

News Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 13, 2016

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Plans to Cut Massachusetts State Forests Could Worsen Climate Change and the State Budget

Westford, Massachusetts — In a letter to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), almost two-dozen organizations and individuals expressed serious concerns about eight planned tree cutting projects in Massachusetts state forests. DCR documents reveal that they have not considered how these projects could damage the climate. Nor has DCR presented a full accounting of expected costs and revenues to the taxpayers who own the land slated for cutting.

“Scientists agree that we need to immediately take strong actions to reduce global carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere to avoid catastrophic climate change,” said Michael Kellett, executive director of RESTORE: The North Woods, a Massachusetts and Maine nonprofit organization. “This means not only reducing carbon dioxide releases from burning fossil fuels, but also protecting forests, which absorb significant amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in trees and soil. DCR’s forest cutting plans do not even mention this critical issue. Sound science shows that logging not only releases carbon dioxide from trees and soil into the atmosphere, but also drastically sets back the ability of forests to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.”

There is growing recognition around the globe that forest protection must be a vital part of addressing climate change. A groundbreaking international agreement on climate change reached in Paris last December, endorsed by the U.S. and almost 200 other nations, calls for the conservation of forests as a key strategy for reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide.

“About 13 percent of the land area in Massachusetts is owned by the public and should therefore be used for the public good. Massachusetts could protect these forests to mitigate climate change, leading the way that other states might follow,” said environmental consultant and registered professional engineer Ellen Moyer, Ph.D. “Instead, thus far, DCR has stuck its head in the sand, ignoring the issue as well as the citizens who have repeatedly requested information regarding the climate impacts of DCR’s logging program. We hope that the agency will finally provide substantive information about the impacts of its logging projects on the climate. The scientific literature I’ve seen indicates that the climate is best served by preserving rather than logging forests.”

The letter to DCR also raises concerns that DCR documents on the eight cutting projects do not include a full accounting of the costs of planning and overseeing logging operations and the revenues received for selling the trees. As a result, it is impossible to judge if these projects are in the public's financial best interests. Past DCR logging project documents that do include financials often show that the projects lose money. In such cases, taxpayers are forced to pick up the tab and pay for the losses.

"Governor Baker is cutting vital state programs and jobs because he says there is a budget shortfall," said Kellett. "The costs of the DCR logging projects may exceed the revenues from selling the trees, without providing offsetting public benefits. If so, then we need an honest, open discussion about whether the public wants to subsidize these projects rather than spending funds on other priorities."

Moyer added, "We need and deserve answers before one single tree is cut to make sure these logging projects would not hurt the climate or cost taxpayers money."

The letter calls on DCR to provide credible and complete information to the public about the impacts of the proposed logging projects both on the climate and on taxpayer finances. A copy of the letter is available here: http://www.restore.org/Forests/DCR_forest_projects_ltr_RESTORE_etal.pdf

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