

Do We Need a \$15 Million “Illegal Logging Initiative?”

by Alan Caruba

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Does the US really need to spend \$15 million on a new “Initiative Against Illegal Logging?”



Did you know that forests cover about one-third of all the land in the United States? I like to collect facts like that. It amounts to some 737 million acres of forests and, of that, 247 million acres (3.5%) are reserved from harvest by law or represent slow-growing woodlands unsuitable for timber production. Some 490 million acres are called timberlands, i.e., forests that can produce more than 20 cubic feet of wood per acre annually.

Even so, you might be surprised to learn that the US imports more than \$15 billion in wood products annually. In 2002, the value of these products was set at \$15,876,388,000. This represents everything from hardwood logs and lumber to railroad ties, softwood lumber to plywood and particleboard. Lumber for “builders carpentry” represented \$1,683,915,000 in 2002.

So my interest was aroused when I learned that, in July, the Bush administration had launched an “Initiative Against Illegal Logging” and the cost of that Initiative would be \$15 million in taxpayers’ money.

It’s no secret the US is deep into the red ink these days and one would think it would be looking for ways to cut spending, but this Initiative was deemed important enough for Secretary of State, Colin L. Powell, to announce it on July 28. He noted that the World Bank estimates illegal logging costs developing nations an estimated \$10-15 billion every year in lost resources and revenues. It is money he said, “stolen from legitimate forest products businesses.”

As I read through Secretary Powell's address, I noticed that he expressed his appreciation to Conservation International, a major Green organization, and the American Forest and Paper Association for their work "in demonstrating the critical importance of preserving protected forest areas." Reading further, I learned that the US had "already entered into agreements with six countries to generate over \$60 million for forest preservation." So the total is now up to \$75 million for this policy designed to "save" forests from proper management and use.

Now, let's understand what we are *really* talking about. "Forest preservation" translates as forests from which virtually no timber may be extracted. You may recall that the Greens have been trying for decades to stop any logging in the rain forests of South America, among others. And you may recall that Green logging policies just cost the State of California thousands of homes and more thousands of acres of trees burnt to cinders. The real cost of these retrogressive policies has to be calculated in the billions!

Then I noticed who's in charge of this initiative and this is where the whole thing begins to wreak of a Green agenda to insure that wood, the most sustainable, usable, and recyclable product on the face of the Earth, will remain yet another natural resource the Greens want to deny everyone.

The man in charge of this Initiative is John F. Turner, and he was appointed the US State Department's Assistant Secretary in charge of the Bureau of Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs. Guess what? Prior to his appointment in November 2001, Mr. Turner was the President and Chief Executive Officer of The Conservation Fund, described as a "nonprofit organization dedicated to public-private partnerships to protect land and water resources."

Let me translate for you. This organization, like so many comparable Green groups, is the enemy of private property. Like so many Green groups, its agenda is to insure that as much land as possible is taken off the revenue producing rolls. During Mr. Turner's tenure, his organization "protected" 2.8 million acres of parks, wildlife habitat, and open space across America.

That's 2.8 million acres that cannot be used for housing our growing population, for timber production, hunting, fishing, camping, hiking or off-road use of any kind. And it gets better. Mr. Turner, from 1989 to 1993, was the Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service where, among his duties, "he was responsible for expanding collaborative approaches under the Endangered Species Act, increasing wetland protection and establishing 55 new National Wildlife Refuges, the most of any administration in the nation's history." Why is this necessary? It's not. The total amount of developed land in the US amounts to barely 3.5% of the entire landmass. The US already controls upwards of 40% of the landmass.

So, the Bush Initiative on Illegal Logging begins to look more and more like the fulfillment of the deepest held wish of every diehard environmentalist, the destruction of the nation's economy by shutting off access to our natural resources and the denial of access to our nation's forests in the name of protecting so-called endangered species.

And even the American Forest & Paper Association speaks the Green line saying, "All forest enterprises worldwide should implement sustainable forest management before the next World Forestry Congress." A more accurate translation of "sustainable" is the means by which the use of forests and other natural resources is restrained and regulated in every way possible to insure it goes unused!

Even giant forest product conglomerates like the Weyerhaeuser Company, with sales of \$18.5 billion in 2002 and offices or operations in 18 countries, benefit from the taxpayers' underwriting of the administration's \$15 million Initiative. It increases the difficulties of smaller lumber import companies to compete. This is good news for Weyerhaeuser's bottom line, but not for the many wood-importing companies who contract with local producers around the world.

Which brings us at last to the question of how such illegal timber activities could exist without the compliance of the nations in regions such as the Congo Basin, the Amazon Basin and Central America, and South and Southeast Asia? The answer to that is

“corruption.”

None of the wood being exported from countries such as Indonesia or Brazil just shows up at the harbor and gets secretly loaded on ships. Someone has to certify it as legal for export. The Initiative is going to throw \$15 million in US taxpayers’ money at an effort that corrupt forest product authorities in nations around the world will render meaningless. Still think it’s worth the cost? Think “drug trade.”

Lastly, it should be noted that there are already scores of international laws, rules, and regulations regarding the export and import of wood. This Initiative fulfills the dreams of every environmentalist who hates capitalism and the free market.

Alan Caruba is the author of Warning Signs, published by Merril Press. His weekly commentaries are posted on the Internet site of [The National Anxiety Center](#).