**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 this year.

In 2015, state lawmakers needed overtime, but several measures passed the legislature and were signed into law by Gov. Dayton that will help loggers and the forest products industry as a whole during the 2015 legislative session. Among the helpful provisions were supplemental funding for DNR Forestry, a plan that improves forest road maintenance while helping loggers at the same time, and funding to continue the work of the Forest Resources Council. The following is a rundown of actions taken during the 2015 Legislative session that pertain to our industry, as well as a handful of others of interest.

**DNR Funding**

The DNR Division of Forestrysaw an increase of funding from the General Fund of $2 million in FY2016 (beginning July 1, 2015) and an increase of $1.5 million in FY2017. In addition, Funding to DNR Forestry from the Forest Management Investment Account (FMIA) is increased by $500,000 per year. Finally, DNR Forestry was provided with a 1.8% increase from the General Fund and from FMIA in each year of the next biennium, totaling $2.204 million, in order to cover increased employee compensation costs.

**State Forest Roads**

Of the appropriation for FY2016, $500,000 of it is allocated to a pilot project that awards forest road maintenance contracts to owners of state timber sales. This is a result of discussion at TPA Board of Directors meetings, and then meetings with DNR staff and several legislators.

**Riparian Buffers**

Governor Dayton had proposed a 50 foot buffer of perennial vegetation along waterbodies in the state. This provision was passed by the legislature and was signed into law. The waters on which buffers are required are to be identified by July 1, 2017. Because the Voluntary Site-Level Forest Management Guidelines already provide for riparian buffers around harvest sites, this proposal is not expected to impact forestry.

**MFRC Funding**

The Minnesota Forest Resources Council received an extra $200,000 for its base budget. Over the years, the council’s budget, which once topped $1.2 million, had been cut in half. The Council’s budget will now be $780,000 per year.

**Electrical Rates**

Legislation establishing rates for Energy Intensive Trade Exposed (EITE) industries was passed and signed into law. The legislation provides the ability for defined customers, including paper mills, sawmills, OSB manufacturers, taconite plants, and others to negotiate an EITE rate with their utility for review and approval by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). The statute also provides the opportunity for other trade exposed industries to seek an EITE rate. This could apply to new, large wood-based bio-products facilities that may be proposed for Minnesota. EITE rates are only available to customers of Minnesota Power and Ottertail Power.

**Other legislative topics of note**

* The Citizens Board of the MN Pollution Control Agency was abolished.
* No transportation funding package passed, and no changes in fuel or other transportation taxes were enacted.
* Efforts were made by a coalition of shippers to obtain the same provisions for truck weights and configurations—i.e. 90,000 pounds with a 6th axle—as the forest products and agricultural industries have. These efforts were not successful.