

David Lytle, State Forester and Chief  
Ohio Division of Forestry

And All the Benefits They Provide...

In my first few months as Ohio's new State Forester and Chief of the Division of Forestry, I've come to better appreciate how many different people, with different interests, value Ohio's woodlands. I've met and visited with an extensive list of sawmill managers/owners, tree farmers, foresters, loggers, academics, environmentalists and recreational users.

Without exception, each person I've met with places a high value on the state's public and private forests and there is strong agreement that our woodlands provide tremendous benefits and opportunities.

There is also general concern that in spite of a 50-year resurgence in the health and scope of our wooded areas, that Ohio's forests now face a daunting list of risks and challenges; from an ever growing array of exotic, invasive species to increasing fragmentation within these woodlands.

As our forests face continued threats, many in Ohio's wood industry are also facing continued depressed prices for red oak, a foundation species for our timber industry, which is making for some of the most challenging economic conditions that Ohio's sawmill industry has seen in decades. And that impacts everyone with an interest in forests. Without a healthy forest industry providing employment, economic development and demand for the timber created from harvests that promote wildlife diversity and support real estate taxes on woodlands then good management does not occur. That's a problem for all of us.

For the Division, we are proud that the state forests are an increasingly attractive site for recreation. I think that's a result of the aesthetic quality and value of properly managed forests. But with this increased attention comes additional impact on our forests and increased need for assuring that trails are properly maintained.

How to meet the needs of all these interested parties, with limited resources, during such challenging times? As Chief of the Division, the Ohio Revised Code provides a broad direction for the efforts of this Office. It says, "The chief shall be concerned with silvicultural practices, including the proper planting, growing, protecting, harvesting, and managing of trees for such purposes as watershed and soil protection, timber production and utilization, recreation, aesthetics, wildlife habitat development, and urban enhancement and for all benefits that forests provide."

At this time two efforts in particular stand out to me as ways that the Division can provide support to all the above interests and to do so in a way that is good for Ohio's forests.

By obtaining sustainable forest certification of our state forests lands, the Division will be able to provide a substantially increased level of “green” certified wood for Ohio’s mills. This will help them, if they choose to seek such markets, a supply of available timber to diversify and develop new opportunities. It is also a process that I believe will verify the excellent work being conducted on state forest by our managers.

Re-examining the Ohio Forest Tax Law and the benefits it provides landowners is another major opportunity to improve our private forests. It is important to bring consistency across the state on forest tax issues and to do so in a way that addresses issues such as fragmentation, while maintaining more land as forest in Ohio and respecting the rights and needs of the landowner.

Both efforts will take considerable time and effort, and input from all the stakeholders that value our forests. I look forward to continuing to meet more of you and hearing your views and advice on the best ways to achieve these goals. We’re in this together.