

Tennessean Editorial
February 27, 2005

Ask more of chip mills

Tennessee can well afford the modest regulation of the chip mill industry outlined in the legislation before the General Assembly.

In fact, Gov. Phil Bredesen's office ought to demand state departments come to some meeting of the minds. Agriculture officials appear to be out of step with the rest of state government on tourism, clean water and the great outdoors.

The Department of Agriculture reportedly opposes the legislation by Rep. Mike McDonald, D-Portland, and Sen. David Fowler, R-Signal Mountain, which would give the state some control over the clear-cutting of land by chip mills. The department obviously has adopted the position that the legislation interferes with landowner rights. That position, however, conflicts with conservation efforts now afoot to enhance the tourism and outdoor possibilities of the Cumberland Plateau where the assault by chip mills has been severe.

The legislation doesn't ask to end chip mills; it asks for modest regulation about where they can be located. Considering the potential for outdoor use in areas where chip mills are chopping down the view, Tennessee can afford to get a little picky about where they put their saws.

Under the bill, new or expanding mills would be required to buy a permit. The state would then determine if the proposal for the chip mill would impact environmental, tourist or recreation plans. As to the issue of landowner rights, there is nothing in the bill that would prevent landowners from managing their property. The requirement of a permit is no more burdensome than other land-use or zoning requirements.

Moreover, chip mills cost business and government in other ways. Clear-cutting harms the environment from water to scenery, jobs are lost, and taxpayers foot the clean-up bill. The law doesn't ban chip mills; it simply asks more of them. What could possibly be wrong with that?