

OPINION

COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA, R-BIG FLATS

Seeing the forest through the trees

Governor Andrew Cuomo pulls the wraps off his 2018-19 New York State budget proposal this week and many of us will be keeping an eye out for what the governor proposes for the future of forestlands.

That's right, forests. It may not be the first issue that pops into your mind when considering priority actions for the economic and environmental future of upstate New York, but it deserves all the attention it can get.

The Empire State's 19 million acres of forests – three-quarters of which are privately owned – contribute more than \$20 billion to state and local economies every year.

These forestlands are critical to timber production, outdoor recreation and tourism, as well as conservation, water quality and environmental sustainability.

Sound forest stewardship produces numerous benefits: Cleaner water. Higher quality wildlife habitat. Recreational opportunities. Wood products essential to everyday lives. Job creation. Tax relief.

In short, forests are an invaluable asset when properly, effectively and wisely managed.

State policies and programs have helped to effectively conserve and manage publicly owned forests. The same can't be said for the 75 percent of forests that are privately owned. This shortcoming needs to change and we are looking to turn it around in 2018.

I recently joined an impressive coalition of more than 20 industry and conservation advocates (representing businesses and industries, farmers, environmental and energy concerns, and land conservationists), together with a bipartisan group of state legislators, to call on the governor to fulfill his promise to reform the "Forest Tax Abatement Program." In short, this longstanding program has offered private landowners tax deductions, incentives and other benefits in exchange for protecting their land from development, enhancing its viability as wildlife habitat, ensuring its environmental sustainability, and undertaking important conservation initiatives.

The current tax abatement program for private landowners, however, is outdated. It needs modernization.

It's riddled with complex rules and administrative requirements that keep the vast majority of eligible private landowners from participating and, consequently, help accelerate the conversion of forestlands to non-forest uses.

One of this year's leading reform advocates is the Empire State Forest Products Association, which notes that the state's forest products industry employs 65,000 workers statewide.

Association Executive Director John Bartow recently said of this year's reform effort, "The current (tax abatement) program overburdens property owners with cumbersome regulations and excessively complex requirements for participation, and has led to just seven percent of eligible landowners applying for the available tax benefits."

Darren Suarez of the Business Council of New York State said, "New York's forest lands provide significant economic, environmental and societal benefits to the people of New York...More than 60,000 New Yorkers are employed in forest products manufacturing. Combined, they receive over \$2.5 billion in annual

wages.

The future of those jobs is connected to the continued maintenance and viability of our forestlands. Reforming the Timber Tax will ensure this vital industry is allowed to grow."

Jeff Williams, Director of Public Policy for the New York Farm Bureau, adds, "By reforming the current tax abatement program to reduce the acreage threshold from 50 to 25 acres of land, as well as allowing half of the parcel to be open space, we will open up the program for landowners in more rural parts of the state. This law will not only economically benefit the Upstate economy by boosting forest-related tourism, it will branch out across the state to benefit agriculture as well, as farmers who own forest land become eligible to participate."

The forest-based economy across Upstate New York is a critical source of local jobs, local conservation efforts, local tax relief, and numerous other locally based benefits.

We are looking forward to Governor Cuomo's budget proposal this week for many reasons, not the least of which will be the future of our forests.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The fate of the Northside Blodgett Clock tower

To the Editor,
Northside Blodgett has played a very important role to the C-PP School District and the history of Corning, New York.

- All of the young men and women back in the day that played sports, participated in clubs and graduated.

- It played an important role in my life. I started my career there in 1970 and got the opportunity to end my career there in 2008 as Principal of summer school.

I feel it is going to be a difficult decision to decide its fate. Its condition and size I feel will have a lot to do with it and where it will be placed.

Some factors I feel to keep in mind of its placement:

- What the tower would be contained in to be safe from vandalism, harsh weather, and how to have it well lighted.

- It needs exposure.

- Possible locations: front of Corning High School, grounds on Corning Fire Station, Corning Stadium, City Hall where the famous people wall is located, and maybe Corning Courthouse Park.

Thanks for allowing me to make some suggestions. Best of luck in your well-deserved endeavors for an important treasured part of history of the the CPP School District and the Corning area.

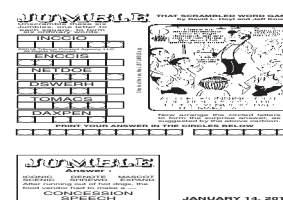
Fran Avagliano
Corning

Russian roulette on Route 86

To the Editor,
Between Bath exit 39 and Campbell exit there are 16, Lindsay X-Lite end terminals in 9.5 miles of road. Guard rails and end terminals are supposed to absorb the energy of a crash and minimize damage to the car and occupants.

This is not true of the Lindsay

See LETTERS, A8



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Ferdinand (PG) - [1:35]
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