

WVOA Policy on Legislative Activity

As an organization that enjoys tax exempt status with the IRS, which means that dues and contributions are tax deductible for our members, WVOA puts strict limits on all political activity. We work with state agencies and legislators only when the topic is seen by our Board of Directors as directly relevant to our members' ownerships and management of woodlands. Modifications in the Managed Forest Law are a prime example.

Decisions on the position to take on legislation are made by the Board, usually based on discussion with the Legislative Committee chair. The chair, or in some cases another Board member or the Executive Director, may then express that position at Legislative hearings, directly with Legislators, or by letter. This is the Board's job, acting in the best interests of our members.

Members of WVOA who have opinions on proposed legislation are of course free to express these opinions directly to legislators. They may identify themselves as WVOA members, but must make it clear that they are speaking for themselves, not on behalf of WVOA. The only exception would be in the rare case that WVOA had suggested to members that they contact Legislators on the organization's behalf, or to tell them about a position the Board has taken on an issue.

Talking to Legislators about a subject other than proposed legislation, is generally acceptable. An example might be the impact of Use Value Assessment on woodland property taxes, or the problems associated with antiquated fence laws. However, unless WVOA has taken an official stance on such an issue, we must all be careful not to represent ourselves as speaking for the organization.

Under no circumstances can WVOA endorse or support a candidate for political office at any level. Individual members are free to do so, of course, and may identify themselves as members when they do. They must be careful, however, not to speak for WVOA or to suggest their position represents' WVOA's position. There is nothing wrong with inviting elected officials to chapter events, but it would be advisable to avoid such invitations in the period leading up to an election in which the official is a candidate.

All of the cautions outlined above apply to federal lawmakers and agencies, as well as those at the state level.

Of course, the WVOA Board, and the Legislative Committee, wants to hear from members with their suggestions for legislation or policy. We can only know your thoughts if you tell us about them.

Approved by the WVOA Board 6-2-05