

January 31, 2012

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas,

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 writing to you to share our views on the reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

We would like to applaud the Agriculture Committees' in both the House and Senate for their bipartisan, bicameral work to develop recommendations for the "Super Committee" deficit reduction package. Even though the efforts of the Super Committee were not successful, your leadership has helped assure that the agriculture and forest community is well positioned to continue engagement in deficit reduction discussions. We know that budget cuts are inevitable as Congress works to reduce the federal deficit, and we know the Agriculture Committees will continue to work to ensure that those cuts affecting agriculture and forestry are proportionate and fair relative to other sectors of the economy. We stand ready to assist in any way possible to pursue a course that will maintain private forest conservation across the U.S.

We also greatly appreciate the Committees' work on important policy changes that enable better forest conservation. We are aware that the Agriculture Committees' discussions in the deficit reduction process resulted in agreement on policy changes to the Farm Bill. Our understanding is that many of these policy changes will give forest owners access to additional conservation tools and are consistent with most of our key priorities including:

- Strong provisions for forests in Conservation Programs;
- Strengthened forestry outreach, education, research, and inventory programs;
- Tools to Combat forest-related invasive species; and
- Improved forest market opportunities.

While we have yet to see the specific details of these proposals, preventing us from fully endorsing them, we applaud these efforts. We hope the Agriculture Committees' retain these important policy proposals that address our forest conservation priorities and make any further improvements necessary.

The nation's private forests, which make up more than two-thirds of all U.S. forestland and supply Americans with clean water and clean air, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, clean, renewable and sustainable energy, and forest products, are a key component of America's rural landscapes. Private forests are critical to maintaining good paying rural jobs—every 1,000 acres of privately owned forests supports 8 rural jobs. With the economic downturn, the forest industry has lost over 294,000 jobs, so maintaining healthy, productive forests is essential to stemming this job loss.

There is no guarantee that private forests will remain healthy or maintained as a significant and important land use. The Forest Action Plans completed in each state indicate there are 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 land use changes that have the potential to breakup and permanently convert as many as 57 million private forest acres by 2030. Invasive species, insects, and diseases currently threaten roughly 58 million acres of forests and wildfires threaten as many as 400 million acres.

Farm Bill programs give forestland owners the tools they need to manage healthy and sustainable forests, and keep their forests as forests amidst growing threats and challenges.

As this process unfolds, we look forward to working with you to ensure the new Farm Bill addresses these issues. Your work in the lead up to the Super Committee process was clearly a step in the right direction, and we are more than willing to provide additional input on what works best for forest owners to help conserve and improve the management of the nation's privately-owned forests.

Thank you again for your leadership.

Sincerely,

American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Rivers
Appalachian Mountain Club
Arkansas Forestry Association
Association for Temperate Agroforestry
Biomass Thermal Energy Council
California Forestry Association
CarbonVerde, LLC
Conservation Northwest
Defenders of Wildlife
Empire State Forest Products Association
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Forest Capital Partners
Forest Guild
Forest Resources Association
Great Lakes Forest Alliance
Georgia Forestry Association
Hardwood Federation
Indiana Forestry and Woodland Owners Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Land Trust Alliance
Louisiana Forestry Association
Michigan Forest Association
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 State Foresters
National Association of University Forest Resources Programs
National Network of Forest Practitioners
National Woodland Owners Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North Carolina Forestry Association
Northern Forest Center
Ohio Forestry Association, Inc.
Oregon Small Woodlands Association
Pacific Forest Trust
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Plum Creek Timber Company
Quail Unlimited
Quality Deer Management Association
Ruffed Grouse Society
Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine
Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests
Society of American Foresters
South Carolina Forestry Association
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Sustainable Northwest
Tennessee Forestry Association
Texas Forestry Association
The Lyme Timber Company
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
Vermont Woodlands Association
Virginia Forestry Association
Washington Farm Forestry Association
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Weyerhaeuser
Wildlife Mississippi