To: NYFOA Membership

For many years, unaffordable property taxes have been identified as the number one problem faced by private family forest owners. Our woodlots are not generally eligible for agricultural exemptions, and the current Forest Tax Law 480a program requires a minimum of 50 acres to enroll. The 50-acre minimum is the highest of any state in the nation, and the great majority of woodlot owners in New York do not qualify.

NYFOA has been fighting for changes to 480a for many years, specifically for streamlined administrative provisions and a reduction in the minimum qualifying acreage. Last year we joined a coalition of several forest stakeholder organizations and requested attention from Albany on numerous environmental and forest issues, including 480a. Many NYFOA members participated in this effort by writing the Governor and writing or meeting personally with their legislators.

Our 2016 efforts were partially successful in that the Governor introduced his Empire Forests for the Future Initiative (EFFI) during his 2017 “State of the State” address. EFFI included many provisions important to coalition members. Of particular interest to NYFOA was a new option under the Forest Tax Law (480b) that would provide a 40% tax assessment reduction on a minimum of 25 acres when the property is managed for a relatively broad range of management objectives. EFFI also included the new forest stewardship cost-share programs we developed under our Restore New York Woodlands initiative in 2013.

NYFOA has now joined an even broader coalition of forest and environmental stakeholders to promote EFFI and urge the Governor to include funding for it in his 2018 Executive Budget.

If the provisions of the EFFI are important to you, I would urge you to once again write to the Governor and the Senator and Assemblyperson representing your District. Sample letters can be found HERE. Letters to the Governor should be sent asap since the 2018 budget is already under preparation. Also included at the link provided are lists of legislators who are members of committees having a strong influence on the proposed legislation. Letters to these legislators from NYFOA members who are constituents should be a high priority.

Due to the size and influence of the coalition supporting EFFI, I am cautiously optimistic that we may finally see some of the changes we have been fighting for. I hope you will join me on what may be our final “push”.

Best wishes,  
Charles Stackhouse