

## Christian Declarations on Forest Conservation

### California United Methodists Call for End of Commercial Logging on National Forests and in Old Growth Forests

WHEREAS, Psalm 24:1 proclaimed “*the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and all that dwell in it...*”

WHEREAS, in Genesis 1:12 God proclaimed the goodness of trees and other plant life,...

WHEREAS, we don’t need to log national forests for our timber supply, given... timber from national forests... comprises only 3.9% of this nation’s total annual wood consumption....

WHEREAS, the national forest timber sales operated at a net loss to taxpayers of at least in \$1.2 billion in fiscal 1997....

WHEREAS, if we ended the timber sales program on national forests and redirected the logging subsidy, we could provide over \$25,000 for each public timber worker for retraining... and... have over \$200 million left over to reduce the federal deficit....

WHEREAS, our commitment... to protect... ancient forests on public and private land is [an] ...important symbol for us to make so that other nations might be more willing to follow suit,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we call for the immediate cessation of commercial logging on all public lands including our National Forests;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we call for the redirection of all timber industry taxpayer subsidies into worker retraining in forest restoration jobs that lead to healthy rural... communities;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that local congregations, the California Pacific Annual Conference, and the General Conference of the United Methodist Church urge our lawmakers to enact legislation to end commercial logging in our National Forests, on public lands, and in ancient and old growth forests.

### National Episcopalian Church Declaration on Forest Conservation

Unanimously passed, Episcopal Environmental Network

Therefore, we call for the immediate cessation of logging of all ancient and old growth forests;

And Therefore, we call for the immediate cessation of commercial logging on all public lands;

And Therefore, we call for the redirection of all timber industry taxpayer subsidies into worker retraining in forest restoration jobs that lead to healthy rural economies and communities....

### NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

#### National Policy Statement on Forest Ecosystems

(The National Council of Churches  
represents 34 Christian denominations)

WE AFFIRM that Scriptures declares, “*The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it.*” (Psalm 24:1) AND

WE AFFIRM that “*the LORD has made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to eye and good for food*” (Gen. 2:9), AND

WE AFFIRM that God treated and intended that "*all the trees of the forest will sing for joy,*" (Psalm 96:13) AND...  
WHEREAS forest ecosystems play a crucial role in mitigating the increasing levels of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, AND...

WHEREAS the purposes of National Forests to provide quality water supplies and recreation... have been largely overlooked... in favor of maximizing commercial timber harvest, AND

WHEREAS the livelihoods of people in certain communities have historically depended on government subsidized logging, AND

WHEREAS we... affirm simple living, ... frugality, and ...good stewardship of God's provision in creation; and affirm that our biblical responsibility to love our neighbors... extends not only to neighbors living today, but to our neighbors throughout time...

WE ENCOURAGE All Christians to support and advocate the conservation of remaining forest ecosystems as natural communities, created by and pleasing to God, rather than using forest ecosystems solely for their potential as economic capital and to prayerfully evaluate and diminish their personal consumption of... forest products, such as using recycled paper and recycled wood.

WE EXTEND A CHRISTIAN CALL FOR

(1) the immediate end to all cutting of ancient and old growth forests, and the phase-out of international trade in old growth lumber... and related products, (2) a phase-out of commercial logging on public land, (3) the redirection of taxpayer subsidies into forest restoration and... jobs, and (4) prayer and a search for wisdom by churches on the spiritual value of forests.

## **Christian Environmental Council**

(Evangelical Christian leaders)

Resolution on Forest Ecosystems (abridged)

October 4th, 1998, Phoenix, Arizona

WE AFFIRM that Scripture declares, "*The earth is the LORD's and everything in it,*" (Psalm 24:1), AND...

WHEREAS old growth forests are a declining remnant of the earth as God created it, AND...

WHEREAS large and integrated forest ecosystems provide a critical habitat for many of God's threatened and endangered species, AND

WE ENCOURAGE all Christians to support and advocate the conservation of remaining forest ecosystems as natural communities, created by and pleasing to God, rather than using forest ecosystems solely for their potential as economic capital.

THEREFORE, let it be resolved that we encourage, support, and advocate the end of all old-growth logging of God's forest ecosystems... to ensure protection of this ancient remnant of God's creation.

THEREFORE, let it be further resolved that we encourage, support, and advocate the end of all commercial logging on U.S. National Forests, as carried out under the U.S. Forest Service's timber commodity program and the redirection... of monies to benefit communities dependent on timber harvesting and to fund forest restoration.

