

**NORTHAMPTON** – Wake up and do not drink the Kool-Aid, Northampton.

Mayor David Narkewicz is allowing aggressive commercial logging of Northampton's most precious and important publicly owned drinking water supply protection forests. He is also either wittingly, or unwittingly, misleading the public by pointing to a "stewardship" plan that was written by vested interests, and which spins reality by claiming that forest "stewardship" requires aggressively cutting the forest. Four hundred acres are targeted for cutting in just the first two years of a 10-year program.

The plan also suggests considering the spraying of toxic herbicides in the watershed to control invasive plant species commonly spread and exacerbated by logging. The logging program operates at financial loss, and has cost Northampton water ratepayers \$102,000 and Massachusetts taxpayers another \$42,000.

The mayor seems intent on thwarting citizen participation. Recently, an informational walk at the site of a completed logging job was scheduled with city councilors to contrast the real damage caused by large trucks entering and cutting the watershed with the scientifically unsupportable claims by the mayor that commercial logging "helps" the forest. Roughly an hour before the tour, a threatening letter was released from the city legal department prohibiting walking in the watershed to allegedly "protect the public water drinking water supply." The walk had to be canceled. Diesel trucks cutting down the forest continues.

Peer-reviewed, credible science says there is no "need" to log these forests, and many reasons not to. The financial, ecological and potential public health costs of a degraded watershed will be borne by Northampton's 30,000 citizens. Because a large portion of private forestlands have been "high-graded" — in which loggers have "taken the best and left the rest" — timber interests have targeted municipal conservation land and public watershed forests for log-



KEVIN GUTTING

**Northampton City Engineer James Laurila, left, forester Michael Mauri and Northampton Senior Environmental Scientist Nicole Sanford walk March 14 through an area of the city's watershed land in West Whately.**

ging because these lands still have high-value timber.

To sell the logging, foresters often create manufactured or exaggerated threats, for example that the forest is too crowded, diseased, the wrong age, "needs more vigor" or that a hurricane will come and blow it down if we don't cut it now. Some of these excuses are laughable and others make sense for timber production. But rarely does logging "help" the forest or water quality.

Some of the threats presented are convincing to the layman, but when examined by independent experts, the justifications almost always turn out to be false, exaggerated or situations that will get even worse with more logging.

It is important to remember that many foresters have a vested interest in logging and are in the business of producing timber, not protecting the ecology

of the forest. This may be appropriate if your goal is to produce timber by carefully logging private forests to minimize the damage, but for public water supply forests, where forest values such as carbon sequestration and water filtration are most important, credible science states that logging degrades the forest and water quality and is counterproductive.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency says this: "Local impacts of timber harvesting and road construction on water quality can be severe. These effects are of greatest concern where silvicultural activity occurs in high-quality watershed areas that provide municipal water supplies or support cold-water fisheries."

Eric Chivian, a Nobel Prize recipient with the Harvard Center for the Global Environment says this: "There are significant potential risks from planned logging operations for the Quabbin and other watersheds — increased greenhouse gas emissions, a decline in the populations of many deep forest species, massive dam-

age to the forest floor and to forest soil ecosystems and their functioning ... and a potential loss of the ability of the forest to filter pollutants from air and water."

It is hypocritical for green, progressive and climate-concerned Northampton to cut its most important forests while expecting poor Third World countries to protect their forests for the climate health and the global benefit.

These public drinking water protection forests are the most important forests in the city and represent our best chance to preserve and protect wilderness areas, fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, clean air, carbon sequestration and scenic beauty.

Let's protect them now.

Chris Matera of Northampton is a professional engineer with Massachusetts Forest Watch.