



American Forest Foundation

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Farm Bill Offers Congress Chance to Protect Public Stake in Family-Owned Forests

Washington, D.C. March 28, 2007 – The American Forest Foundation (AFF) today urged Congress to enact policies that will help stop the loss of family-owned forests.

“Most Americans don’t understand that 10 million individuals and families own most of our nation’s forests,” said Laurence Wiseman, president of AFF. “All of their small properties taken together amount to more than 60 percent of the timberland in the United States.”

These forests are disappearing. According to the U.S. Forest Service, every year an area larger than Everglades National Park, about 1.5 million acres of forests, is lost to development and sprawl.

“What we have here is an invisible forest health crisis,” said Chuck Leavell, a noted conservationist, a trustee of AFF, and long-time keyboardist for the Rolling Stones. “People simply don’t know who owns the majority share of United States forests. Even more important, they don’t realize what they’re losing when these forests disappear.”

“Our forests aren’t just tree factories,” Leavell said. Family-owned forests provide prime habitat and help protect critical watersheds. They sequester carbon, produce oxygen, host all sorts of outdoor recreation, and provide the green space around our cities. “That’s why the public has a stake in helping us to sustain our forests,” Leavell said, “so we can keep producing clean air, pure water and great places to hunt, fish, or just walk in the woods.”

AFF’s primary goal during the upcoming debate of the 2007 Farm Bill is to assure that federal conservation programs help family-forest owners sustain their forests – through improved access to cost-share and incentive programs, through better coordination among federal and state agencies, as well as more robust education and technical assistance to support family owners.

The **American Forest Foundation** is a nonprofit organization devoted to the conservation of family-owned forests through a variety of outreach, education, and demonstration programs. AFF’s **American Tree Farm System® (ATFS)**, with 87,000 members who together own 27.5 million acres, is the largest family forest owner network in the United States, and the nation’s oldest sustainable forestry certification program. Through its Forests for Watersheds and Wildlife™ program, AFF works with Environmental Defense, the Nature Conservancy and other conservation groups to implement innovative conservation strategies on family-owned forests. AFF also administers Project Learning Tree®, among the nation’s largest and most respected environmental education programs.

Chuck Leavell, one of rock's most distinguished keyboardists, is a member of the Rolling Stones band, and has played with Eric Clapton, George Harrison and on many other Grammy-winning recordings. He's also a distinguished conservationist, carrying the family forest message to Capitol Hill, the White House and audiences all over the world. With his wife Rose Lane, Chuck spends his days working on Charlane, his Georgia plantation. Chuck and Rose Lane were named in 1999 as ATFS's National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year. Leavell is a trustee of the American Forest Foundation, a spokesperson for the Abundant Forest Alliance, a member of the board of the U.S. Endowment for Forests and Communities, and serves on many other nonprofit boards. His most recent children's book, *The Tree Farmer*, is available in bookstores now.

The public's view on the federal role in sustaining family-owned forests:

→**80 percent** of those polled said they support **offering incentives** for forestland owners to conserve forests on their property.

→**65 percent** said they would support providing **financial assistance** to private woodland owners who depend on forests for income to help them conserve their forest lands.

→**90 percent** said they would support providing **technical advice** to forestland owners to help them better manage and conserve forests.

Excerpt from a national telephone poll of 1,100 adults sponsored by the Coalition for Forests in the Farm Bill, conducted in February 2007 by the firms of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates and Public Opinion Strategies.

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