



October 7, 2005

The Honorable Thad Cochran
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-2402
capitol fax: (202) 224-9450

Dear Chairman Cochran:

According to current estimates, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have caused a loss of over 19 billion board feet of timber over 5 million acres, mostly on private forestland, in Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana. Approximately 500,000 homes have been either damaged or destroyed.

In the wake of this enormous natural disaster, the worst in the nation's history, the Society of American Foresters (SAF) representing over 15,000 professional forest managers, researchers, and educators across the country applauds Congressional and Administration efforts to date to help communities in the affected states begin to recover from these hurricanes. In particular, we applaud the efforts of the over 5,000 men and women in the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, and state natural resource agencies who have aided in this massive recovery effort.

As the region begins to rebuild, SAF believes forest recovery and reforestation is critical to restoring communities and way of life in the nation's more important "wood basket." Forests play a crucial role in the economies and environments of these states. Recovering dead and dying trees and restoring forests can serve to bring economic and ecological stability to the devastated region.

Forest health is a major concern in the region following these hurricanes, with windthrown and damaged trees susceptible to insect and disease attacks, heavy fuel loads contributing to increased wildfire risk, and the increased potential spread of invasive species in disturbed forests. Landowners need assistance to help mitigate these threats and ultimately restore the health and resiliency of these forests.

In addition to short-term recovery needs, SAF is also concerned with the long-term implications of this catastrophe. Landowners in this region, many of whom own small, family woodlots, will need assistance for many years to help them restore and manage their forests and maintain an income stream to retain their land in forest cover. Because of the extreme losses these landowners have suffered, development pressures will be magnified unless incentives are provided to retain and manage forestland.

In light of these short-term and long-term threats, SAF offers the following suggestions to mitigate these threats and restore the communities and way of life in the region.

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- **Educational and Technical Assistance:** existing programs and authorities can be used to help forest landowners, however additional funding is needed to enable forestry professionals to assist these landowners.
- **Reforestation and Management Financial Assistance:** landowners, many of whom are minority and low-income families, need financial assistance to help pay for reforestation and the long-term management of their forests.
- **Forest Inventory:** funds should be made available to permit rapid inventory of forest conditions following the hurricanes in the affected states. This information is essential before sound, professional management planning can occur.
- **Tax Incentives:** provide incentives in the form of a greater deduction for timber casualty losses or by excluding timber gains from income.
- **Forest Industry Incentives:** in addition to the landowners, the forest products industry in the region suffered severe losses. To ensure prompt recovery and reforestation, incentives and assistance should be provided to enable the construction of “wet storage” facilities for salvaged timber and expanded utilization of forest biomass at forest products facilities. To enable greater biomass utilization, air quality emissions standards should be flexible enough to recognize both the air quality and energy security advantages of having low value wood fiber burned in fixed site power boilers, rather than consumed via uncontrolled wildfire. Additionally, forest products companies need assistance to help cover increased worker compensation costs and the costs of equipment needed to help in the recovery efforts. Small business loans should be provided help cover these costs.
- **Expedited Federal Process** – although only a small portion of the damaged forests is federal forestland, it is critical that federal forest managers have expedited processes for environmental review and public involvement to ensure they can complete recovery and reforestation in a timely manner. Recovery and reforestation across the landscape is critical to restoring forest health, wildlife habitat, and resilient forests in the region.

We are happy to provide more details on these recommendations upon your request.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Helms". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "H".

John A. Helms
President