April 21, 2021

Assembly Member Ash Kalra
State Capitol, Room 2196
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assembly Member Kalra:

On behalf of our undersigned organizations, we write in support of your bill, AB 416, requiring that state contractors supplying certain forest-derived products have policies to protect deforestation and intact forest loss in tropical and boreal forests and ensure the protection of fundamental Indigenous rights. As Californians and people around the world face growing threats from climate change and ecosystem collapse, this bill is a critical step toward protecting two of the forests most vital to securing a safe, livable future.

Boreal and tropical forests are indispensable in the dual fights against climate change and biodiversity loss. These two “lungs of the earth” are among the most carbon-dense biomes on earth, absorbing and storing carbon dioxide and converting it into life-giving oxygen and buying
us critical time to transition to a decarbonized future. Each year, forests absorb one-third of our greenhouse gas emissions, making them among the most cost-effective, efficient climate solutions. Forests also harbor abundant biodiversity, accounting for 80% of all terrestrial species. Boreal and tropical forests are even linked by the migratory birds that call both home at different times of year. These birds, en route to their summer and winter forest habitats, alight in backyards across the United States, from California to Maine.

Yet the U.S. also has a far more destructive connection to these forests, driving unsustainable supply chains that are rapidly eroding these vital ecosystems. Each year, U.S. demand for products like pulp and paper, lumber, palm oil, and soy are leaving behind vast clearcut areas that jeopardize our climate, at-risk species, and Indigenous rights. U.S. trade is the largest global driver of both tropical and boreal forest loss, including accounting for 80% of all boreal forest product exports from Canada.

The international ramifications of this trade are catastrophic. About 18 million acres of tropical forest, an area one-fifth the size of California, are lost each year to deforestation. This tropical deforestation is the third-largest driver of global carbon dioxide emissions, and potential reductions in rainfall and snowpack in parts of the U.S. have even been linked to deforestation in the Amazon. Tropical forest loss is also linked to a global rise in pandemics, increasing the likelihood of the spread of zoonotic diseases like COVID-19.

The impacts to the boreal are no less catastrophic, yet too often have been overlooked in supply chain commitments and global forest protection frameworks. Each year, industrial logging in Canada alone clearcuts over a million acres of boreal forest, much of this in biodiverse, carbon-rich intact forests. The logging industry, despite claims of sustainability, is driving biodiversity declines and releasing vast stores of locked-up carbon into the atmosphere. Canada also does not require companies to respect Indigenous rights to free, prior and informed consent, meaning the more than 600 Indigenous communities who live in and rely on the boreal forest are not guaranteed the right to dictate the future of their traditional territories.

This bill would place California at the forefront of a global political and marketplace push to curtail forest loss. Companies have been facing unprecedented pressure to ameliorate their impacts on forests. Last fall, an overwhelming majority of Procter & Gamble’s shareholders voted in favor of a resolution that requires the company to take measures to eliminate deforestation and intact forest degradation from its tropical and boreal supply chains, marking the first time a forest-related shareholder resolution has passed. Leading asset managers such as BlackRock and State Street voted in favor of the resolution, marking a sea change in the financial sector’s approach to forest loss.

By passing AB 416, California would not only help propel this marketplace shift, but also help drive urgently needed action at the state, local, and federal levels. New York is considering a similar bill in its current legislative session, and California’s demonstration of leadership could spur similar measures across other states. Moreover, both Governor Newsom and the Biden Administration have signaled their prioritization of natural climate solutions, providing a unique opportunity for California to model the robust protection of both Northern and tropical forests that is needed to forestall the climate and biodiversity crises.
With the looming threats of climate change and species collapse, we cannot afford to lose any more of the world’s remaining intact forests. Thank you for authorizing this bill and your leadership on helping chart the kind of transformative change we need to craft a just and sustainable world.

Sincerely,

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