

New-Indy is good for business and forestry

BY STATE SEN. EVERETT STUBBS

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One of my highest priorities as your State Senator has been protecting and strengthening South Carolina's forestry industry. Forestry is more than an industry in our state—it's part of our heritage, our economy, and one of the greatest conservation success stories in the Southeast. That is why I was honored on Monday, July 27, to join Myra Reece, Director of the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services, along with many of her senior staff from the Bureau of Air Quality and the Bureau of Land & Waste Services, for a firsthand tour of the New-Indy Catawba paper mill to review the significant environmental improvements that have been made in recent years.

I came away from this visit very impressed.

The New-Indy team has made an extraordinary commitment to modernizing the facility and investing in environmental stewardship. Rather than simply meeting minimum regulatory requirements, they have made investments that position this mill to operate responsibly for decades into the future.

Among the improvements we observed was a new \$30 million steam stripper system that removes approximately 98% of reduced sulfur compounds and 95% of methanol from process streams that greatly reduces onerous smells that we all associate with paper mills. We also observed significant upgrades to the wastewater treatment infrastructure, new spill

prevention systems to protect the integrity of the Catawba River, extensive dredging and restoration of their treatment basins, and advanced air monitoring that gives real time readings on hydrogen sulfide levels around the facility. The mill has also reduced its water consumption by approximately six million gallons every day through process improvements and water reuse initiatives while committing to invest more than \$10 million annually in ongoing environmental stewardship and compliance.

These are not small improvements—they represent a fundamental commitment to operating responsibly to preserve the mill's operations and ultimately save good-paying manufacturing jobs here in South Carolina.

Just as importantly, this paper mill is absolutely critical to the future of our forestry industry.

Most people think about the hundreds of employees who work inside the gates of the mill when they think about the impact of this mill on the regional economy. Those jobs are certainly important, but the true economic impact extends far beyond the plant itself.

The New-Indy mill purchases approximately \$80 million in roundwood and wood chips each year from more than 75 suppliers. That wood comes from forests and landowners right here in this region. In total, the mill supports an estimated \$350 million in annual regional economic activity while providing approximately \$65 million in payroll and benefits.

Perhaps most importantly, this mill is one of the primary markets for pulpwood harvested during planted pine thinning operations.

Those thinning operations are essential to healthy forest management in helping open the forest canopy to grow trees taller and wider for uses other than paper such as saw lumber and telephone poles. Without strong markets for pulpwood, many private landowners would struggle to justify keeping their property in working forests. Instead, the financial pressure to sell timberland for development would only increase.

That is why supporting responsible forest product manufacturing is also supporting conservation. Various species of wildlife and plants depend heavily on varying stages of timber growth. Forests that are not appropriately thinned result in stunted tree growth and ultimately produce less favorable ecosystems for wildlife and other plant species.

Healthy forestry markets encourage landowners to continue investing in their forests rather than converting those lands into subdivisions and commercial developments. In our region, every logger, truck driver, equipment dealer, forester, rural auto parts store employee, gas station clerk and diner restaurant waitress is likely connected to this economic chain that depends upon having reliable markets for pulpwood.

I've often said that the best conservation policy is profitable farming and profitable forestry. When our landowners can make a living from working forests, those forests remain forests.

That protects wildlife habitat, improves water quality, stores carbon, supports outdoor recreation, and preserves the rural character that makes our region so special.

Seeing firsthand the investments New-Indy has made gave me confidence that environmental responsibility and economic growth can go hand in hand. We do not have to choose between protecting our natural resources and protecting good jobs. With responsible leadership and continued investment, we can accomplish both.

As your State Senator, I left New-Indy feeling encouraged and hopeful that our region of South Carolina will remain a place where our forestry industry can thrive, our environment is protected, and future generations inherit both a strong economy and healthy forests. Thank you to the folks at New-Indy for making the investments for our foresting future in this region!

Stubbs is the representative for S.C. Senate District 17, which includes all of Lancaster County.