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Wisconsin Alliance of Forest Owners asks legislature for property tax relief

Owners of forest land pay exorbitantly high property taxes compared to other agricultural land, making it difficult to net any income from timber harvests, says the Wisconsin Alliance of Forest Owners, a newly-organized group of private woodland owners. Although the state Forest Products Industry depends on harvests from privately owned forests, high taxes and other disincentives to sustainable timber production persist.

“Two-thirds of Wisconsin’s woodlands* are privately owned, and those supply 64% percent of the raw materials used by the Forest Products Industry, the state’s second largest industry behind other agriculture, responsible for 68,000 jobs,**” said Richard Wedepohl, WAFO board director.

“Statewide, woodland owners pay an average of \$32.61 per acre in property taxes, while owners of other agricultural land pay an average of \$3.38. In fact, since 1995, taxes have risen 434% on forest land, while taxes on other agricultural land have decreased 78%. This is a huge incentive to convert wooded acres, no matter how unsuitable, to other agricultural uses, particularly as the current trend continues,” Wedepohl further explains.

Land Classification	Net tax per acre				% change
	1995/96	2000/01	2005/06	2013/14	
Agricultural land	\$15.23	\$8.28	\$3.00	\$3.32	- 78%
Forest land	\$7.78	\$12.90	\$10.36	\$33.75	+434%

WAFO encourages Gov. Walker to include lowering tax rates on productive forest acres as part of his agenda to cut taxes. Fair tax property tax rates would strongly encourage private woodland owners to sustainably manage Wisconsin’s most valuable natural resource, and support the state’s important forest products jobs and industry by supplying it with higher-quality and higher volume of raw materials.

For county-by-county tax data and tools for assessing your property tax bill, visit the WAFO website at www.wiafo.org, call WAFO at (608) 218-4789, or email WAFO at info@wiafo.org.

*“Wisconsin Forest Resource Fact Sheet,” USDA Forest Service, Feb. 2012

**Wisconsin DNR, Summary of County Economic Sectors, 2010

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