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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 635

Offered January 10, 2001

Prefiled January 10, 2001

Requesting the Department of Forestry to study the feasibility of establishing and implementing a hardwood forest restoration program.

Patrons—Day, Diamonstein, Grayson and Stump

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, forest lands are being converted to nonforestal uses and the loss of this land affects the Commonwealth's forest production capabilities and the quality of life of Virginians; and

WHEREAS, § 3.1-18.4 of the Code of Virginia recognizes that "(a)griculture, forestry, and related enterprises comprise a significant segment of the Commonwealth's economy and play a critical role in defining the character of the Commonwealth, and their preservation should be encouraged"; and

WHEREAS, it is the policy of the Commonwealth not only "to conserve and protect and to encourage the development and improvement of the Commonwealth's agricultural and forestal lands for the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products" but also "...to conserve and protect agricultural and forestal lands as valued natural and ecological resources which provide essential open spaces for clean air sheds, watershed protection, wildlife habitat, as well as aesthetic purposes" (Code of Virginia § 15.2-4301); and

WHEREAS, the maturity of the hardwood stock, increased timbering, the fragmentation of Virginia's forests, and the loss of forestland due to development and urbanization have resulted in a decrease in the amount of hardwood growing stock; and

WHEREAS, while the number of cubic feet of hardwood growing stock has increased dramatically since 1940, the cubic feet of hardwood removals has increased 12 percent over the periods from 1986-1991 to 1991-1997; and

WHEREAS, data from the 1986 forest inventory data documents the beginning of a reduction in the growth/removal ratio, as hardwood stocks decreased and removals increased significantly; and

WHEREAS, no longer, as was the case in the 1986 inventory, is the growth in hardwoods twice as much as removals (ratio = 2.03), as data collected in the 1998 appear to show that hardwood growth exceeds removals by only 37 percent (ratio = 1.37); and

WHEREAS, Virginia, under auspices of the Reforestation Board, has implemented a very effective program to ensure the reforestation of softwood trees by providing financial and technical assistance and other incentives to private landowners; and

WHEREAS, a similar program aimed at the reforestation of hardwood acreage may hold the prospect of maintaining and perhaps increasing the acreage of hardwood forests; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Forestry be requested to study the feasibility of establishing and implementing a hardwood forest restoration program. The study should examine (i) how such a program should be structured, (ii) what incentives should be provided to landowners, (iii) the impact such a program might have on the hardwood resource, and (iv) the costs of implementing the program and how it should be financed.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department of Forestry for this study, upon request.

The Department of Forestry shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2002 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

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