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Greetings,

The New Mexico legislature is now in session and as always the Tree Farm program is keeping an eye on the session to let our members know if there is any pending legislation or actions that will affect forest landowners. This session is a thirty day one which is supposed to focus on financial concerns. This limits to some extent what can be introduced for consideration.

One bill (SB 241) would combine the Environment Department with the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department (EMRD). This would be done to "streamline" administrative expenses. The EMRD is the parent agency for the Division of Forestry which works with many forest landowners, including Tree Farmers. It's unlikely that combining the two departments would have any effect on services provided to forest landowners by Division foresters.

A bill in the House (HB78) directs the Environmental Improvement Board (EIB) to adopt rules to prepare for possible federal or state rules to limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. How could this impact Tree Farmers? I'm sure you have all heard parts of the debate about global warming or as it is more commonly referred to now; climate change. The theory is that GHG emissions (CO 2 and some other gases) released by man's activities are leading to an overall increase in earth's temperatures so therefore GHG emissions should be limited. The Waxman-Markey bill (American Clean Energy and Security Act) which passed the U.S. House in June of last year would do this. A part of this act would set up a "cap and trade" system where total GHG emissions are "capped" at a certain level. Businesses that could not meet this cap could "trade" emission credits with businesses that emit less than the capped amount and also with other entities that capture or sequester GHG. This is where Tree Farms enter the picture. Forests are known to sequester or capture CO 2. On a national level the Tree Farm program has been very active in promoting the idea that forests should be eligible for carbon credits. If this comes to pass, a forest landowner could conceivably have a "credit" for sequestered carbon that could then be traded in the marketplace. This is actually occurring in some areas.

This is all very complicated but to get back to HB78, if there are rules being promulgated on a state level concerning GHG, the Tree Farm Committee will let regulators know of the importance of forests in the debate.

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Cork, it has to be one of Mother Nature's most interesting substances. After all it is lightweight, rot, fire, and termite resistant, impermeable to gas and liquid, soft, buoyant, and pliable. Given these characteristics it is no surprise it makes the perfect material for stopping wine and Champaign bottles, the use we are probably most familiar with. But what exactly is cork and where does it come from? To begin with cork is derived from the oak tree Quercus suber. While all trees have a degree of cork to their outer bark, no other tree can compare. Cork is made from the water resistant cells which form as a layer of protection and insulation on the outer layer of bark, in essence separating the outer layer from the inner layer of bark. These trees are found primarily along the Mediterranean coast as well as in Western Europe and Northern Africa. Commercial cultivation of cork began sometime in the 18th century. The bark is harvested during the active growing season generally the spring through summer months. During this time the newly generated cork cells are easily separated from the cambium without damaging the tree. The tree does suffer mild setbacks in function but recovers quickly and is able to begin regenerating the outer bark. The bark is harvested manually using a special type of axe. This is done carefully and methodically to ensure the tree is not damaged in the process. Mechanical methods have been tried but have been unsuccessful. A mature oak tree must be at least 25 years old before it can be harvested for the first time. This cork is called the virgin cork and is usually grey in color and poor in quality. It is ground and used in construction type products. The next harvest is done 9-10 years later and is called the reproduction cork. Again this is substandard cork for bottling purposes and is generally used in flooring. The third harvest is completed in another 9-10 years and this will be the first cork that can be used for wine stoppers, known as the amadia cork. A cork producer thus has a 40 year gap before a tree begins producing quality cork. Once the tree has reached this stage it will be harvested about every 9 years for the remainder of its life, generally 170 to 200 years. A mature tree can produce on average enough cork for 4000 wine stoppers each harvest. The largest and most productive cork tree is the Whistler tree found in Portugal. This tree is 230 years old and has been in production since 1820. Each harvest this tree produces enough cork for 100,000 wine stoppers, and is expected to produce enough cork for 1,000,000 wine stoppers over the course of its life. Once harvested the planks of bark are allowed to set and cure. Once this process is complete the cork will be boiled allowing the cells to expand and honeycomb making the cork more pliable and increasing its volume by 20%. The cork is then allowed to dry and will eventually be cut into strips the length of a standard wine stopper but slightly wider. A sharp punch is then used to form the final product, which will then be sterilized using hydrogen peroxide. All scrap is used in various products including insulation, flooring, shoes, and other products. Due to the fact nothing is wasted, and the trees are never cut down but continue to renew themselves, the cork industry is considered one of the most sustainable in the world. Approximately 13 billion wine stoppers are produced each year, employing an estimated 30,000 workers. The next time you open that special bottle of wine perhaps you will give this complex and fascinating industry a thought before you throw that cork stopper in the trash.

References:

www.corkqc.com; www.realcork.org; www.howstuffworks.com

Country	Forest Area Hectares	% of Worlds Forest Area	Production Tons (000)	% of Total Production
Portugal	736,000	33%	185	54%
Spain	500,000	22%	88	26%
Algeria	410,000	18%	20	6%
Morocco	340,000	15%	15	4%
France	100,000	4%	5	1%
Tunisia	99,000	4%	9	3%
Italy	90,000	4%	18	5%
TOTAL	**2,275,000**	**100%**	**340**	**100%**

2004 Figures courtesy of APCOR