

The Kentucky Woodlands Owners Association is focusing our efforts on the passage of meaningful legislation to benefit woodland owners. Last year during a short legislative session, we were able to get one bill completely through the House and passed through the Senate committee. With this year's longer legislative session, we hope that our efforts will find fruition.

There is a general consensus among woodland owners about the problems we face, but we are a widely varied group. We agree on problems, but we prioritize them differently. At KWOA, we are all volunteers, so we have to be realistic and try to pursue legislative goals that actually have a chance of becoming law. With the current state of our commonwealth's finances, it is squandering valuable time trying to push through legislation that will require financing from the state. The following are legislative initiatives that we believe have a reasonable chance of passage.

Forest Health Task Force

With Kentucky's fiscal situation in mind, KWOA is making plans to reintroduce the Forest Health Task Force bill in the 2010 session. This legislation was one vote away from becoming law in the short 2009 session. It should have an excellent chance of getting passed in 2010. The members of this task force are already state employees or are volunteers.

"Bad Actor" Laws

We have been working with our partners and the Attorney General's office to find a means for law enforcement and prosecutors to fund their pursuit of timber theft cases by establishing seizure and forfeiture laws. Besides financing investigation and prosecution, the monies generated could also be used to provide victims with restitution. We also are working on strengthening the current "bad actor" laws. Bad actors are loggers who have been cited by the Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF) because they repeatedly refuse to use best management practices established by the Forest Conservation

Act when logging. KDF currently has the power to shut their operations down and to issue them monetary fines. Most of the fines go uncollected because there is no mechanism to ensure collection. Instead of bringing more financial burden to Kentucky, these measures could actually put money in the state's coffers.

Future Initiatives

Timber theft and arson legislation has been before the legislature for many sessions but has never been resolved. The problem with timber theft and arson is not a lack of laws. There are adequate statutes on the books concerning timber theft and arson. The problem is the lack of financing for law enforcement to investigate and for prosecutors to try these cases. The ultimate solution would be a Timber Theft/Arson Investigative Unit. The initial cost to start such a unit has been estimated to be \$1.2 million with operating costs in subsequent years to be \$600,000. With Kentucky's current budget woes, the chance of getting this legislation passed is slim to none. KWOA continues to remind legislators that this is the ultimate solution in hopes that when the budgetary problems ease, they will be prepared to pass legislation establishing this unit.

We will keep our members up-to-date concerning our legislative efforts via e-mail and with postings on our Web site at www.kwoa.net.

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**Don't forget to attend our
Annual Meeting held
April 16 - 17, 2010.**

**See our ad on page 7
for more information.**