

March 30, 2022

HB876 – Maryland Forestry Education Fund – Establishment

Position - Favorable

Dear Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee Members,

My name is Donald VanHassent. I worked for the DNR-Forest Service for forty years before retiring in December of 2019. The last five and a half years I served as the Director and State Forester. The fourteen years before that I was an Associate Director with the Forest Service.

Among the many activities the Forest Service performed was forestry education. We realized a long time ago that most people really didn't know or understand what forests were, what they had to offer, what they could provide, nor did they know or understand what forest management was. Sure, they knew there were trees there, it was a good place to hike or hunt and sometimes trees were harvested for wood products. But they did not understand the things they could not see – the positive effect forests have on water and air quality, the habitat for animals and plants (both rare and common), and economic impacts to both the forest landowner and the general public.

To help address this issue the Forest Service had a program to conduct educational seminars, school programs, booths at county fairs, etc. We had a small group of employees who had this as their primary duty while others helped on specific events. Many of these events were conducted in cooperation with the county forest Conservancy District Boards. This changed almost twenty years ago. Budget challenges required a serious look at all aspects of the Forest Service with the intent that something will be cut. It was a very difficult decision, but the Forest Service cut the forestry education program. We felt this would eventually come back to bite us at some point we just didn't know when.

So, here we are, almost twenty years later and we are still facing many of the same issues. There are approximately 700,000 more citizens in Maryland, probably less forest land although strong actions at state and local levels have reduced the amount lost. We need a strong, focused effort to renew forestry education efforts in Maryland. HB876 is an excellent first step and I urge you to vote favorably on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald VanHassent

Donald VanHassent
State Forester, retired