

Working Lands Key to Affordable Energy and Climate Bill, Coalition Tells Lawmakers

Landowners, Conservationists and Market Leaders Call for Investment in U.S. Forests, Farms and Ranch Lands

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 15, 2010) – As Senators John Kerry, Lindsey Graham and Joe Lieberman finalize the text of their energy and climate legislation, a diverse national coalition is calling on lawmakers to ensure the bill includes allocations for productive U.S. forests, farms and ranch lands.

Such investment will conserve the vast landscapes that stabilize the climate while providing food, drinking water, wildlife habitat, renewable energy and sustainable jobs. It will also ensure an affordable and effective bill, says coalition leader Laurie Wayburn, president and co-CEO of the [Pacific Forest Trust](#).

America's forests, farms and ranch lands now offset nearly 20 percent of all domestic greenhouse gas pollution annually. Yet more than 2.2 million acres of natural and working lands are lost to development each year—an area greater than the state of Delaware. That land conversion process emits vast amounts of greenhouse gas pollution into the atmosphere. At the same time, it degrades or destroys the land's ability to safely absorb and store emissions in the future.

"With the right type of investment, we can start conserving our working landscape while reducing the cost of implementing the energy and climate bill," Wayburn said. "But to do that, we need to sustain the people and communities that depend on the land for their livelihoods. That's why we're urging the Senate to allocate \$5 billion annually for working lands conservation in the bill."

The [coalition](#) for working lands is comprised of more than 70 large and small U.S. landowners, mill owners, conservation groups and market leaders across the United States.

Coalition members are urging the climate and energy bill's authors to fund the protection of America's working forests, farms and ranch lands through permanent conservation easements and incentives for sustainable land management.

Privately-owned U.S. forests and other working lands increasingly are threatened by economic forces that drive their owners to sell the land for conversion to other uses. Most woodlands owned by families will be sold and developed over the next 50 years, according to recent USDA projections. In that scenario, America's iconic, forested landscapes will look more like urban suburbs, their heritage and economic contributions lost.

"This originally was a lumber-based community," recalls Gary Hendrix, spokesman for a seventh-generation [forest and mill owning family](#) in Shasta County, Calif. "Originally there were 56 sawmills here – now there are three. We've had to lay people off. Rural communities like ours are really hurting."

"We're trying to stay in these communities but it's really tough out there. Quite frankly we're losing money," agreed Wade Mosby, senior vice president of [The Collins Companies](#), one of the largest land and mill owners in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. "If we were just intent on dollars and cents we would have shut some of these facilities down. But we're trying to keep the core employment going to maintain some of these rural communities."



In addition to lost climate benefits, the conversion of productive, privately owned forests threatens the forest-related industries that funnel more than \$100 billion dollars into the U.S. economy. Conserving the land infrastructure that supports this vital sector has the added benefit of sustaining and creating new jobs, Wayburn added.

"The data is clear. Investment in forest conservation and stewardship can be a powerful stimulus for economic recovery and jobs," Wayburn said, citing a 2007 study by the University of Massachusetts' PERI Institute that found investment in forest conservation and restoration yields the most jobs per dollar invested of any industry studied - including renewables and conventional energy sources like oil and nuclear.

To read the full text of the Coalition's letter to Senators Kerry, Graham and Lieberman, visit:
<http://www.pacificforest.org/policy/coalitionletter.html>.

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