

October 24, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
328 A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
328 A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

The Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition has come together specifically to increase opportunities for America's private forest landowners to provide economic and environmental benefits. We applaud the steps which have been taken in the Forestry Title.

Privately-owned forests comprise approximately two-thirds of our nation's total forested lands, the vast majority in the hands of families and individuals. Private forests have long been an important mainstay of our rural traditions and livelihood including jobs, recreational opportunities, protecting sources of drinking water, providing soil conservation, flood protection, groundwater recharge and serving as a source for fiber and potentially renewable energy.

The rates of forestland conversion and fragmentation are increasing rapidly; the U.S. Forest Service predicts that, under current trends, we lose 1.77 million acres of family-owned forests every year. Coupled with loss of markets, lack of planning and technical assistance, and lack of funds to manage forest resources, these trends spells trouble for our nation's family forests landowners. Without assistance, many of these landowners do not have the means to practice sustainable stewardship or maintain their lands as forests.

The 2007 Farm Bill can help address these concerns, and allow family forest landowners to manage their lands as forests. The draft Forestry Title begins to address some of the important issues which can help our private forest landowners manage and retain their forests. By establishing national priorities which states and regions can address through a coordinated and inclusive process, the scarce funds which are available may be better targeted to achieve more lasting results on the ground. Additionally, the Community Forests and Open Space Program will enable local governments to own and manage blocs of forested lands for the multiple uses to meet local needs.

These are positive steps toward the goal of increasing opportunities for private forest landowners. We greatly appreciate the receptivity and openness demonstrated by Committee Staff as the Forestry Title has been prepared. We look forward to continuing to work with you, the Committee and Conferees for passage of a Farm Bill which, to the extent possible, addresses needs of our rural economies and our environment.

Sincerely,

American Forest Foundation  
National Association of State Foresters  
Southern Group of State Foresters  
American Forest and Paper Association  
Hardwood Federation  
Society of American Foresters

Eastern Forest Alliance  
Northern Forest Partnership  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Wilderness Society  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
Wildlife Mississippi