

October 3, 2011

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

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
U.S. House of Representatives  
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 developed 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  
Great Lakes Forest Alliance  
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  
Northwest Natural Resource Group  
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