

June 29, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Eugene Scalia  
Secretary of Labor  
200 Constitution Avenue  
Washington, DC 20210

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary of Homeland  
Security  
Washington, DC 20528

**Dear Secretaries Pompeo, Scalia and Wolf:**

On behalf of the undersigned national and state leaders in the forestry sector, we write to express our concern regarding unintended impacts of President Trump’s Proclamation suspending the entry of H-2B visa guest workers until December 31, 2020. The forestry sector relies heavily on seasonal forestry workers who legally enter the U.S. to perform important forestry work that renews our public and private forestlands through the tree planting, forest health improvement, and wildfire prevention and suppression.

Overall, the H-2B program differs from other visa categories included in the President’s Proclamation. These differences include a legislatively mandated cap that limits the number of H-2B workers that can enter the U.S. and the requirement that prior to hiring H-2B workers, employers must first advertise these jobs to Americans. The forestry sector typically has difficulty securing a sufficient seasonal citizen workforce, even during times of high unemployment, because the work requires travel to multiple states, often encountering rough terrain and inclement weather.

H-2B forestry workers play a major role in planting more than 1.6 billion trees on 2.6 million acres of public and private forestlands annually, including Federal forestlands. If this work is not completed, it could prevent forestland owners from meeting states’ regulatory requirements or compliance with forest certification programs for years to come. Guest workers who plant trees are also critical in meeting the President’s support of the World Economic Forum Trillion Trees Initiative. The proclamation will impede progress towards President Trump’s commitment to plant trees.

H-2B workers are important to the forestry economies of rural communities across America. This is supported by a recent General Accountability Office report which concluded, “counties with H-2B employers generally had lower unemployment rates and higher average weekly wages than counties that do not have any H-2B employers.”<sup>1</sup> Further, the H-2B program protects the jobs of the full-time, year-round American workers, who rely on the H-2B workers to sustain their jobs. Every H-2B worker supports 4.6 American jobs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United States, Congress, “H-2B VISAS: Additional Steps Needed to Meet Employers' Hiring Needs and Protect U.S. Workers.” *H-2B VISAS: Additional Steps Needed to Meet Employers' Hiring Needs and Protect U.S. Workers*, GAO-20-230, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2020, pp. 13–14.

<sup>2</sup> Zavodny, Madeline. *Immigration and American Jobs*. American Enterprise Institute, 15 Dec. 2011, [www.aei.org/research-products/working-paper/immigration-and-american-jobs/](http://www.aei.org/research-products/working-paper/immigration-and-american-jobs/).

Forest Resources Association

1901 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 303, Washington, DC 20006

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The work performed by H-2B forestry workers is critical to maintaining a viable forest products industry in America, especially as we face the daunting task of full economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. H-2B forestry workers play a vital role in the wood supply chain and are essential to the near and long-term economic strength of the forest products industry in the U.S.

As you work together to establish standards defining categories of guest workers covered by section 3(b)(iv) of the proclamation, we urge you to recognize the importance of H-2B forestry workers to the forestry sector and to the economic recovery and continued economic growth of our nation.

Sincerely,



Deb Hawkinson  
FRA President  
dhawkinson@forestresources.org

Alabama Forestry Association  
American Forest Resource Council  
Arkansas Forestry Association  
Arkansas Timber Producers Association  
Associated Logging Contractors – Idaho  
Black Hills Forest Resource Association  
Empire State Forest Products Association  
Federal Forest Resource Coalition  
Florida Forestry Association  
Forest Landowners Association  
Forest Resources Association  
Forestry Association of South Carolina  
Georgia Forestry Association  
Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association  
Hawai'i Forest Industry Association  
Intermountain Forest Association  
Kentucky Forest Industries Association  
Louisiana Forestry Association  
Maine Forest Products Council  
Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association  
Michigan Association of Timbermen  
Michigan Forest Products Council  
Minnesota Forest Industries

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Minnesota Timber Producers Association  
Mississippi Forestry Association  
National Alliance of Forest Owners  
National Association of State Foresters  
National Woodland Owners Association  
North Carolina Forestry Association  
Northeastern Loggers Association  
Ohio Forestry Association, Inc.  
Oregon Forest & Industries Council  
Pennsylvania Forest Products Association  
Pennsylvania Forestry Association  
Railway Tie Association  
South Carolina Timber Producers Association  
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association, Inc.  
Southern Loggers Cooperative  
Tennessee Forestry Association  
Texas Forestry Association  
Virginia Forestry Association  
Washington Forest Protection Association  
Western Wood Preservers Institute  
West Virginia Forestry Association

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