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Another Voice: County's forestry plan puts profits above stewardship

By *Another Voice* (<https://buffalonews.com/author/another-voice/>) | Published November 21, 2018

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By Larry Beahan

We citizens of Erie County own 3,200 acres of beautiful woods spread across the southern part of the county. These forests are doing their job of purifying air and water as they collect carbon that would otherwise stoke climate warming.

The 2018 update of the 2003 plan to manage the Erie County forest is a bad plan designed to extract a few dollars at the sacrifice of these important values.

County Executive Mark Poloncarz may have forgotten his scathing 2006 report as county comptroller on the contracting and execution of the 2003 plan. It promised \$500,000 for the county and produced closer to \$100,000. The single logging company that was allowed to bid for the contract made an untold fortune.

The 2003 plan was advertised as “Primarily for the health of the forest.” Franz Seischab, professor of forestry at Rochester Institute of Technology, disagreed, writing that “the clear intent of this plan is to manage this land for forest production, to contribute to county revenue.”

In 2006, forester Bruce Robinson of Jamestown looked at the resulting rogue logging operation. “The harvesting of all the large trees has left a residual stand of poles, low-grade hardwoods and hemlocks. There has been no attempt to prevent soil erosion or to leave the forest any kind of mirror of itself.”

A delegation of county Legislators went down to the Genesee Road forest to see for themselves. They ordered an emergency “cease and desist.” The next day the loggers took two more black cherry trees. The legislators were furious.

The 2018 plan is explicitly written to advance the production of and to harvest all marketable timber. The portions not marked

for timbering are those where the timber has no market value. Lot 3 on Genesee Road and Lot 7 off Route 16 were robbed of their valuable timber in 2006.

Loggers realize that forest Lots 1 and 2 on Genesee Road are heavily used for skiing, hiking, snowmobiling and sugaring. The squawk would be heard all the way to Buffalo, if they were abused.

To have missed its brazen intent, the recent Buffalo News editorial was clearly based on a superficial peek at this plan. It was wise enough to predict the complaints of “extreme environmentalists.”

A day or two later The News described a study in “science advances” by Joseph Fargione of the Nature Conservancy. It demonstrated that by reforestation and better logging practices, forests and vacant farmland could sequester 21 percent of the greenhouse gases that the U.S. produces each year, an amount equal to removing every single car and truck from the road.

How about this time the county does an impact study, under the state Environmental Quality Review Act, before jumping into the deep end again?

Larry Beahan is conservation chairman of the Sierra Niagara Group.

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