



**JIM DOYLE**  
**GOVERNOR**  
**STATE OF WISCONSIN**

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May 1, 2006

The Honorable Mark Rey  
Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment  
US Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Undersecretary Rey:

I am writing in response to your proposal to sell national forest land to help provide funding to implement the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000. Although the proposal initially involves only 80 acres of federal land in Wisconsin, I find the principle underlying the proposal to be antithetical to good public policy.

The forests of Wisconsin provide a wide array of ecological, economic and social benefits to the people of the State. Their value is only increasing over time as pressures on the resource grow. Our forests have made an amazing recovery from the cutover era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Our forests now fuel one of the largest sectors of our economy, the forest products industry. In addition to the \$22 billion in value from that industry, an additional \$6 billion is generated from forest-based recreation in Wisconsin. When you also consider the array of environmental services provided by our forests – clean water, clean air, habitat for a diversity of plant and animal species, carbon sequestration, to name just a few – the value of our forests becomes inestimable.

Our forest is becoming more fragmented as pressures increase to subdivide and develop forest land. The rapid turnover in our industrial forest lands is symbolic of the volatile condition of the forest products industry and private forest land overall. Just last month I announced a deal to ensure that nearly 65,000 acres of private forest land in Wisconsin would be maintained forever as a working forest open to the public for recreation. This will ensure this forest land is maintained as a large block, generating both environmental benefits and contributing to both the local and statewide economies. To have the federal government turn around and propose selling public forest lands is at odds with what we are trying to accomplish in Wisconsin.

I am not opposed to the concept of disposing of parcels outside the boundary of the national forests that are no longer needed for conservation purposes. However, I believe a more prudent strategy would be to use these lands as trade for lands within your boundary that are privately

held. Consolidating ownership within the national forests should enhance the public benefits that derive from large blocks of forest land, and it facilitates efficient management of those lands.

I am further opposed to selling land to pay for a federal obligation to local schools and roads in communities that lie within and adjacent to the national forests. I believe the role of the federal government is to develop a permanent funding solution to ensure these obligations to local governments are met, not to sell long-term assets for short-term cash. If this is pursued, the people of Wisconsin and the nation lose assets that will only increase in value to the people over time, and fail to realize a long-term solution to the Secure Rural Schools funding problems.

Having once lost most of our forest, we may be more sensitive than others about their immense value to the people of Wisconsin. Selling public forest land to provide short-term cover for a problem funding a commitment to local governments is, simply put, bad public policy.

Federal forest policy should encourage sustainability of federal lands, other public lands and private forest lands. As both federal and state governments strive to ensure that our private forest lands continue to provide the array of public benefits that accrue to all citizens, it is particularly important that we set a good example of what it means to sustain our forests so that future generations can enjoy the same array of ecological, economic and social benefits that we today derive from our forests.

Wisconsin stands ready to work with you to address the issues associated with funding for the Secure Rural Schools program, as well as to further the important work we collectively do to maximize the sustainability of our public and private forest lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Doyle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Doyle  
Governor

Cc: Dale Bosworth, Chief, USDA Forest Service  
Cynthia Swanson, USDA Forest Service  
Wisconsin Council on Forestry  
Scott Hassett, DNR Secretary