

*Remarks for the
Neshoba County Forestry Association
August 12, 2002*

The great American conservationist John Muir once wrote, “when one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.”

This is certainly the case as it applies to the timber industry in Mississippi. Our history has its foundation in natural resources. Agriculture has played a major role in everything from economic development to literature. For the timber industry in particular, Mississippi is a great place to do business, and the impact of this industry is felt worldwide.

There are more than 18 million acres of forest land in Mississippi, covering about 60 percent of our area. We have more tree farms than any state in the country, and the \$11 billion impact of forestry on our economy is evident.

The majority of these lands are owned by private individuals; however, we are proud of the business relationships we have with the timber industry and will work to keep those relationships strong.

At this time, there are more than 62,000 Mississippians employed in the timber industry. You don't have to drive far in this state before you see a log truck or lumber yard. The economic numbers provide strong evidence of the importance of this industry, with exports in wood and woodpulp reaching nearly \$300 million last year.

The work we do to bring jobs and economic growth to Mississippi should be balanced with the work we do to protect our natural infrastructure.

We need to protect the delicate balance between progress and conservation. The timber industry in Mississippi has demonstrated time and again its commitment to this effort, and I appreciate the leadership shown by the industry.

The Mississippi of the 21st century is going to be far different from the Mississippi of the 20th century. No longer is the economy of the state based mainly on agriculture; we are attracting new, technology-based industries that require a more highly skilled workforce.

Yet, the increase in technology-based industries has not harmed our timber industry, nor has it taken our focus away from the value and importance of timber to the state. In recent years, the value of our timber harvests has exceeded \$1 billion per year. Ten percent of Mississippians work in forestry-related jobs.

We will always need and promote our forestry resources. People around the world depend on us and other states for the timber resources to provide homes, furniture and other wood products.

We are working to keep this vital part of our economic infrastructure alive and vibrant, and here's one way we're doing it. As part of the Advantage Mississippi initiative, an aggressive economic development package passed by a special legislative session in 2000, we established the Mississippi Land, Water and Timber Resources Board.

Created to spur the growth of the agricultural industry and promote our natural resources, the Board is made up of civic leaders, local officials and representatives from state agencies.

This Board will also play a crucial role as debate continues on the Canadian Softwood Lumber Agreement. For several years now, this issue has been at the forefront of the U.S. timber industry.

It has also been watched closely here in Mississippi, since Canada is the top export market for Mississippi products. In 2001, our export trade with Canada amounted to nearly \$887 million.

Despite our strong and friendly trade with Canada, we must work to protect the timber industry here at home.

As a member of the Southern Governors Association, I supported a resolution on Canadian lumber subsidies last September, calling on the Bush administration to “encourage open and competitive sales of timber in Canada.”

The role of timber in our economy is vital to our success and I want to keep that role strong.

That's why I signed legislation in this year's regular legislative session to create the Mississippi Institute for Forestry Inventory, to help us develop a means of tracking our forest inventory and maintain this tremendous resource for the future.

In Mississippi, trees are tangible evidence of our economy, our future, and our commitment to the land. We plant trees we may never see harvested, but we do so with the faith that they will be there for another generation.

I appreciate the work – and the faith – each of you brings to this industry and our state. Your commitment to growing and building Mississippi is strong, and that is good for all Mississippians.

Thank you for the invitation to be with you tonight.