



News Release

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AMENDMENT VOTE LINKED TO GEORGIA ENVIRONMENT

Georgia voters will make an important decision regarding forest land and the environment on Tuesday, November 4. Georgians will cast ballots on Amendment #1, the "Georgia Forest Land Protection Act of 2008," which asks voters whether the state Constitution should be amended to allow timberland taxation on the basis of its actual value as a forest, rather than its potential or speculative future use.

"As land values have increased, property taxes have risen to the point where many landowners are forced to decide whether it makes economic sense to keep their land in forests or sell it for development," explained Lauren Bush, Public Affairs Staff Forester with the Georgia Forestry Commission. "Amendment #1 encourages landowners to keep their land in forests rather than sell it to developers."

Georgia boasts approximately 24 million acres of forest land, 92% of which is privately owned. The forest industry contributes \$28.5 billion to our state's economy, and provides invaluable nature services to Georgia, including clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities. The Georgia Forestry Commission provides leadership, service, and education in the protection and conservation of the state's forest resources.

"Forest management is a long-term commitment for landowners," said Bush. "They may not receive a return on their investment for 20 or more years, but their property taxes are due every year. Amendment #1 can help encourage property owners to keep their land in forests, which enhance the life of every Georgian."

To receive the forest value assessment, Amendment #1 requires forest land owners to leave their land in tree production for at least 15 years. If a county's total tax digest of revenue is reduced by more than three percent, the money will be reimbursed by the State of Georgia. If it is affected by three percent or less, the county will be reimbursed 50%.

If ratified by Georgia voters on the November 4 General Election ballot, the Forest Land Protection Act will go into effect on January 1, 2009.

For more information, visit GaTrees.org, www.fourforests.com or www.keepgeorgiagreen.org.

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