



August 22, 2006

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

The Honorable Carlos Gutierrez
U.S. Department of Commerce
Room 5516, 14th & Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Mike Johanns
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave,
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Stephen L. Johnson
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Secretaries Kempthorne, Gutierrez, and Johanns, and Administrator Johnson:

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) is pleased with your efforts to encourage cooperative conservation. SAF represents over 14,000 forestry professionals across the country in all employment sectors. Our members are involved in the management and conservation of the nation's 739 million acres of forests in both public and private ownership.

We believe that the federal government, through its policies, legislation, and implementing activities, should establish a unified goal for all of the nation's forests to provide citizens with a sustainable forest resource. Ensuring the sustainability of our forest resources is critical to the nation's future due to the important role our forest lands play in providing natural resources (including clean air and water and wildlife habitat), economic benefits (both locally and nationally), and social values (including public recreation and aesthetics). Providing sustainable forest resources requires management that balances the ecological, economic, and social values associated with forests and recognizes the mutually supportive nature of these values.

Because of the diverse ownership of the nation's forests at the landscape scale, cooperation is essential to making a sustainable forest resource a national reality. Cooperative conservation can provide a holistic approach to management of the nation's forests while recognizing the diverse goals of individual citizen, corporate

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and government landowners. Such an approach will assure that citizens play a central and substantive role in the stewardship and governance of their environments, ultimately helping to sustain the nation's forest resources for the long-term benefit of land owners and the public alike.

SAF members, as stewards of the nation's forests, are faced with many challenges that highlight the need for policies that promote and encourage sustainable management and allow the cooperation necessary to make it happen. The following are just a few of these challenges:

- Rapid fragmentation and loss of forests to development;
- Inability of forest uses to compete with real estate values
- Widespread sale of industrial forestlands;
- Shifting of the forest products industry overseas, often to areas with minimal environmental standards;
- Loss of forest industry infrastructure, reducing market opportunities to help cover costs of forest management for forest health, wildlife, and other purposes;
- Increasing insect and disease outbreaks and large-scale wildfires;
- Continued disinvestment in the management of forestlands, both public and private;
- Distraught rural communities that once thrived on forest-based economies;
- Economic instability of private family-owned forests;
- Difficulty in regenerating hardwood forests in the Eastern United States; and

Sustainable forest resources and cooperative conservation go hand in hand. The following are suggestions for encouraging cooperative conservation that at the same time helps sustain U.S. forest resources for the needs of current and future generations.

1) How can the federal government enhance wildlife habitat, species protection, and other conservation outcomes through regulatory and voluntary conservation programs?

- Forests provide the majority of wildlife habitat in the U.S. including nearly 90% of habitat for endangered species.
- For forests to continue to provide wildlife habitat, species protection, or other conservation outcomes, they must be managed sustainably—recognizing the importance of the interconnectedness of the ecological, economic, and the social values of forests.
- Additionally, the majority of the nation's clean water derives from forested watersheds.

The federal government can help by encouraging:

- Better integration within programs to address economic, social, and ecological needs and values, reflecting the three cornerstones of sustainable forest resources;
- Better coordination among voluntary programs and the various regulatory and tax policies at all levels of government that affect forests and their management; and
- Better integration of activities and cooperation across ownerships on forested landscapes.

2) How can the federal government enhance cooperation among federal agencies and with states, tribes, and local communities in the application of environmental protection and conservation laws?

- It is clear from the various laws and regulations governing forests and their conservation that there is no clear set goal for forest management in the U.S. (e.g. the Clean Water Act sets a clear standard to have “fishable and swimmable” waters in the U.S. The Endangered Species Act sets clear standards for the conservation of endangered and threatened species).
- Nowhere in U.S. policy does it state that we, as a nation, believe a sustainable forest resource is a desired goal. Without clear direction, the default guidance is a labyrinth of laws and regulations that haphazardly apply to forests and result in the array of issues and threats we are facing today.

The federal government, including Congress, could help resolve this problem with clear direction for a sustainable forest resource in the U.S. and improved government cooperation to achieve this goal. To do this we must have:

- Clearly defined roles for the various levels of government;
- Incentives for cooperation, both within and outside government;
- Incentives for achieving balance among the economic, social, and environmental aspects of forests;
- Mechanisms for cooperation through landscape planning and coordinating (e.g. the Community Wildfire Protection Plan model has been very effective in bringing communities together to solve natural resource problems);

3) How can the federal government work with states, tribes, and other public and private sector partners to improve science used in environmental protection and conservation?

- Up-to-date science is essential in the conservation and management of forests.
- Both traditional research and the translation of that research to inform on-the-ground conservation activities through technology transfer are critical.
- In addition to funding science and its application through the federal government research entities and through research incentives for non-governmental entities, the federal government can encourage more application of science to conservation and environmental protection efforts through various mechanisms such as:
 - support for a new and improved model of extension;
 - creating a clearinghouse for translation of forest-related research into practical information;
 - better integration and priority setting among the various forestry research bodies including Forest Service Research and Development, the land grant institutions, and other non-federal and private entities conducting research;
 - Ensuring research and its application covers the broad range of issues and needs that will help guide sustainable management of the nation’s forests.

4) How can the federal government work cooperatively with businesses and landowners to protect the environment and promote conservation?

A sustainable forest resource requires cooperation and commitment from all entities, from those that own forestland to those that rely on forests for water or hunting access, to those that enjoy

the benefits of the scenic beauty associated with forests. Thus, the federal government should adopt policies that:

- encourage the business community to recognize, support and invest in the production of public benefits like clean water, clean air, and wildlife habitat, that forest landowners are providing free of charge;
- help ensure that the business community and landowners have access to the latest science and technical information
- Provide a mechanism to coordinate among the private interests and government entities on conservation of forests.

5) How can the federal government better respect the interests of people with ownership in land, water, and other natural resources?

Respect for the rights of individuals is essential if we are to get the cooperation and involvement of private entities. Given that over 2/3 of forests in the U.S. are owned by private entities, their cooperation is essential to sustaining the nation's forests. The federal government should build upon and encourage a stewardship ethic in private entities, through:

- Incentive based motivation rather than regulatory approaches and
- Education that demonstrates the compatibility of meeting the landowner's interests and providing public benefits

We look forward to working with you on these issues as we strive to promote a sustainable forest resource at the national scale for current and future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marvin D. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Marvin D. Brown
President