## **The Rev. Billy Graham**

Evangelical Christian

*It is not right for us to destroy the world God has given us.... We Christians have a responsibility to take the lead in caring for the earth.*

## **Patriarch Bartholomew II**

Eastern Orthodox Churches

*Care of the environment constitutes a most urgent issue for each and every human person.... From this, we conclude that ... to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For humans to cause species to become extinct, to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of the Earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the forests, or destroying wetlands — these are sins. To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin.*

## **Pope John Paul II**

Roman Catholic Church

*One must support and promote “an ecological conversion” to protect the environment and make the earth a place where all life is valued and can grow in harmony... (Homily, January 17, 2001, Vatican City)*

*One cannot use with impunity the animals, plants or the natural elements as one wishes, according to one's economic needs. ...Protecting the world's forests is each [person's] individual responsibility... The ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the concern of everyone....*

## **Forest Resolutions by other religious denominations and organizations:**

Coalition on Religion in Appalachia (CORA)  
Charleston, West Virginia

Christians Caring for Creation  
Pasadena, California

United Church of Christ  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation  
Santa Rosa, California

plus many other declarations pending

“The growing possibility of our destroying ourselves and the world with our own neglect and excess is tragic and very real.”

Billy Graham, *Approaching Hoofbeats*, 1983.

Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina endorses  
Ending of Commercial Logging in the U.S. National Forests

November 15, 1999

contacts:

The Rev. Brian Cole, Sabbath Project (828) 669-8366

The Rev. David Rose (828) 765-4331

Bill Deveraux, WNC Diocesan Environmental Concerns Committee (828) 295-3603

On November 13th, 1999, the 78th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina endorsed a resolution to “encourage, support and advocate the end of all commercial logging on the U.S. National Forests.” The Convention also endorsed three other environmental resolutions requesting increased awareness and positive steps to ensure clean air and water and to make future Conventions more ecologically sound.

The resolution in support of ending commercial logging in the U.S. National Forests was submitted by The Revs. David Rose and Richard DeMott, both Episcopal clergy in the Western North Carolina diocese. The resolution also asked that monies currently used to support the U.S. Forest Service’s timber commodity program be redirected “to benefit communities dependent on timber harvesting and to fund forest restoration.”

## **Resolution on Forest Ecosystems**

Resolved, that the 78th Convention of the Diocese of Western North Carolina encourage all Christians to support and advocate the conservation of the remaining forest ecosystems as natural communities, created by and pleasing to God, rather than using forest ecosystems solely for their potential as economic capital.

Be it further resolved that we encourage, support, and advocate the end of all old-growth logging of God’s ecosystems in the United States to ensure protection of this ancient remnant of God’s creation.

Be it further resolved that we encourage, support and advocate the end of all commercial logging on the U.S. National Forests, as carried out under the U.S. Forest Service’s timber commodity program and the redirection or appropriation of monies to benefit communities dependent on timber harvesting and to fund forest restoration.

Rationale:

WE AFFIRM that Scripture declares, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it,” (Psalm 24:1) AND

WE AFFIRM that “the Lord God had made all kinds of trees to grow out of the ground -- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good food,” (Genesis 2:9) AND

WE AFFIRM that God created and intended that “all the trees of the forest will sing for joy” (Psalm 96:13) AND “all the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12).

FURTHERMORE, we affirm that forest ecosystems are an integral component of God’s good creation, wholly having intrinsic value because they were created by and for Jesus Christ, and have been reconciled through Him (Colossians 1:15-20, Ephesians 4:6).

WHEREAS old growth forest ecosystems are a declining remnant of the earth as God created it, AND

WHEREAS large and integrated forest ecosystems provide a critical habitat for many of God's threatened and endangered species, AND

WHEREAS forest ecosystems play an ecologically crucial role in mitigating the increasing levels of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, AND

WHEREAS the purpose of the National Forests to provide quality water supplies and recreation have been largely overlooked in recent years in favor of maximizing commercial timber harvest, AND

WHEREAS the livelihoods of people in certain communities have historically depended on government subsidized logging, AND

WHEREAS we as Christians affirm simple living, the virtue of frugality, and living as global stewards of God's provision in creation; and affirm that our biblical responsibility to love our neighbors as ourselves extends not only to our neighbors living today, but to our neighbors throughout time, because Christ's redemption extends throughout time (Matthew 22:39, Psalm 15:3, Proverbs 13:22, and Romans 8:21).

