

Before the current harvest and privilege taxes were passed by the Legislature years ago, a committee of landowners, assessors, elected officials and non-landowner groups evaluated the existing tax structures and debated, over several months, the best alternatives for industrial forest lands and small family owned forest lands. Their recommendations resulted in the current tax structure. That process did not occur to create HB 2379, or any of the other privilege taxes being proposed. Instead they are a knee-jerk response to several opinion pieces published in the media, or are crafted by persons who believe landowners are not adequately taxed. I would prefer the Legislature appoint a bi-partisan committee of tax experts, landowners and the general public to evaluate any fair and equitable tax structure for forestlands and the forest products they produce.

As a side note, I recall the ill-advised pre-1977 ad valorem timber tax that placed an annually assessed tax on standing timber. The process required County Assessors to map and track forest stands and set an annual timber tax. This caused landowners to cut timber as soon as possible to avoid the tax. Considering the benefits of growing trees longer, that was poor tax policy. I fear the proposed increases in harvest taxes in this bill, and others, will have the same effect. It will drive landowners to harvest now before this tax goes into effect, or before the timber becomes more valuable (ie, larger and older).