

July 28, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Eugene Scalia
Secretary of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue
Washington, DC 20210

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary of Homeland
Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretaries Pompeo, Scalia and Wolf:

The undersigned organizations representing the \$300 billion¹ U.S. forest products economy seek your help to prevent the cascading economic and environmental impacts to working forests and rural communities resulting from the President's Proclamation "Suspending Entry of Aliens Who Present a Risk to the U.S. Labor Market Following the Coronavirus Outbreak" dated June 22, 2020. Suspending forestry H-2B visas will negatively impact rural forest communities around the country, millions of acres of public and privately owned forests, thousands of family forest landowners, timberland investments worth billions of dollars, and jeopardize the employment of thousands of American forestry workers.

Many H-2B employers contract their services to public and private forest landowners in the U.S. to perform forestry work. A major component of this work includes tree planting on more than 2.2 million acres of forestland annually that are both publicly and privately owned. A survey of businesses that employ H-2B forestry workers was undertaken in July 2020 to assess the impacts of the President's Proclamation, and revealed the following:

- **The suspension of H-2B forestry visas will have a harmful impact on 90% of the responding businesses.** Forty-five percent of respondents reported that they will not be able to do any of their planned forestry work. An additional 29% indicated that they would be able to do less than 50% of their planned forestry work.
- **Seedlings will go unplanted and die.** Nearly all replanting work in the U.S. is done by H-2B workers. H-2B forestry workers plant 1.55 billion tree seedlings on 2.2 million acres of forestland each year. If forestry is not granted an exemption allowing H-2B workers to begin this critical work in the next 60 days, an estimated 1.6 million acres of forestland will go unplanted, and 1.12 billion seedlings will die at a direct cost of \$336 million.
- **American companies and rural communities will suffer an estimated \$725 million in economic harm.** This includes the loss of seedlings, canceled contracts, and increased costs for future forest management operations when work resumes. It does not include the incalculable loss of billions of dollars in forestland value when a year's worth of timber growth is lost.
- **Labor for these jobs is extremely scarce or non-existent without the H-2B option.** Before receiving H-2B guest workers, businesses are required by law to advertise the available jobs to U.S. workers. Survey respondents stated that in FY2020, of the 6,350 positions advertised, the number of local workers who applied for these forestry jobs was only 1.9% of the available positions.
- **American jobs depend on the work done by these guest workers.** Each H-2B worker supports 4.5 American jobs.² Further, a recent Government Accountability Office study concludes that "*counties with*

¹ <https://afandpa.org/advocacy/economic-impact>

² Zavodny, Madeline. *Immigration and American Jobs*. American Enterprise Institute, 15 Dec. 2011, www.aei.org/research-products/working-paper/immigration-and-american-jobs/.

H-2B employers generally had lower unemployment rates and higher average weekly wages than counties that do not have any H-2B employers”.³

The role H-2B workers play is unique, critical, and essential for the regeneration, retention, and long-term environmental and economic value of America’s public and private forestlands. The work they do is seasonal, performed outdoors with exposure to various weather conditions and terrain, and often requires travel from state to state throughout the planting season, separating workers from their families for months at a time. It is also critical to supporting the 2.5 million full-time jobs held by non-H2B workers along the forestry supply chain.

As the State Department reviews the proclamation, the signatories of this letter respectfully urge you to add forestry related services to the National Interest Exceptions to the Presidential Proclamation suspending the entry of nonimmigrants to the United States. Failure to do so will negatively impact small businesses and rural forest-dependent communities across America.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue to the forest products sector of the United States.

Sincerely,



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Lisa Kenna, Executive Secretary, Office of Secretary Pompeo, DOS
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Brandon Wales, Deputy Chief of Staff, Policy for Office of the Chief of Staff, DHS

The Undersigned Associations Support this Letter:

Alabama Forestry Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Forest Resource Council
Arkansas Forestry Association
Arkansas Timber Producers Association
Associated Logging Contractors – Idaho
Associated Oregon Loggers
Association of Consulting Foresters
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
Empire State Forest Products Association

³United States, Congress, “H-2B VISAS: Additional Steps Needed to Meet Employers’ Hiring Needs and Protect U.S. Workers.” *H-2B VISAS: Additional Steps Needed to Meet Employers’ Hiring Needs and Protect U.S. Workers*, GAO-20-230, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2020, pp. 13–14.

Federal Forest Resource Coalition
Florida Forestry Association
Forest Landowners Association
Forest Resources Association
Forestry Association of South Carolina
Georgia Forestry Association
Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association
Hawai'i Forest Industry Association
Intermountain Forest Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Louisiana Forestry Association
Maine Forest Products Council
Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association
Michigan Association of Timbermen
Michigan Forest Products Council
Minnesota Forest Industries
Minnesota Timber Producers Association
Mississippi Forestry Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of State Foresters
National Woodland Owners Association
North Carolina Forestry Association
Northeastern Loggers Association
Ohio Forestry Association, Inc.
Oregon Forest & Industries Council
Pennsylvania Forest Products Association
Pennsylvania Forestry Association
Railway Tie Association
Society of American Foresters
South Carolina Timber Producers Association
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association, Inc.
Southern Loggers Cooperative
Tennessee Forestry Association
Texas Forestry Association
Treated Wood Council
Virginia Forestry Association
Washington Forest Protection Association
Western Wood Preservers Institute
West Virginia Forestry Association