

American citizens to EU Commission: “Stop cutting our forests”

Brussels, 11 December 2014

Over 50 000 US citizens are appealing to European Commissioners Arias Cañete and Vella for a change in the EU legislation that has caused a boom in the demand for wood pellets produced from Southern US forests [1]. Their demand is today being delivered to the European Commission by BirdLife Europe and the European Environmental Bureau.

Southern US forests are being logged to feed Europe’s appetite for energy produced by wood pellets burned in biomass power plants. A loophole in European laws designed to promote clean energy has prompted massive demand for wood pellets, leading to the rapid expansion of logging in the Southern US. An appeal by more than 50,000 United States citizens asking the EU to stop supporting the unsustainable use of bioenergy was delivered today to European Commissioners Miguel Arias Cañete and Karmenu Vella, who are in charge of portfolios for energy, climate and environment. The appeal was further supported by five US conservation organizations – Dogwood Alliance, Natural Resources Defense Council, Gulf Restoration Network, Green America and ForestEthics – and, in Europe, by BirdLife Europe and the European Environmental Bureau.

During the ‘National Day of Action to Save our Southern Forests’, citizens gathered and demanded action from the EU to save their local forests. [2]

The growing demand for woody bioenergy has caused a rapid expansion of wood pellet production in the South Eastern US, with more than 30 new pellet mills planned. Citizens are witnessing clear cuts and loggings in biodiversity-rich bottomland hardwood forests, and the logging of whole trees simply to feed European power plants. The EU currently has no sustainability requirements for the kind of wood or biomass burned in order to fulfil renewable energy targets by 2020.

“The accelerating destruction of our forests is disrupting the critical services forests provide as well as threatening the quality of life and the long-term economic viability of our coastal communities and existing forest-dependent businesses. Privately owned forests in the Southern US have practically no legal protection to ensure valuable forests are preserved. We urge the European Commission to acknowledge the growing citizens’ concern” said **Adam Macon, Campaign Director at Dogwood Alliance.**

Peter Lehner, Executive Director, Natural Resources Defense Council added: *“European leaders are usually ahead of the game when it comes to climate solutions—but this is one misguided policy that needs to change. Clean, truly renewable energy comes from sources like wind, solar or geothermal, and energy efficiency. This is where nations should be focusing their energy investments, not subsidizing companies that burn dirty biomass and contribute to the destruction of forests. There are better ways to keep the lights on than burning trees for electricity.”*

“This appeal by American citizens is further evidence that EU bioenergy demand is hitting other countries hard. If this is allowed to grow without safeguards there will be more environmental damage and no reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The Commission must set bioenergy use on the right track when drafting the legislation for the 2030 climate and energy framework”, concluded **Sini Eräjää, EU Bioenergy Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe and at European Environmental Bureau.**

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NOTES TO EDITOR

[1] links to US petition and official letters to Commissioners:

http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/11.12.2014_letters-to-Canete-and-Vella.pdf

[2] US Save our Southern Forests Day of Action Video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwtLj7E0BQ&list=UUoj7pn0GA7J4znb_d6PVuUw

Pictures from Dogwood Alliance available

at: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kfwsK9scgrjd9se/AADFX3IDb1fdiQB9A1rBXL7a?dl=0>