



**On Behalf of**

**Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, Southern Environmental Law Center, The Wilderness Society Southern Appalachian Office, Virginia Wilderness Committee, Western North Carolina Alliance, Wild South, The Clinch Coalition, Cherokee Forest Voices, Wild Virginia, Virginia Forest Watch, Georgia Forest Watch, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning, Friends of Georgia**

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Suite 200-A  
Washington DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Sweeping new national forest management rules set to be released by the Obama administration in early 2011 provide a unique opportunity to continue the conservation legacy of President Theodore Roosevelt, who had the foresight to protect these treasured lands more than a century ago. Because of this vision, America enjoys 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands including nearly 5 million acres in the Southern Appalachian mountains. These public lands provide vital protection for fish and wildlife and clean drinking water for millions nationwide. The national forests in the Southern Appalachians support globally significant biodiversity, shelter the headwaters of the major rivers of the Southeast and the Chesapeake Bay, supply clean drinking water to many of the Southeast's major metropolitan areas and innumerable local communities, and provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation and renewal for the approximately half of the U.S. population living within a day's drive of these forests.

Today, our national forests and the wildlife and water resources they support, including those in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama, face unprecedented threats that even a visionary leader such as Roosevelt could not have anticipated. Our forests, wildlife and watersheds, which require comprehensive restoration to remedy the effects of mismanagement, also face new challenges associated with climate change and encroaching development.

The new National Forest Management Act regulations must effectively protect and restore our national forests as we face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They must anchor Forest Service management by giving the agency clear non-discretionary direction and by requiring, as do the current regulations developed in 1982, that management plans, in turn, establish binding standards for resource management and protection. At the same time, the new regulations must use sound and current science to safeguard healthy fish and wildlife populations and their habitats, and secure safe, clean water by creating management standards to protect and restore streams, rivers and watersheds.

We see the development of these comprehensive national forest management rules as one of the most important environmental actions that the administration will take during this term. The course set by these critical rules will determine the future of our forests, wildlife and watersheds for generations to come.

We look forward to working with you to develop a new framework for managing our national forests in this century of which President Roosevelt would be proud.

Sincerely,

Mark Shelley, Director  
Hugh Irwin, Program Director  
Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition  
825-C Merrimon Ave., Suite 353  
Asheville, NC 28804

Sarah A. Francisco, Senior Attorney and National Parks and Forests Program Leader  
Southern Environmental Law Center  
201 West Main Street, Suite 14  
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Brent Martin, Southern Appalachian Program Director  
The Wilderness Society Southern Appalachian Office  
563 West Main Street, Suite 1  
Sylva, NC 28779

Julie Mayfield  
Executive Director  
Western North Carolina Alliance  
29 North Market Street, Suite 610  
Asheville, NC 28801

Tracy Davids, Executive Director  
Ben Prater, Associate Director  
Wild South  
16 Eagle Street, Suite 200  
Asheville, NC 28801

Laura Neale, President

Virginia Wilderness Committee  
423 Sheep Creek Ln.  
Fairfield, VA 24435

Steve Brooks, Director  
The Clinch Coalition  
1097 Old Quarry Dr.  
Nickelsville, Va. 24271

Catherine Murray, Director  
Cherokee Forest Voices  
1101 Antioch Road  
Johnson City, Tennessee 37604

David Hannah, Conservation Director  
Wild Virginia  
P.O. Box 1065  
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Bud Watson, Executive Director  
Virginia Forest Watch  
14031 Independence Rd.  
Ashland, VA 23005

Wayne Jenkins, Executive Director  
Georgia Forest Watch  
15 Tower Road  
Ellijay, GA 30540

Sandra K. Goss, Executive Director  
Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning  
130Tabor Road  
Oak Ridge, TN 37830

Larry Winslett, President  
Friends of Georgia  
119 Ezra Ct. - Unit 5352  
Ellijay, GA 30540