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SMITH-NORCROSS BILL PROMOTING FOREST HEALTH THROUGH STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM RECEIVES FINAL LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL

TRENTON – Legislation sponsored by Senators Bob Smith and Donald Norcross that would establish a forestry stewardship program for state-owned lands was approved today by the General Assembly and now heads to the Governor's desk.

"Environmental management of many of our forests has been nonexistent and the results have been detrimental to our state's vegetation, wildlife and water quality," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset. "Overgrowth, dead or aging trees have grown too thick and have blocked out sunlight, prohibiting new growth from taking root on our forests' floors. Nature typically regulates its forest growth and habitat diversity with fire, wind and disease, but allowing these natural happenings to occur could be harmful to the residential communities bordering our state's forests. We must find new and innovative ways to promote forest health. This program is the right thing to do."

The bill, S-1085, would direct the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to develop a comprehensive forestry stewardship program that provides for sustainable forest management activities to preserve forest resources and enhance the benefits provided by the forest.

"New Jersey's state-owned forests are a real asset for the state that provide recreational space for many of our residents - from hikers and campers to fishers and hunters," said Senator Norcross, D-Camden and Gloucester. "Unfortunately, without a comprehensive forest management plan, our forests have fallen into disrepair. We must implement a comprehensive plan that will sustain our natural resources for the benefit of wildlife, our residents and our state."

The bill was approved by the Assembly with a vote of 46-27-2. The Senate approved the bill last year 36-3. It now heads to the Governor.