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April 27, 2006

USDA Forest Service  
SRS Comments  
Lands 4S  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Mailstop 1124  
Washington, DC 20250-0003  
*via email: SRS\_Land\_Sales@fs.fed.us*

Re: USDA Proposal to Sell Forest Lands to Provide Funding for Rural Schools,  
February 28, 2006

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Ozark Chapter of the Sierra Club opposes the Bush Administration's plan to sell national forests and Bureau of Land Management land to fund the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination (SRS) Program. The proposed auction of more than one quarter of a million acres of public forests in our nation would do irreparable harm to our national forest system. The lands, which would be lost forever, provide critical wildlife habitat, cleansing systems for our air and water, and a legacy to our children.

The Under Secretary of Agriculture, Mark Rey, explained that this sale is necessary to compensate for a decline in revenue from timber harvests in recent years, and a corresponding decline in monies sent to counties. If Mr. Rey were to examine the reason for the decline in revenue, he would see it is that the Forest Service does not promote sustainable forestry management. The Forest Service should follow the practices of Pioneer Forest, a very successful forest in Missouri with whom the Missouri Forest Service employees are familiar.

The Forest Service's proposal to complete a one-time sale of lands in order to raise money is short-sighted and flawed for many reasons.

- 1) Once the lands are sold, the Forest Service will never have the chance again to make money from them. Instead of selling them, the FS should engage in sustainable forestry.

- 2) Once the lands are sold, the federal government will not be able to control their usage. The lands could be clearcut and then developed. While millions of people around the globe are planting trees to lessen the impacts of global warming, it is extremely short-sighted and irresponsible for the United States government to encourage the destruction of hundreds of thousands of acres of forest land.
- 3) After the lands are sold, the revenues received, and the money spent on the schools, what will be done to fund the schools after the schools have spent the money? Would the Bush administration then propose selling hundreds of thousands of additional acres? Forests sold in this way are a finite resource and cannot fund schools in perpetuity.
- 4) The Forest Service's claim that the lands should be sold because they are "small, isolated or difficult to manage due to their location or other characteristics" lacks validity. Parcels that are small nevertheless provide habitat for endangered and other species and perform valuable services in cleaning the air and water. Isolated parcels provide habitat for endangered and other species and perform valuable services for important ecosystems. The statement that the parcels are "difficult to manage" smacks of deception: the parcels have been "managed" until there was a budget crunch; that does not make them "difficult" now. Furthermore, there is no shortage of people who use these lands who might be willing to volunteer their expertise to manage them.

When President Theodore Roosevelt and other Presidents created the National Forest System, they intended that the lands be saved in perpetuity for future generations. It is irresponsible and reckless for one President to try to solve budgetary problems by destroying these vital resources.

Very truly yours,

/s/Kathleen G. Henry

Kathleen G. Henry

Great Rivers Environmental Law Center

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