths and thousands of ethical small landowners to shield a few special interest groups from regulations.

Doug Murray
Tennessee Forest Watch, LaFollette, TN