## Open Letter to President Bush from America's Religious Leaders

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

§1. As clergy and religious leaders from across America, we submit to you this open letter about the importance of forest conservation. In particular we call your attention to the moral, ethical and spiritual reasons for protecting America's last wild forests from destructive road building and for ending commercial logging on the national forests.

§2. Over the past several years, numerous religious organizations have issued declarations on forest conservation. This is because issues of forest conservation at their core are also religious issues. They are religious issues because God commands care of creation and because trees anchor the life support system of the planet. For Christians and Jews alike the biblical story of human interaction with the world begins with God's commands regarding two trees. The way those first people responded reflected their relationship to their Creator and their fidelity to the commands given to them.

§3. Judaism and Christianity teach that we share a sacred obligation to God and future generations to protect and safeguard the biological systems that sustain humanity and the vitality of the planet. As a people we have been given dominion over Earth and commanded to steward its air, land and water. We are obliged to care for creation and ensure the fruitfulness and integrity of the biological processes that are essential for the life of the planet. These biblical commands provide a vision for humanity to dwell in harmony with God and the land. It is our human task

to “dress and keep” creation and function in harmony with this ancient vision.

§4. The way we interact with forests and all of God’s creation is thus informed by religious teaching. Yet this vision of human purpose has faded in our nation’s public policy. Not only are the great forests of the world disappearing, in our own country, barely 4% of America’s original great forest remains.

§5. The irony of this predicament is that the forests that are being lost to commercial logging are more valuable if left standing than when cut for lumber or pulp. Studies show that forest conservation brings important economic and social values. A 1995 U.S. Forest Service report found that there are many more rural jobs and more rural income when the forests are preserved. Opinion polls reflect that 70% of Americans would save the national forests from commercial logging. The clear fact is the forests have spiritual, biological and social values far in excess of their dollar or commodity values.

§6. To people of faith, forests are places of inspiration and beauty. They witness to the power and majesty of God. Forests also reflect a unique handiwork of the Creator that reconnects us to the wonder and mystery of creation. To people of science, forests are “the lungs of the planet” and repositories of medicines and undiscovered cures for disease. Intact forest systems provide an array of natural services: They provide clean air and clean water. They metabolize carbon dioxide, restraining global climate change, releasing oxygen and sequestering carbon dioxide. They inhibit catastrophic fires. They serve social stability by regulating stream flows, transpiring moisture to enhance rainfall and restraining hillsides from erosion. They offer habitat for animal and plant species, many of them endangered. They afford recreation by providing places for hunting and fishing, hiking and camping, and many forms of outdoor repast and respite from the hurried and harried pace of society.

§7. The severe wildfires that our country recently experienced should call attention to the failures of past forest policies. The combination of excessive fuel loads caused by suppressing small fires, the flammable “slash” debris left by logging, the drying of the forests caused by removal of the largest trees – which are also the most fire resistant, coupled with record drought in many parts of the nation, have resulted in predictably higher levels of catastrophic fire damage. Because commercial logging degraded and dried the national forests, there can be no sounder policy than to end the roadbuilding and logging that have bequeathed us this unnecessary fire hazard and to institute a policy of ending commercial logging on the national forests.

§8. Numerous religious organizations have studied the array of forest concerns and issued formal statements. Roman Catholic Franciscans, Episcopalians, Evangelical Christians, Jewish organizations, the United Methodist Church and many others have national or regional declarations calling for an end to commercial logging on the national forests.

§9. These statements are emerging because forest issues are issues of value. Former U.S. Forest Service Chief Max Peterson recently related that after all the studies are done, “*the problems facing our forests are not technical or scientific questions, they are value questions.*” Because forest questions at heart are questions of values and principles, the voice of religion has a responsibility to address this issue.

§10. Mr President, on behalf of the churches and synagogues of America, we appeal to your religious sensitivity and particularly to your campaign promise that you would apply religious principle to the policies of your administration. Please listen to the voice of the religious leaders who are calling for an end to commercial logging on the national forests. Please listen to the voice of science, which has called for this same end. Please listen to the majority of Americans, 70% of whom wish to end commercial logging on the national forests. Listen to us all as we ask you to stand up for religion, morality, right reason, unbiased science and a large majority of the American people. Stop the commercial logging of our national forests. Thank you.

Signed

Thousands of religious leaders and clergy