

Dear Legislators,

We of the South Carolina Native Plant Society strongly oppose the sale of lands in the National Forests of our state. These publicly owned lands serve many roles that are absolutely vital to our state and to our people. To sell any of these lands to generate dollars to use in lieu of tax revenues to provide temporary funding for even such noble goals as improving rural schools and helping Katrina victims is short-sighted. Will we sell more land a few years from now, when another natural disaster creates a demand for funding? What will we do when the school improvements we purchase now are out-dated or no longer adequate for an expanded population of children? These should be national political priorities that we fund with our taxes, in reflection of the fact that we all have a stake in these priorities. The maintenance of publicly owned land within a reasonable distance of our population should also be a national priority.

We live in a society where many people have little knowledge of vital environmental processes that sustain us, providing us with clean air and water, as well as vital economic resources. As a society, we are ever farther removed from undisturbed or sustainably managed natural resources. We are barred from experiencing nature by the “No trespassing” signs of private landowners, or the gates of upscale communities on the most naturally beautiful landscapes, and we understand the concerns of these fortunate landholders. The presence of publicly owned land provides **all of us** with an outlet where we **can** experience natural beauty, plant and wildlife communities, and quiet time.

We go to these public lands to hike, to hunt, fish, or just to see a relative intact ecosystem with its trees, grasses and wild flowers, its wildlife, its wetlands, its rocky slopes. We go to ride bicycles and horses in a quiet setting. We go to set up a tent and sleep under no roof but the sky. And we come back from these adventures with a sense of peace, well-being, and renewal.

Our magnificent US Forest Service, National Park Service, and state land management people have done a good job of managing these vital public resources for many different uses. These lands provide ample recreational opportunities, and through this use, significant local economic benefit. The harvest of timber on these lands is, on the whole, done carefully, with wise application of environmental knowledge. The harvest of timber from public lands provides large economic returns to local communities. Yet, when you look at a stream that flows out of a largely publicly managed forest watershed, you can see the results of their work in the clean water and diverse aquatic plants and animals.

We did not get to be the great nation we are by seeking short-term solutions to long-term problems, particularly solutions that sacrificed fixed public resources such as land. It is not time to start now. We here in South Carolina are planning to raise money with Heritage Bonds and other sources to purchase land for sale by large industrial landholders. We value our open spaces. We hope to pass this irreplaceable legacy to our grandchildren, with the thought that they may need it more than our generation. And we hope they learn to value it and manage even better than we did.

We reiterate our strong opposition to the sale of US Forest Service land. These lands provide a mix of resources and services much too valuable to dispense with lightly.

Sincerely,

South Carolina Native Plant Society