**Actions the Minnesota Timber Producers Association**

**(TPA) has taken on your behalf:**

Thanks to TPA’s lobbying efforts, both during Minnesota’s Legislative Session and through discussions with policy makers at the state, federal, and county levels, a number of issues important to TPA members were acted upon in the last 12 months.

Here is a rundown of actions pertaining to the forest products industry, and their outcomes this year:

**5% Truck Weight Tolerance**

In the 2019 Legislative session, lawmakers clarified that truckers with a raw forest products permit receive a 5% overweight tolerance all year around on roadside compliance checks. In 2018, the interpretation of existing law changed, and the tolerance only applied during the winter months. Rep. Rob Ecklund (DFL-International Falls) went to work to fix that, and was the chief author of the 2019 bill, using language developed by TPA. Staff also held meetings with the State Patrol’s Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division and with MnDOT, as well as House Transportation Committee Chair Frank Hornstein (DFL-Minneapolis) and other House and Senate members. The efforts of Sen. Jason Rarick (R-Pine City) and Sen. Dave Tomassoni (DFL-Chisholm) were also critical in getting the provision passed by the legislature. This clarification does not change the maximum weight in statute, which remains 90,000 pounds on 6 axles with the raw forest products permit, with an increase to 99,000 pounds during winter load increases. The tolerance only means drivers with the permit can’t be ticketed and fined roadside until the load exceeds 94,500 pounds (103,950 pounds in the winter).

**DNR Unsold Timber Tours**

In response to unsold tracts on DNR auctions, TPA members met with state staff in the Baudette, Sandstone, and Tower areas to provide input on how to better design sales to make them more attractive to bidders. Each of the meetings began in the office, and then the participants headed to the woods. Included in the meetings were not only DNR staff from the Division of Forestry in each area, but also staff from St. Paul, as well as from the Wildlife and Water and Ecological Services divisions in each area.

**State Funding Improves County Forest Roads**

In 2017, TPA lobbied the legislature for funding to improve and maintain county forest roads throughout the state. $1 million was appropriated over the biennium, with another $1 million included in the base budget for 2020-21. Now two years later, loggers are seeing the results of this funding across the forested regions of the state. In all, roughly 75 projects have been completed, with more in the planning stages. Counties receiving funding for the work include Aitkin, Becker, Beltrami, Carlton, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis.

**Workers Comp program is now Self Insured**

TPA has had a workers compensation program for more than 35 years. This year, the program became self-insured, which should lower rates for program participants. Northern Capital Insurance Group, with agents Bill Dupont and Jay Eystad, continues to service the TPA accounts.

**Actions on Federal Forests**

The US Forest Service allowed harvesting operations on timber sales to continue during the Federal Government shutdown in January, thanks to the lobbying efforts of several groups around the country, including TPA. In addition, TPA staff participated in meetings on Forest Service issues with US Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and with Undersecretary Jim Hubbard, both of whom are supportive of increasing federal outputs.

**And Congratulations Are in Order…**

…to TPA members Cliff & Mary Shermer of Gheen for being named National Loggers of the Year! The Shermers are an example of what our members do for our association, and the great work Minnesota loggers do in managing our forests. Great job, Shermers!