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House Natural Resources Committee Unanimously Clears Major Legislation to Fight Illegal Logging

WASHINGTON, DC – The House Committee on Natural Resources this morning unanimously passed the bipartisan Legal Timber Protection Act (LTPA), H.R. 1497. The vote propels this landmark bill to combat the United States' role in the global illegal logging problem one key step closer to becoming U.S. law.

The bill's passage reflects broad support that includes not only environmental groups but organized labor and the American forest products industry. This unprecedented coalition has come together to address a problem that causes American job losses and timber mill closures, as well as serious human rights violations and deforestation in countries around the world.

In a report published this month, called "No Questions Asked," the Environmental Investigation Agency estimated that 10% of U.S. wood product annual imports, or \$3.8 billion dollars, are derived from illegally logged timber. It also found that despite an express ban on Indonesian sawn timber exports, 1570 shipments entered the U.S. over a two year span ending November 2006 – over 2 shipments per day.

Currently, the U.S. government has no authority to take enforcement action against the import of illegally logged wood products. The LTPA, introduced by Congressmen Blumenauer (D-OR), Weller (R-IL), and Wexler (D-FL), would amend a long-standing wildlife trafficking statute, the Lacey Act, to prohibit commerce in illegally-harvested wood and wood products.

The bill approved by the Committee will clarify provisions regarding declaration requirements and the scope of foreign laws covered by the Act, and brings the LTPA in line with its bipartisan Senate companion bill, the Combat Illegal Logging Act, introduced by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN).

"This is a clear message from the U.S. Congress that fighting illegal logging is an urgent issue which crosses political lines," said Alexander von Bismarck, executive director of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), a non-profit group which investigates international environmental crime.

EIA has worked closely with many groups to develop innovative solutions to the problem of illegal logging, including the American Forest & Paper Association and the Hardwood Federation.

von Bismarck also noted that the U.S.'s actions are being carefully watched on the international scene – in the European Union and other consuming countries where similar legislation is being considered.

"Momentum is building to pass a bill that would turn the power of the American market towards fighting forest crime, rather than underwriting it," said von Bismarck.