March 18, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Mr. Michael Boots, Acting Chairman
White House Council on Environmental Quality
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chairman Boots,

We the undersigned organizations wish to thank you for your leadership and express strong support for the role that increased use of wood products in buildings can play in supporting strong rural economies, mitigating climate change, and protecting the nation's forests and the environment. We look forward to continued partnership on the work you began at the White House Rural Council Symposium on Building with Wood, to increase understanding among federal, state, and local government and private sector partners, on how wood can be used in building construction to meet environmental, energy, and sustainability goals.

In addition to furthering USDA's mission, we strongly believe the work you are doing to build understanding of wood products will also contribute to meeting the goals of President Obama's Climate Action Plan. Wood products, especially when used in building construction, provide a number of environmental benefits, not the least of which is reducing greenhouse gas emissions and storing carbon. Each year, forest products help offset roughly one percent of all annual U.S. greenhouse gas emissions and we estimate significantly increasing wood use in buildings could lead to a thirty percent increase in the amount of emissions offset by forest products. Wood products also use much less energy in their manufacturing and produce less air and water pollution than many alternative building materials.

In addition to these benefits, increasing the demand for wood products will also help protect America's forests. U.S. forests support almost one million family-wage jobs, sequester carbon that offsets over twelve percent of our annual U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, clean our air and water, and provide wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. As forests face increasing threats, from development pressures to wildfire to insects and diseases, strong markets for wood products are essential to forest conservation and the protection of all of the benefits our forests provide. This positive conservation effect from strong forest markets, especially when combined with investments in forest conservation programs like the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program and other conservation tools, will help reduce forest loss.

According to the recent USDA Forest Service 2010 Resource Planning Act Assessment, Future of America’s Forests and Rangelands (2012), we could see as much as 34 million acres of forests lost to development by 2060. Strong markets provide incentives and financial means for landowners and land managers to keep their land in forest and implement treatments that can protect against devastating wildfires and insect and disease infestations, all of which are predicted to worsen in the face of a changing climate.

Thank you again for your leadership on this important issue and we look forward to working with you in the future as partners in your efforts to protect America's forests and all the benefits that come from forests, mitigate climate change and increase climate preparedness with forest-based solutions, and support strong rural economies.

Sincerely,

Alabama Forestry Association
American Chestnut Foundation
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Wood Council
APA-The Engineered Wood Association
Binational Softwood Lumber Council
California Forestry Association
CarbonVerde, LLC
Composite Panel Association
Connecticut Forest & Park Association
Conservation Forestry, LLC
Dovetail Partners, Inc.’s
Empire State Forest Products Association
Federal Forest Resource Coalition
Georgia Forestry Association
Green Diamond Resource Company
Hardwood Federation
Hawaii Forest Industry Association
Indiana Forestry & Woodland Owners Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
L&C Carbon LLC
Louisiana Forestry Association
LP Building Products
Lyme Timber Company
Maine Quality Homes, LLC
McShan Lumber Company
Mississippi Forestry Association
Montana Forest Owners Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters
National Association of University Forest Resource Programs
National Lumber & Building Material Dealers Association
National Network of Forest Practitioners
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Woodland Owners Association
North Carolina Association of Professional Loggers, Inc.
Oregon Women In Timber
Plum Creek
Potlatch Corporation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Sierra Pacific Industries
Society of American Foresters
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Tennessee Forestry Association
Treated Wood Council
The Trust for Public Land
U.S. Endowment for Forestry & Communities
Virginia Forestry Association
Washington Forest Protection Association
Westervelt Company
Weyerhaeuser
WoodWorks – Wood Products Council