

Timbering controversy

State official says timbering limits are low

By Penny Wright
special writer

"The National Forest Management Plan is the hottest issue in Michigan forestry today," said David Olson, a member of the state's Natural Resource Commission. The NRC oversees the operations of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

According to Olson, the sparks of controversy won't be extinguished when the plan is completed late this summer.

The commissioner hinted that if certain areas of conflict are not resolved, "there will be a formal notice of appeal filed to the plan by the Michigan Forest Products Industry Development Council and possibly the DNR."

Although most forest harvesting is done in the Upper Peninsula, many suburban residents have followed the issue as it has been debated in Ann Arbor.

"MICHIGAN IS in the midst of a major expansion of the forest industry. Over \$1.5 billion of forest industry expansion has happened since 1980," said Olson.

"The plan states levels of timber production which are too low to allow achievement of forest industry goals."

Olson, district forester with the MSU Cooperative Extension Service, made his remarks during a recent visit to the U-M School of Natural



our land
Penny Wright

Resources. He said the plan was deficient in analyzing current demand and estimated production levels.

Drafted by the National Forest Service, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service activities in three national forests — Huron-Manistee in the Lower Peninsula, Hiawatha and Ottawa in the Upper Peninsula.

Federal law requires the agency to develop management plans for each of the nation's 155 national forests. The plan in final form will set goals for such forest resources as timber, recreation, water and wildlife over the next 50 years.

DISAGREEMENTS have centered on the issue of timber harvesting. The plan proposes to more than double logging in the forests. The three national forests represent 19 percent of Michigan's commercial forest land.

Such groups as the Wilderness Society have opposed the projected timber harvest goals. They contend timber sales in the national forests have lost money over the last six years, and that increased harvests

are unnecessary and damaging to the forests' wild resource values.

Timber industry representatives contend the plan's proposed timber harvest projections are set too low. They say increased logging will improve local economies, contribute toward better wildlife habitats and improve the quality of timber harvests will exceed costs.

OLSON, THE only person representing the Upper Peninsula on the seven-member, governor-appointed NRC, addressed the forest industry point of view.

"The plan presently will detract from Michigan's ability to implement the statewide forest resources plan and the forest products target industry program," he said.

Olson believes forest industry goals could be met without any modifications in acreage assigned to wilderness, semi-primitive recreation and other uses which limit forest management.

He noted that resource and environmental management is subject to political pressures. "The big issues in the Upper Peninsula are jobs and the local economy. Traditionally the Forest Service has worked to help make jobs."

The Forest Service is presently reviewing public comments on the draft version of the plan. The final version will be reviewed every 10 to 15 years.



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