



Bush Officials Sued for Steering \$350M to Forest Foundations

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SEATTLE, Washington, September 12, 2008 (ENS) - A coalition of conservation organizations filed a lawsuit Wednesday against the Bush administration alleging that federal officials diverted \$350 million from the public treasury to forestry foundations "dominated by the timber industry."

The suit alleges that the administration violated federal appropriations law when, in September 2006, without any public process or congressional approval, the administration steered \$350 million from Canadian lawsuit settlement funds to the foundations.

The plaintiff organizations - the Forest Stewardship Council-US, Conservation Northwest, and the Center for Biological Diversity - say they filed the lawsuit because they are committed to promoting sustainable forestry in the United States.

The Washington Forest Law Center, a public interest law firm based in Seattle, filed the suit on behalf of the plaintiffs in federal court in Seattle.

The defendants are the U.S. Trade Representative, the Department of Commerce and the Bureau of

Customs and Border Protection.

"Once again the Bush administration has made up its own rules," said Joe Scott, International Programs director of Washington-based Conservation Northwest.

"Here, the administration illegally gave away hundreds of millions of public dollars to organizations whose programs are not clearly established to advance the public interest," said Scott.

The groups are asking the court to declare that the Bush administration violated the law and asks the court to take reasonable and fair steps to ensure that the money is safeguarded until the administration follows the law.

One of the co-plaintiffs in the lawsuit, represents a forest certification system.

Corey Brinkema, president of the plaintiff Forest Stewardship Council-US, said the organization joined the lawsuit because, "FSC-US and our partners work tirelessly to develop and promote the highest standards for forest management, as well as provide the public the opportunity to reward responsible forestry through choosing FSC-labeled products. The administration's action is a

huge setback that, if left unchecked, could significantly lower the bar for what is represented as sustainable forestry."

The suit alleges that money the Bush administration earmarked to the two timber industry-dominated organizations, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Inc. and the American Forest Foundation, should instead have gone into the US Treasury.

"How this money is spent should have been up to Congress, not timber industry executives in a backroom deal with the administration," said Bill Snape, senior attorney for the plaintiff Center for Biological Diversity.

The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities is a not-for-profit corporation established in September 2006, at the request of the governments of the United States and Canada in accordance with the terms of the Softwood Lumber Agreement between the two countries and endowed with \$200 million. The Endowment is one of three entities designated to share in a one-time infusion of funds to support "meritorious initiatives" in the United States.

The American Forest Foundation is

a nonprofit organization that works with family forest owners. It was chartered in 1981 “to encourage the long-term sustainability of America’s forests, restore wildlife habitat, and develop quality environmental education programs.”

The AFF Board of Trustees includes officials of the National Audubon Society, the Aldo Leopold Foundation, and the American Bird Conservancy as well as packaging company MeadWestvaco and timber company Weyerhaeuser, as well as keyboardist Chuck Leavell, known for his work with The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, and The Allman Brothers Band, among others.

The AFF adheres to the sustainability standards of the

Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification PEFC, based in Geneva, Switzerland, a rival of the plaintiff Forest Stewardship Council.

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