

Testimony of Larry Jarrett
Before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
October 7, 2005

I would like to thank the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health for the opportunity to testify at this hearing. My name is Larry Jarrett. I am a forest landowner from the State of Mississippi and I am a past President of the Mississippi Forestry Association.

I am currently serving as Chair of The Natural Resources Initiative of Mississippi. The Natural Resources Initiative is a volunteer organization including representatives from Federal and State agencies, economic development officials, non-profit organizations, and private landowners. Our efforts serve to protect and sustain our natural resources while promoting business development opportunities. Some of our recent initiatives include community based sustainable growth projects, recent implementation of the Forest Legacy Program for Mississippi and statewide nature based tourism efforts.

I have also been appointed by Governor Haley Barbour to serve on the Mississippi Nature Tourism Task force.

According to the Revitalization Institute, restorative development is emerging as the greatest new growth frontier. The institute, based in Alexandria, VA is a non-profit international alliance for community renewal & natural resource restoration. Restorative development should include tourism, recreation and other community benefits, which are tied to the protection of wildlife, watershed, scenic and other values.

The economy of Mississippi and the South is changing and, in the new economy that is emerging, rural communities in particular are increasingly hard-pressed to provide jobs. Tourism dollars are increasingly important to the health of Mississippi's economy and for the Southeastern United States.

According to the World Tourism Association, the fastest growing segment of the tourism market is nature-based tourism, with most tourists expressing an interest in natural, historic and cultural attractions. Mississippi's abundant, diverse, and beautiful natural resources and unique cultural and historical locations are great potential for the development of a flourishing nature tourism business.

Help is needed to restore Nature Tourism for areas specifically affected by Katrina and other natural disasters.

The programs should re-assess and restore existing cooperative nature based tourism efforts of the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Corps of Engineers, Natural Resource Conservation Service and other federal lands including Mississippi's governmental agencies.

According to the 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation for Mississippi, one million U.S. citizens, spent an estimated total of \$974 million in Mississippi alone on wildlife-associated recreation.,

The impact of Tourism in Mississippi as a whole brings in billions of dollars. The Division of Tourism within the Mississippi Development Authority estimates in 2002, tourism expenditures were \$3.1 billion for the year. With numbers of manufacturing businesses outsourcing to other countries, tourism dollars are increasingly important to the health of Mississippi's economy, especially along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

To aid the growth in this sector, we request that Congress restore funding for USDA Forest Service Rural Community Assistance programs, USDA Forest Service Economic Action Program (EAP) and expand the USFS Recreation and Heritage Resources Programs. Add line item request for specifically for Mississippi in the amount of \$5 million. A regional plan that involves resources such as parks, rivers, and forest land that encourages smart growth and sustainable development is needed.

Help is also needed to restore Nature Tourism for areas specifically affected by Katrina and other natural disasters. These programs should re-assess and restore existing cooperative nature based tourism efforts of the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Corps of Engineers, Natural Resource Conservation Service and other federal lands including Mississippi's governmental agencies.

We in Mississippi recognize that our state's National Forests, which make for seven percent of our forestland, is a centerpiece to this more ecologically sustainable economy. Mississippi and the rural South has historically had National Forests and other public lands managed for high volume logging to feed an economy that emphasized extraction of raw materials that often brought a low return. This has affected the character of the land: high density pine plantations, large road volumes that

were expensive and difficult to maintain, and a regime of short rotation clear cutting.

With numbers of manufacturing businesses; particularly in the pulp, paper and wood products industries either moving off-shore or outsourcing raw materials, , emphasis on pulp wood production in the southeastern US does not necessarily bring a high economic return. Rather, there is now a spirit of conservation mixed with the understanding that there are values besides short-term production that can bring “value added” benefits from alternative forest products, recreation, tourism and high value wood products . . (briefly describe what this entails)

A report by The US Forest Service, “The Southern Forest Resource Assessment”, tells the story: Southerners value public lands most highly for clean air, scenic beauty, and cultural heritage over wood products. Southerners are making the connection that when private lands are the source of wood products rather than public lands, the private sector benefits.

The Forest Service is guided by laws and procedures in NEPA National Environmental Protection Act and the agency manual, that if followed in a spirit of protecting our conservation heritage, “protects the land and serves the people”. Many forests in other parts of the country manage for tourism, watershed protection, biodiversity, and sportsman recreation as the highest priorities, and we would like to see this happen in our region. Mississippi, for example, will have a new forest plan that we hope protects our conservation heritage, including watershed, hunting, wilderness, and camping recreation values. Sound management based on science and guided by protecting our natural resources Such management will make our region the attraction for visitors and new inhabitants that it deserves to be.

Restoring our region’s ecosystems can happen both by normal agency planning , following environmental laws and regulations, even and during unexpected times. A good example of the latter was the Conecuh National Forest in Alabama’s response to hurricane Ivan last year. Following a standard process of an Environmental Assessment, the Conecuh district turned a disaster into an opportunity to restore altered landscapes back to their native ecosystem. Salvage took place efficiently, environmental safeguards were observed, controversy was minimized (is this true??) and valuable ecosystem restoration took place, all under normal NEPA procedures. Thus, the procedures management guidance for Katrina and future disasters have a good precedent in standard Forest Service practices that following existing laws and regulations that can be used to anticipate other natural events.

In a recent discussion on Katrina response during an event at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard titled “Emergency Preparedness: Katrina and New Orleans and Beyond,” researchers Arnold Howitt and Herman Leonard noted that the Forest Service’s Incident Management System was designed to handle emergencies and natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

The system has been developed over the last 35 years to merge firefighting units from across the country to battle fires in the West. The system’s success also prompted the assignment of the Forest Service to the recovery effort after space shuttle Columbia broke up re-entering the atmosphere in 2003.

The National Incident Management System, mandated by the US Congress in the Homeland Security Act is being implemented by all federal response agencies, and is based on the US Forest Service system model. The US Forest Service should be commended on their response and recovery efforts and their collaboration with other agencies.

We encourage the agency to continue following well designed plans like these rather than implement unproven actions that would suspend important environmental standards.

Economic assistance for Katrina is important. We also wish to see Congress and the Forest Service consider long-term planning for Southern forests, both public and private, that lives up to the spirit of our most important environmental laws, and plans thoughtful response to crises to bring a broad-based benefit that that sustains and develops the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this very important matter.