



Massachusetts Sierra Club  
10 Milk Street, Suite 632  
Boston MA 02103-4621  
www.sierraclubmass.org  
office@sierraclubmass.org  
(617) 423-5775

May 3, 2011

The Honorable Kenneth Donnelly  
Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Peter Kocot  
House Chair  
Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

**Testimony of the Massachusetts Sierra Club in support of H836, an act relative to protecting tropical forests by restricting state purchases of certain wood products**

Dear Chairman Donnelly, Chairman Kocot, and Members of the Committee

Thank you for providing this opportunity to offer our support of House Bill 836, *An act relative to protecting tropical forests by restricting state purchases of certain wood products*. The Sierra Club is a non-profit, non-partisan organization with 1.4 million members and supporters in the United States, with 22,000 in Massachusetts, making us the largest grassroots environmental organization in America.

This legislation would help stop the reduction of the world's tropical forests from being further reduced by restricting the purchase of wood grown and materials and supplies made substantially of wood grown in tropical forests in state projects. Alternatives to tropical hardwood offer important environmental and economic advantages over wood.

Tropical forests are found in Mexico, the Bahamas, India, southern China, Australia, Chile, and Brazil. Some of these countries are developing nations where much of the wood is obtained through illegal timber cutting.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that one-half to three-quarters of tropical timber is obtained through illegal forestry somewhere in the chain of custody.<sup>2</sup> The most problematic areas include the Amazon Basin, Southeast Asia, and Central Africa.<sup>3</sup>

The Sierra Club has long been committed to conserving natural resources. Due to logging and clearing for farmland, the world is losing tropical forests at an alarming rate. Each year, 140,000 square kilometers of rainforest are destroyed.<sup>4</sup> Currently, tropical rainforests cover about 6% of the land on earth, which is less than half of the land they once occupied.<sup>5</sup> These remaining stands could be consumed in just 40 more years.<sup>6</sup>

Alternate materials, such as recycled plastic lumber, have many advantages over wood, including creating business opportunities.<sup>7</sup> Although initially slightly more expensive than wood, the use of recycled plastic lumber reduces long-term costs.<sup>8</sup>

The characteristics that lead to reduced costs are:

- maintenance-free
- does not crack
- requires no sealants, preservatives, or paint
- bacteria, insect, moisture, chemical, and graffiti resistant<sup>9</sup>

For example, recycled plastic lumber can be used for the typical outdoor projects for which tropical hardwood or wood treated with hazardous substances normally is used. Among other uses, some popular uses included signs on trails and docks, park benches, railings, decks, and piers.<sup>10</sup>

Because of logging and clearing for farmland, rainforests may be one of the most endangered habitats on earth.<sup>11</sup> This legislation is important to stop the destruction of tropical forests by restricting the use of tropical hardwoods and requiring the use of alternate materials, which have many advantages over wood, including significant economic benefits. We hope that this committee reports this bill favorably.

The Sierra Club fully endorses H.836 and hopes this bill is reported favorably by the committee and is supported by all members of the Senate and House of Representatives.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James McCaffrey". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long horizontal line that extends to the right.

James McCaffrey  
Director  
Massachusetts Sierra Club

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<sup>1</sup> Taiga Rescue Network, *Illegal Logging in the Boreal*, 2003, available online at:  
<http://www.taigarescue.org/en//index.php?sub=2&cat=41>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> World Wildlife Fund, *Tropical Forests*,

[http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/ecoregions/about/habitat\\_types/habitats/tropical\\_forests/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/ecoregions/about/habitat_types/habitats/tropical_forests/), last visited April 29, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Taylor. "The Healing Power of Rainforests."

<sup>7</sup> California Department of Resources, Recycling, Recovery (CalRecycle), *Recycled Plastic Lumber*, <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/Plastics/recycled/lumber/>, last updated November 8, 2010, last visited April 29, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> World Wildlife Fund, *Tropical Forests*,

[http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/ecoregions/about/habitat\\_types/habitats/tropical\\_forests/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/ecoregions/about/habitat_types/habitats/tropical_forests/), last visited April 29, 2011.