

Increased Timber Harvesting on Public Lands

Experts in public lands management and forestry agree that the LePage Administration's proposal to increase timber harvesting on Public Lands is not scientifically justified and threatens the values that public lands are managed for: wildlife habitat, public recreation, and sustainable forestry.

Background

In 2014, the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee expressed significant concern over increasing the annual harvest on public lands above the sustainable harvest level without scientific justification. In 2013, based on new inventory information, the Bureau had raised their sustainable harvest level and annual allowable cut to 141,500 cords/year, without opposition.

The committee also opposed proposals to divert revenue from timber harvesting to programs outside of the mission of the Bureau of Parks & Lands (BPL). By law, all revenue from timber harvesting on public lands is dedicated to managing the forestry, wildlife and recreation activities on public lands.

Current proposals not scientifically or legally justified

BPL has failed to scientifically justify increasing the harvest level above the 141,500 cords/year sustainable harvest level and reducing the amount of timber on the land (aka "stocking"). The Governor has also, once again, expressed his desire to use timber revenue for unrelated purposes. High tree mortality, spruce budworm risk, and excessive stocking have been cited as reasons for the increased cut. **All purported scientific justification has been debunked by forestry experts:**

"Tree mortality is no higher on public lands than geographically similar private lands in the Unorganized Territory. Even if it were, modern forestry teaches that dead trees have ecological value and should not always be viewed as some kind of "waste" or evidence the bureau has been negligent." – Prof. Robert Seymour, School of Forest Resources at the University of Maine & Member of BPL's Silvicultural Advisory Committee

"The susceptibility of stands on Public Lands [to spruce budworm risk] has been . . . greatly exaggerated. Fir [the main host of spruce budworm] composes only about 9% of public lands." – George Ritz, Retired BPL District Forester

"Nearly 60 percent of Maine's public forests are dominated by large, valuable trees, so of course their stocking is high relative to surrounding private lands that are managed more aggressively. This result of patient, conservative stewardship by the bureau's foresters should be celebrated, not criticized. . . . There is absolutely no scientific justification to reduce this stocking..." – Prof. Robert Seymour

Forestry experts agree that the LePage Administration's initiative to increase harvesting on public lands is politically driven, devoid of scientific justification, and threatens public values:

"I [continue to be impressed] with the thoughtful, scientifically-based forestry balancing all the public's values the Bureau practiced. To disregard this long history of fine forest management in the public interest and turn the public's forest land into a 'piggy bank' that can be raided at the whim of government officials anytime they want some ready cash is irresponsible at best and a total disregard for the public's interest at worst." – Michael Dann, member of the Outcome Based Forestry Panel & former member of the BPL's Silvicultural Advisory Committee

The Bureau of Parks & Lands should continue to harvest at the scientifically justified sustainable harvest level (141,500 cords/year). Revenue generated from timber harvesting should remain in a dedicated fund to support public lands programs.

Ever since Governor LePage took office in 2011, Public Lands have been cut above the sustainable harvest level.

