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To: jgreis@fs.fed.us, dwear@fs.fed.us
cc:
Subject: Comment on SFRA.

01/29/02 06:13 PM

Southern Forest Resource Assessment
USDA Forest Service
1720 Peachtree Rd. NW
Atlanta, GA 30309

Dear Mr. Greis and Mr. Wear,

Thank you for providing the public with an opportunity to comment on the draft of the Southern Forest Resource Assessment (SFRA). In the past eight years, I have become familiar with the state of our forests in Tennessee. In 1987, I represented the Sierra Club on the Tennessee Governor's Sustainable Forest Management Panel. Besides learning about the forestry and timber production matters through environmental group and state government meeting venues, as a professor of chemistry at Tennessee Technological University I am priveleged to hear first-hand reports from students whose families live in the areas presently being clear cut.

I am writing to urge you to emphasize in your final report the threat posed by the continued expansion of industrial forestry in the Southeast. The SFRA documents that while 30 million acres of forest will be lost to sprawl through 2040, at least 250 million acres of forests will be heavily logged by big timber companies to produce products such as paper. Removals of the South's hardwood forests will exceed growth by 2025. In addition, approximately one in every four acres of the South's "forest" will be a single-species pine plantation by 2040.

With these observations, it is puzzling that the conclusion drawn in SFRA is that sprawl is the largest threat to our forests. Conversion of a hardwood forest to pine is destruction of that forest, destruction not only in a literal sense, but in terms of inherent economic value, in terms of ecological value, and in terms of value in our quality of life. If more than 60 million acres of our forest will be destroyed through pine conversion, that would be over twice the amount of forest lost to sprawl. Pine conversion is clearly a much larger problem than sprawl. I would hope that the draft will accurately address the problem of systematic destruction of our native forest to make room for low value pine plantations.

The report should also emphasize that the loss of our forests is largely the result of our egregious waste of paper. Our nation has a per capita consumption of paper and paperboard which is over seven times the world average. This level of wasteful consumption is a primary cause of the loss of our forests, and the need for greatly reducing our paper usage should certainly be emphasized in any report discussing that loss.

Apart from the loss of high value, mature hardwoods and the accompanying finished wood product industry, pine conversion and sprawl are likely to severely impact the tourist industry in Eastern and Central Tennessee and other areas still possessing native forests. The loss of tourist revenue from forest destruction should be included in your projected economic impact model.

The use of chemicals in pine plantations will more than double. SFRA

discounts the danger of the spraying being done in the destruction of our forests, but that discounting must be the result of ignorance. Because there has been very little monitoring of that contamination, little is known about the contamination of our waters by spraying in timber production operations. People here on the plateau are well convinced of the damage being done by intense use of herbicides and pesticides. They know all too well the high incidence of cancer and birth defects seen in the pine production areas. They are well aware also of the damage the spraying causes to areas adjacent to the targetted spray areas, to the gardens, orchards and yards of individual landowners unfortunate enough to live near the plantation areas. They also see the denuding of vegetation around the springs receiving water contaminated by the spraying. I am told that the same type of harm has accompanied timber production in southern Arkansas. Our ignorance and reluctance to obtain the necessary data to confirm alleged harm should not lead to our making false statements concerning the societal and ecological impacts of the heavy chemical use necessitated in monoculture.

I would like to see this report mark the beginning of a new era in Forest Service service to our country. I would like to see it honestly assess the ecological and societal impacts of the present ravaging of our forests. I would like USDA to present to the public a model of commercial forestry which optimizes the benefits of our forests to our society, including economic, ecological, and quality of life benefits. A model which would serve the public would also suggest means of changing our harvesting program to a sustainable one, through which our economy could continue to benefit by harvest of mature hardwoods in coming years.

I am not so familiar with the rest of the southeast as you are, but what we are seeing here on the Cumberland Plateau is the rapid destruction of our forests, a rapid decline in our solid wood industry, heavy pollution of our waters by spraying of toxic materials, clearcut induced flooding following every significant rainstorm, a significant decline in bird counts, and landscape changed from the most beautiful in the eastern United States to a gut-wrenching nightmare. Rosy as the conclusions of your draft report may be concerning the state of forestry in the Southeast, they won't convince anyone living here that the situation is good.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

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