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COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE on FORESTS and FOREST HEALTH

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WISDOM

I was somewhat intimidated by the Disclosure Requirement statement, in particular the professional qualifications section, as I do not have any degrees nor any "paying" job experience directly related to forestry. I have, however, attended a number of University of Georgia forestry seminars, participated in several forestry organizations, and managed twenty-four hundred acres of family forest land. I had the privilege of representing forest landowners across the country at President Clinton's White House Conference on Climate in 1994. I believe that wisdom is the quality most lacking in today's governmental decisions as they pertain to the individual landowner. How did I arrive at this conclusion? I looked up the definition of the word wisdom in the dictionary. It read, "knowledge gained through experience". Now I knew why I felt qualified, while government, in general, is not. The key word is experience.

I am here today representing Forest Landowners Association, which represents private landowners across seventeen southern and eastern states. We are now attracting members from Maine to Oregon. There are ten million private forest landowners across the nation, and I can tell you three facts about all of them: (1) They love their land and have a personal attachment to it. (2) They want what's best for their land and the vast majority knows what that is. (3) They want it to stay in the family. But after these facts that bind us together, we are all different. We deal with different species, different soils, different climates, different planting methods, different wildlife, different natural disasters, different products, and different markets and challenges.

All landowners face many challenges, both nature made and manmade. These include drought, too much rain, beadle and other infestations, tornados and hurricanes, fire, trespass, and theft. But I believe the biggest challenge we face today is government – taxes, legislation, regulation – and attacks by environmentalist groups. Sometimes these are in tandem as a result of pressure and lawsuits by environmental groups. No collective group is more pro-environment than the landowner. Yet no group has been more vilified by the environmental activists and perhaps even attacked by government entities. But who has the wisdom to know what is best for the private forestland? Let's return to the definition of wisdom – knowledge through experience – and the landowner has the experience! Environmentalists base their demands on bogus ideas that have no basis in science or fact but that appeal to fear and emotion. Allow me to give you a living, breathing example, with whom I am personally familiar. Her name is Janeese Ray and she grew up in a small South Georgia town, not far from where I reside. Her parents were poor, uneducated, and extreme fundamentalists in their thinking and parenting. According to Janeese, herself, this produced an individual who rebelled against society's rules and became a hippie, an unwed mother, and an atheist. In fairness, she did receive a form of higher education in Montana. She has now set herself up as an environmental and forestland authority, authoring books on the subject and appearing at various functions. While the books have received acclaim in literary circles, two statements will reveal the extent of her wisdom. She appeared at the local meeting of the federal survey committee on forests and forest health in the Southeast to request that no land that had any trees other than long leaf pine be considered a forest for the survey. She followed this outrageous statement by stating in her book that her proudest accomplishment is lobbying the Nature Conservancy to purchase 3,000 acres of wetlands covered entirely with longleaf pine. For those of you not familiar with Georgia or long leaf pine, the fact is that long leaf does not grow in wet areas. It requires a sandy, better drained soil. She may have saved wetlands or possibly

longleaf pine but not both in the same location. So much for wisdom!

And now for governmental matters that have affected the forest landowner quite negatively – the top three that come to mind are the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the enactment of the Estate Tax. Although the original reasons for these bills were well intentioned, the actual purpose and administration of these bills has gone far astray. They have been used to prevent proper use and management of private forestland, intrude upon the privacy of individuals, and to prevent the actual accomplishment of the original goals. When authorities in government try to determine and enforce the rules of management for forest landowners, they assume that one size fits all and that their knowledge is superior to that of the landowner. When the Endangered Species Act punishes a landowner and removes his right of management because he has provided habitat for wildlife, it doesn't make sense. When TMDL regulations tell a landowner that he will no longer be allowed to make decisions to protect and use his forest, but that those decisions will be made by faceless entities in Washington, and that everyone from Oregon to Florida will be required to do the same thing, it does not make sense. And when the estate tax forces the cutting of trees, discourages tree planting and protection of the environment, and causes fragmentation of the land, it doesn't make sense.

As for forestry bills that have recently been, or presently are, under consideration, most of these I would ask you not to fund. Two of the bills are similar but purport to have different altruistic goals and use different sums of money. These are the Conservation and Reinvestment Act and the Get Outdoors Act (H.R. 4100). Both furnish huge amounts of taxpayers' money to purchase more government land. The H.R. 1400 calls for fifty-six billion in a guaranteed trust fund so that Appropriations has no control. The principal purpose of this staggering amount is to purchase more land that will be removed from the local tax rolls. CARE is similar in purpose but involves less money. The CARE bill, or Charitable Giving Act, contains a provision that will allow a seller a 25% reduction in their capital gains if he sells to a government, an environmental group, or other non-profit group. This puts the individual buyer at a distinct disadvantage and removes more land from the tax rolls. The National Network of Landowners has requested funding through the Forest Service. This will have the effect of federal funds being used to lobby the Federal Government. The main plea that I would make to you on these bills is that there are so many more productive uses for these funds for the Forest Service that would aid both public lands, the private landowner, and ultimately the environment. I heard Mark Rey, the Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment, speak about the Forest Service when I was in Washington in November. Their goals overlap many of those of the individual forest owner, but most of their money goes toward fighting forest fires so they are unable to do fire suppression or management or landowner programs. In other words, the government does not have the resources to properly manage the lands that they already have – don't buy more. These funds would be much better spent on forest management, research grants for more and better wood products as well as improved species, the State Forestry Commissions to aid landowners, and forestry extension programs to educate the landowner.

In conclusion and on behalf of the private forest landowner, I would ask you not to legislate or regulate, but to educate. Does it pass the test of fairness and common sense? And please remember wisdom – on the ground experience wins every time. Please search for the truth. I believe that is what you are doing here today, and I thank you.