

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

HALEY BARBOUR
GOVERNOR

November 24, 2009

Mr. Richard Fedrizzi
President and CEO
U.S. Green Building Council
2101 L Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Mr. Fedrizzi:

I am writing with concern about the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) draft benchmarks to assess forest certification standards in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system. The current draft benchmarks fail to fairly assess wood from sustainably managed U.S. forests that are certified by systems other than the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Mississippi favors the recognition by USGBC of any credible national forest certification system including FSC, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and the American Tree Farm System.

Sixty-five percent of our state is forested, and we have long recognized wood as an environmentally friendly building material that represents an important part of Mississippi's economy. Much of our forestland – 70 percent – is owned by small, family landowners, and Mississippi has more Tree Farms certified under the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) than any other state in the U.S., with 1.3 million acres. In addition, over two million forestland acres in the state are certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). We are proud of the role these certified forests play in our communities, our economy, and our environment. Our forests provide recreational opportunities, encourage tourism, and create environmental benefits such as excellent water quality, cleaner air, improved wildlife habitat, and the storage of atmospheric carbon.

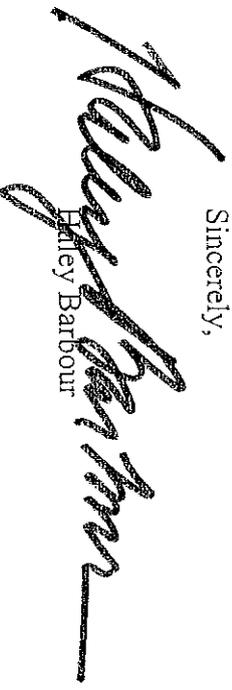
Unfortunately for Mississippi's private family forest landowners and forestry community, the current draft benchmarks fail to fairly assess wood from well-managed U.S. forests that are certified by systems other than FSC. The result is a forest certification credit that continues to be disadvantageous to forest products produced or manufactured here in Mississippi. Last year, I signed into law legislation that prohibits the use of any nationally recognized environmental building rating system that discriminates against materials and products manufactured or produced in Mississippi for certain state-financed

building projects. The current LEED wood credit rules are an example of why this bill was passed by the Mississippi Legislature.

Many of the LEED prerequisites and credits are difficult or impossible for small landowners – the backbone of the forestry industry in our state – to achieve despite ATFS certification. Furthermore, the fact that FSC standards differ between the U.S. and foreign countries means that LEED credit can be secured by wood from abroad but not from domestic, third-party certified forests. And since 90 percent of the wood produced in the world comes from forests not certified at all, it makes no sense environmentally or economically for USGBC to pick favorites from the ten percent of forests that are certified by recognized third-party certification programs.

The USGBC should focus on encouraging the use of certified wood and responsible forestry practices – not providing disincentives by discounting credible forest certification programs. I urge the USGBC to improve the LEED standard by fully recognizing all wood products from well-managed forests that are certified under all credible forest certification programs.

Sincerely,



Handwritten signature of Bailey Barbour in black ink, written in a cursive style.

Bailey Barbour