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## **Clear-cutting devastates environment, economy**

In one corner, there is state Rep. Michael McDonald, D-Portland, championing the need to protect Tennessee's forested areas and its biodiversity by regulating clear-cutting.

In the other corner is the state's chip-mill industry, claiming that McDonald's measure would hurt jobs.

If tradition holds, the odds are strong that the chip-mill industry would win that bout. But before state lawmakers side with the logging industry again they need to take a closer view of the economic and ecological effects of unregulated clear-cutting in Tennessee. And they need to consider the very reasonable legislation that McDonald and Sen. David Fowler, R-Signal Mountain, recommend.

Clear-cutting has become a pressing issue in Tennessee as chip and pulp mills focused their attention on the Southeast.

Currently, Tennessee has virtually no regulation to prevent over-harvesting of forests. The state only has the authority to issue a stop-work order if logging operations are significantly polluting nearby waters.

The result of that laxity is large tracts of land scraped off to the soil, leaving only stubble. Industry officials say they replant the trees they remove, but more often than not, hardwood trees are replaced by pine.

Last week, Dr. Daniel Simberloff, a UT professor of environmental studies, told the House environmental subcommittee about the dangers of clear-cutting on plants and animals, saying that "clear-cutting constitutes about as drastic a habitat change as you can imagine."

McDonald's bill calls for large chip, pump and paper mills to apply to the state for a clear-cutting permit, pay a registration fee and identify the location and the acreage the clear-cutting would involve. The state then would perform a "forest resource review" to determine the impact of the clear-cutting. The bill would not restrict landowners and would not affect sawmills.

The chip-mill industry says the permitting process would be too expensive and that it would cost the state jobs. Yet mature hardwood forests create more jobs and better jobs in furniture building, flooring and cabinetry than chip mills will ever create.

Tennessee's forests are now being cut down at an alarming rate, particularly around the Cumberland Plateau. Clear-cutting mars the landscape, threatens plants, wildlife, water quality and water sports, and wrecks Tennessee's development of hardwood-based employment. The state needs to initiate some regulation on this raping of the land while there are still forests to save.