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Illinois Lawmakers Consider Country's First Prohibition on Illegally-Logged Wood

SPRINGFIELD, IL - In a precedent setting action, the Illinois General Assembly Tuesday became the first state legislature to consider a prohibition on the sale of illegally-logged wood within its borders.

Representatives Susana Mendoza (D-Chicago), Dan Reitz (D-Sparta), and Pat Verschoore (D-Milan) are co-sponsors of the *Illegally Logged Wood Act* (House Bill 1635), which prohibits the import and retail sale of wood and wood products logged illegally in the U.S. or foreign countries.

“The international trade of timber products from protected forests and trees is a multi-billion dollar industry that is taking away business from legitimate logging companies, even here in Illinois,” said Mendoza, who introduced the legislation. “We don’t have the authority to enforce laws that are being broken outside of Illinois and the United States, but we can take a stand that Illinois will not tolerate black market timber within our borders.”

Illegal logging destroys critical habitat, endangers wildlife, and is frequently associated with human rights and labor violations. The World Bank estimates that some \$15 billion is lost annually due to illegal logging and associated corruption in public forests alone.

“It is undeniable that U.S. demand for cheap furniture, plywood and picture frames is driving illegal logging,” said Alexander von Bismarck of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), a leading non-profit organization dedicated to exposing crimes against wildlife and the environment. “This legislation sends a clear signal: illegal wood is no longer acceptable in the marketplace.”

Other countries and a few cities in the U.S. have enacted policies designed to keep the government from buying illegal wood. However, no state has come close to passing legislation with penalties for those who import or sell wood products acquired in

violation of other states' or countries' laws. Similar measures are now being considered at the federal level and in Europe.

Von Bismarck believes that this bill may be the first in a national trend as awareness grows about illegal logging's impacts. "Without this kind of legislation, U.S. consumers will continue to be unwitting participants in environmental destruction around the world."

The bill was unanimously approved in Committee and now moves to the full House for consideration.

For more information on the measure, visit www.ilga.gov.

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About EIA:

The Environmental Investigation Agency (www.eia-international.org) is an international campaigning organization committed to investigating and exposing environmental crime and campaigning to protect endangered species and the natural world.