

September 19, 2011

The Honorable Frank Lucas
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

On behalf of the millions of forest owners, conservationists, hunters, anglers, forest product manufacturers, and natural resource professionals represented in the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition, we are pleased to offer recommendations for the 2012 Farm Bill that we agree will address current and emerging private forest issues.

Why Address Private Forests in the Farm Bill?

The nation's private forests, which make up more than two-thirds of all U.S. forests and supply Americans with clean water and clean air, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and forest products, are a key component of America's rural landscapes, stimulating healthy rural communities and economies, and supporting well-paying jobs in rural America. Many of these private forests, are owned by farmers.

Even as these forests provide multiple benefits, we see growing threats and challenges that make it difficult to keep these lands intact and healthy, so all Americans continue to reap these environmental and economic benefits. These threats and challenges include development pressures that have the potential to breakup and permanently convert as many as 57 million acres of private forests by 2030, which will significantly challenge the provision of critical water supplies across key watersheds. Invasive species, insects, and diseases currently threaten roughly 58 million acres of forests. Additionally, wildfires threaten as many as 400 million acres of private forests.

Even as these external pressures threaten private forests, 170 million acres of these lands are owned by landowners that are 55 years or older, meaning these lands are at high risk of being divided up into many smaller ownership parcels and/or being development in the near future. To compound the problem, only 4 percent of private forest owners have a forest management plan, meaning only a limited number have thought about and planned for the future management of their forest.

As you may know, the 2008 Farm Bill included significant improvements for forest owners, supporting more forest conservation and agroforestry practices and activities across the country. In the 2012 Farm Bill, we hope to build on the success of the 2008 Farm bill and make further improvements, while respecting the budget situation.

Budget Deficit and Program Consolidation

We know you and your colleagues are faced with significant budget deficit issues and we remain concerned with efforts in the appropriations process and the debt ceiling discussions that make it incredibly difficult to craft the next Farm Bill. We also know that you face persistent rural unemployment and economic health challenges, amongst many other challenges that you will be working to address in the next Farm Bill. We stand ready to work with you and your colleagues as you address these issues in a way that makes sense for forest conservation and America's rural communities. Investments in conservation programs are critical to the health of rural communities and economies, and we urge you to work with your colleagues to be sure that conservation programs do not take disproportionate cuts in the budget process.

We also remain ready to work with you to improve program efficiency and consolidate or streamline programs while ensuring that programs better serve program participants, especially forest owners.

2012 Farm Bill Private Forest Priorities

With the challenges and threats facing private forests, the 2012 Farm Bill should include a focus on enabling forest conservation on private forests and surrounding rural landscapes, while also supporting the creation and maintenance of forest-dependant rural jobs and strong rural economies in forest communities.

To do this, we ask that you focus on four key priorities in the 2012 Farm Bill:

- Including strong provisions for forests in Conservation Programs;
- Strengthening forestry outreach, education, research, and inventory programs;
- Combating forest-related invasive species; and
- Improving forest market opportunities.

While each of our organizations has priorities within, and in addition to these recommendations, we agree that a focus on these key priorities will help advance private forest conservation and management in the U.S, even in this difficult budget climate.

The Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition stands ready to provide detailed recommendations to address the above priorities upon request.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you as you develop the next Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Aldo Leopold Foundation
American Forest & Paper Association
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Forest Resource Council
American Loggers Council
American Rivers
Appalachian Mountain Club
Association for Temperate Agroforestry
Biomass Energy Resource Center
Biomass Thermal Energy Council
Boone and Crockett Club
California Forestry Association
CarbonVerde
Conservation Northwest
Defenders of Wildlife
Empire State Forest Products Association
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Defense Fund
Forest Capital Partners
Forest Guild
Green Diamond Resource Company
Forest Resources Association
Hardwood Federation
Indiana Forestry Woodland Owners Association
Kansas Forestry Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Land Trust Alliance
Louisiana Forestry Association
Lyme Timber Company
Mississippi Forestry Association
Mississippi Land Trust
Mississippi River Trust
Montana Forest Owners Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of Gateway Communities
National Association of State Foresters
National Association of University Forest Resources Programs
National Network of Forest Practitioners

National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation
National Woodland Owners Association
New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association
Northern Forest Canoe Trail
Northern Forest Center
Ohio Forestry Association
Oklahoma Forestry Association
Oregon Rural Action
Oregon Small Woodlands Association
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Quail Unlimited
Quality Deer Management Association
Ruffed Grouse Society
Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine
Society of American Foresters
South Carolina Forestry Association
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Sustainable Northwest
Texas Forestry Association
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
Vermont Woodlands Association
Virginia Forestry Association
Washington Farm Forestry Association
Washington Forest Protection Association
Weyerhaeuser
Wildlife Mississippi