

The Wind Is Blowing The Right Direction

By Tom Berger

There are a lot of positive things happening right now in the world of forestry, especially from the national perspective. Forestry and forestry related articles are in the news almost daily. This is quite unusual, as forestry has never received a lot of the positive press in the past. Maybe it's just me, but it always has seemed that forestry was getting the short end of the stick on most topics. But it appears that times might just be a changing. Whether it be forest certification, carbon credits, biomass talk or stimulus money, forestry has been connected to the discussions at all levels. And all of the results of these activities will filter down to you and me as being a part of the Tree Farm Program. At this point, it appears that most of these things will have the potential to affect you and me in a good way.

Forest Certification...is one of those subjects that I have not paid a lot of attention to until now. I didn't pay much attention to it because I couldn't see much of a benefit to the Tree Farmer. Well, things are starting to change. There are mills and lumber dealers out there that are starting to look for certified logs/lumber and they are asking about the Tree Farm Program. In the long haul, this should come out in favor of the Tree Farmer and their certified woods. It should make it easier to sell your timber and long-term it might improve the price you receive.

Carbon Credits...is another one of those things that I could not get excited about. It really appeared that the Tree Farmer was not going to get much out of the original process. Well, this too seems to have the potential to improve with the discussions being held in Washington. Like it or not, a cap and trade system can make a difference with the carbon credits program as it affects Tree Farmers. The values of the credits should increase as they did in Europe, once they instituted the cap and trade program. Maybe money will eventually grow on trees.

Biomass...is one of those subjects that still has a ways to go, but they are discussing it in a way that positively affects the Tree Farmer. I mentioned in the last Journal that the new Farm Bill has a Biomass Crop Assistance Program. This and other proposed programs could provide funding to Tree Farmers through a cost-share program. A recent development in eastern Ohio has biomass in the news on a weekly basis. A coal-fired power plant in Belmont County is being converted to use wood briquettes (85% woody biomass). This has the potential to develop a good market for low quality wood.

Stimulus Funds...the American Forest Foundation was very pleased with Congress' action in supporting family forest owners with the distribution of stimulus funds. The funding will be directed through the U.S. Forest Service to the State and Private Forestry Programs. Ohio will use a part of those funds to fill a void that currently exists with federal cost-share programs. Landowners have a need for more vendors/contractors to aid in accomplishing timber stand improvement practices. There will be a series of vendor training workshops held around the state to get individuals prepared to become woodland improvement vendors.

Many important issues that relate to Tree Farmers are being debated and/or implemented as you read this article. As I mentioned, I honestly don't recall at any time in my career that this much attention has been focused on forestry at the national level. And what's even more exciting is that most of this attention is positive. Over the years, forestry has endured some bad press and it is refreshing that some positive things are on the horizon for Tree Farmers.