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INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS CONVENE TO DISCUSS ILLEGAL LOGGING

WASHINGTON, DC – An international forum has concluded that while some major initiatives are being developed to address the critical issue of illegal logging, stakeholders around the world must work together to develop tools to address this problem.

More than 100 experts from around the world came together to examine the complex issues around illegal logging and associated trade – from legislative changes in the United States to carbon credits for better forest management – at Forest Trends' 2nd annual Potomac Forum on Illegal Logging and Associated Trade.

Illegal logging and associated trade is a major international problem that depresses prices, frequently leads to unsustainable harvesting and great environmental damage, deprives governments and local economies of revenues, undermines the rule of law and sometimes generates funds to support and perpetuate armed conflicts. A recent study estimated that illegal timber and wood products flooding the marketplace have depressed world timber prices by seven to 16 percent on average. U.S. wood exports are estimated to lose more than US\$460 million in revenue each year. Globally, illegal logging results in annual losses of at least US\$10 billion to US\$15 billion of forest resources from public lands alone, according to the World Bank.

“Bringing together a broad range of experts is an excellent way to increase awareness and understanding of how U.S.-based organizations can act to reduce the social, environmental and economic damage caused by illegal logging,” said Michael Jenkins, president of Forest Trends. “This meeting introduced some new initiatives and also showed how progress has been made on certain activities in the nine months since we last had an update.”

Forum participants, many of them specialists in development and trade, came from U.S. and foreign government agencies, the forest industry and non-governmental agencies from as far away as China. They focused on matters pertinent to North American-based organizations, businesses and markets, including international developments in both producer and manufacturing countries exporting to the United States such as Indonesia and China, or consumer jurisdictions importing U.S.-produced wood products such as China and Europe. An update session on U.S. legislative initiatives provided the latest information about on-going efforts to amend the Lacey Act to stop imports of illegal wood.

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"Governments cannot be expected to provide all the solutions on their own. The private sector, particularly forest companies at all stages of the production chain, and lending institutions must face up to how their investment decisions can encourage forest-related crime," Jenkins said. "Active engagement with these groups must be part of a wider conservation strategy."

Sessions included a follow-up to the United Nations conference on climate change held in Bali in 2007 that looked at the challenges involved in building a carbon market in jurisdictions without adequate enforcement and monitoring, and discussed the relationship between illegal logging and REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation). In addition to the Lacey Act amendments, the forum learned of other U.S. actions such as the multi-agency U.S. Treasury's Strategic Economic Dialogue's bilateral agreement with China on illegal logging and the U.S.-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement's annex on forest governance.

"Forests worldwide have a huge capacity to provide livelihoods for rural poor people, to contribute to economic development of countries and to ensure global and local public good services," said Gerhard Dieterle, forestry advisor for the World Bank, one of the forum sponsors. "The Potomac Forum clearly underlines that good governance and a stable institutional, legal and policy framework are key factors for countries with the greatest need of incentives to maintain forests and discourage deforestation."

Kathy Abusow, president and CEO of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), also a forum sponsor, congratulated Forest Trends for arranging and hosting the event. "This kind of broad international perspective is essential to achieve the goal of fostering a constructive network of stakeholders interested in working collaboratively to find and deliver practical and effective solutions to the critical issue of illegal logging."

Other forum sponsors included the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Forest Service. Forest Trends (www.forest-trends.org) is an international non-profit organization that works to expand the value of forests to society by promoting sustainable forest management and conservation.

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