

Members of Congress announce bipartisan bill to curb illegal timber trade

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Today Congressmen Earl Blumenauer (D-Oregon), Robert Wexler (D-FL) and Jerry Weller (R-IL) joined the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and a broad coalition of supporters from conservation, industry and labor groups to announce the introduction of the Legal Timber Protection Act, which bans the use of illegally-harvested timber and wood products. The bipartisan legislation will amend the long-standing U.S. Lacey Act, extending its protections to plants to catch trafficking in timber and wood products.

"Illegal logging is a problem that crosses national boundaries to affect communities, companies and ecosystems alike," said Rep. Blumenauer. "This legislation would level the playing field for U.S. industry, not create new obstacles. We see an extraordinary opportunity for common ground here, and we believe this legislation is a solution that benefits everyone. In Oregon, which produces 13% of the nation's lumber, responsible businesses will now be protected from the costs of the illegal timber trade."

"Not only will this bill protect the world's most vulnerable forests, it will also help those nations that are aggressively working to curb illegal logging within their own borders," said Rep. Wexler. "By reducing the demand for illegally logged timber, we will provide a great boost in the fight against corruption, help stem human rights abuses and limit the environmental degradation that accompanies illegal logging. The bill will also provide a significant boost to U.S. industry that is forced to compete with these illegal imports."

"Illegal logging not only destroys rainforests and wildlife habitat but it destroys communities," said Rep. Weller. "Criminal elements lay waste to rural areas of many undeveloped countries, destroying the economic future of these areas as well as changing the area's climate. We must work together in a global effort to close the door to the marketplace for products made from illegal logging."

"Currently, international timber smuggling syndicates are making the U.S. consumer an unwitting accomplice to brazen corruption, violence and natural resource theft," said Alexander von Bismarck, Campaigns Director of EIA. "The Legal Timber Protection Act will be a critical tool to allow developing countries to take control of their natural resources and manage them more effectively."

The bill's language was developed through extensive consultation with a broad spectrum of industry representatives, conservation organizations and government agencies. At the moment of introduction, the following groups had pledged their support for the bill: EIA, Sierra Club, World Wildlife Fund, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the Earth, Natural Resources Defense Council, Rainforest Alliance, United Steelworkers and Wood Flooring International.

The Hardwood Federation, which represents approximately 14,000 businesses in all 50 states, expressed support for the legislation's intent and said they will study the specifics further: "We have been encouraged by the open dialogue among environmental groups, industry and government on options to combat illegal logging

and look forward to working with all interested stakeholders on this important legislative effort."

Illegal logging threatens some of the world's most valuable and vulnerable forests. It also contributes to huge financial losses to the United States. U.S. companies lose an estimated \$460 million in export opportunities every year because of displacement caused by illegally harvested timber. Additionally, the annual value of U.S. exports is between \$500 - \$700 million lower due to market pressures created by illegally harvested timber.

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