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Testimony of Vic Musselman
before
The House Committee of Rural Development, Agriculture and Natural Resources
In Support of HB 1273
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My name is Vic Musselman and I am President of the Washington Farm Forestry Association. In the first special session of the 56th legislature in 1999, House Bill 2091 was passed and subsequently became known as the Forests and Fish Act. This legislation encoded the principles stated within what is known as the Forests and Fish Report.

The small forest landowners of Washington were very reluctant participants in the negotiations leading up to the Forests & Fish Report because they knew that they would bear an unequal brunt of whatever forest practice regulations would be put into place. In fact, section 501 of HB 2091 recognized that the legislation would have a disproportionate impact on small forest landowners. Accordingly, the Bill called for four specific programs to mitigate the impact on small forest landowners: the establishment of the Small Forest Landowner Office, the FREP program, the development of the use of Alternate Plans in FPA/N applications and the development of Alternate Harvest Restrictions which would have a relatively low impact on aquatic resources. All of these options have been implemented to varying degrees of success except for meaningful Alternate Harvest Restrictions which have eluded small forest landowners for all these years since the passing of HB 2091.

What this means 20 years later is that the small forest owner land base in the state of Washington is smaller than it was in 1999 due to conversion to other uses while those landowners that continue to hold their forest land still have no certainty that the impact of the Forests & Fish Act will be, or can be, mitigated to the extent that will continue to allow them to be economically viable. Even the current effort to adopt new water typing rules appears to be biased against small forest land owners because of the assumption that they could not afford the cost of the protocol surveys being considered therefore they would default to physical standards which would put them in a more disadvantaged situation than larger landowners who could afford to do the work.

I sincerely hope that House Bill 1273 is passed so an analysis of the effect that the regulatory impact of the Forests & Fish Act has had on small forest landowners can be quantified. This could ultimately lead to enough help so that the small forest land owner community of Washington can finally say "it is cool to be a tree farmer."

Respectively submitted,

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