

Billboards chip away at clear-cutting

Area environmental group seeks public support for forestry regulation

By Angie Herrington Staff Writer

An environmental group has launched a billboard campaign asking residents of the Cumberland Plateau to support a proposed law that would establish permit requirements for chip mills.

John Wund, chairman of the forestry committee for the group Save Our Cumberland Mountains, said the bill in the Tennessee General Assembly would protect the state's forests from clearcutting.



"There's been very little regulation on cutting in Tennessee, and something needs to be put in place," he said. But the bill's Senate sponsor, Sen. David Fowler, R-Signal Mountain, said he thinks the bill that he first introduced four years ago has little chance of passage. "I do not anticipate the bill will get out of committee," he said.

Tracy O'Neill, spokeswoman with the Tennessee Forestry Association, said the bill would not help combat clear-cutting because the majority of clearcutting is caused by urbanization and development, not chip mills.

"This is quite a ridiculous proposal. There's no rhyme or reason for it," she said. "These groups are trying to associate clearcutting strictly with forestry, and that's not the case." Billboards have been put up in Tracy City, Spencer, McMinnville, Dickson and Caryville. They read, "Tennessee law should control clear-cutting," and list Save Our Cumberland Mountains' phone number and e-mail address.

Tiffany Hartung with SOCM said the group's staff can put the public in touch with their legislators when they call the hot line.

The bill would require permits before a person could establish or expand a chip mill that has a capacity to use at least 80,000 tons of pulpwood a year. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation would perform a forest resource review

before approving or denying the application.

Mike Countess, assistant commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, said he spoke to the state Senate Environment Committee earlier this month about clear-cutting.

The recently completed Southern Forest Resource Assessment concluded that chip mills are not putting the hardwood forests at risk, he said. The main problem with clearcutting is that it is not pleasing visually, Mr. Countess said.

"The issue of dealing with the aesthetic impact is something that probably needs to be looked at to some degree and in some context of public policy," he said.

Franklin County resident Ron Castle said he's concerned about large mountainside clear-cuts that are happening where he lives. The loss of forest con- tributes to erosion and impacts water quality, he said.

"There's an old saying that if you love your rivers, you'd better save your mountains," Mr. Castle said.

Rod Glover, whose family owns a weekend home in Grundy County, said an out-ofstate logging company has plans to cut 2,000 acres of timber next to the property. He said he's concerned about erosion into the property's creeks.

Mr. Wund said he thinks the bill is gaining momentum in the General Assembly.

"Originally, we felt things looked bleak. But now we see a movement that will lead, if not to this bill's passage this year, certainly much more concern in the next year or two," he said.

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