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ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD
FAUNA AND FLORA

HON. CHARLES H. TAYLOR

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 3, 1997

Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I insert for the RECORD the following statement which I presented to the House Committee on Resources today:

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CHARLES H. TAYLOR BEFORE THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Committee for this opportunity to provide my thoughts on the upcoming meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). As you are aware, the Clinton Administration has petitioned CITES to list the commercially valuable *S. macrophylla* (Big-Leaf Mahogany) as potentially endangered under Appendix II of the treaty. My interest and experience in this area is two-fold. As you may be aware, I am the only registered forester in Congress, and it is important to me that the policy of the United States on timber issues be informed by sound science and proven principles of forest management.

My concern in this area also derives from the importance of wood products to the economy of North Carolina and the nation. Mahogany has always been prized by consumers for its beauty, functionality, and weather resistance. The production of furniture, decking, and decorative arts represent the highest valued uses of this resource. This translates into good jobs in North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York, Indiana, and many other U.S. states—as well as in range states such as Brazil and Bolivia where economic opportunities are not as abundant. By lending economic value to the forest ecosystems in that region, Mahogany production provides incentives to keep these ecosystems intact. Clearly, all of us should be striving for a sustainable utilization of the Mahogany resources with which this hemisphere has been generously endowed.

I have a number of concerns with the proposal to list Big-Leaf Mahogany under CITES Appendix II, and the leading role of the U.S. delegation in that effort. Most fundamentally, the weight of scientific evidence does not show the species in decline. Unfortunately, for some time now the debate over Mahogany has been guided more by emotion and ideology than facts.

Based on what has been presented in the media and by advocacy groups, many Americans would be surprised to learn that the range of Mahogany is very large, extending from Mexico to Bolivia. Jack Ward Thomas, who until recently headed the U.S. Forest Service, concluded after a comprehensive review of the evidence that Big-Leaf Mahogany is abundant, with an extensive range, and not threatened with extinction.

In all parts of the range, the tree occurs in relatively small quantities in comparison to the total standing timber in the forest, a growth pattern characteristic of many of the species in Latin America. This creates opportunities for selective harvesting in which

the majority of trees in a forest are left healthy and standing. "Range states" are increasingly relying upon such practices, and many U.S. importers of Mahogany insist on shipments from properly managed forests. South American governments are also more aggressively combating illegal clearing, tightening allowable harvests, and repealing tax incentives that had contributed to deforestation. Brazil recently suspended logging permits for two years, and my understanding is that Peru is in the process of implementing a similar restriction.

These facts are acknowledged by the U.S. Forest Service—the recognized tree experts in the U.S. Government. The Forest Service's leading Mahogany expert, Dr. Ariel Lugo has published a detailed critique of the Appendix II listing proposal, and concluded that it is a "poor proposal and a bad example of how science is used by the U.S. Government to guide the management of natural resources." Dr. Lugo notes more specifically that the

*** proposal does not measure up to the standards of science and fairness required to solve complex and contentious issues, does not reflect the current understanding of the ecology and biology of Big-Leaf Mahogany, it is strongly biased, contains inaccurate statements, and ignores available information that would provide decision-makers with a more accurate understanding of the Mahogany issue. For this reason, the proposal is not a useful policy-making document and should be abandoned.

In November 20, 1996 comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), then Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Jack Ward Thomas reached the same conclusions, noting succinctly that "none of the criteria for listing a species on Appendix II are met."

Unfortunately, it appears that the Administration has neglected the informed input of its own experts in favor of a more political approach. The process of formulating a U.S. position has been characterized by haste and the exclusion of divergent views. The USFWS participated in three different gatherings of forestry, timber-trade, and plant and Mahogany experts this fall, but engaged in no substantial discussions of the Mahogany proposal. During these meetings, USFWS had an excellent opportunity to inform the groups that an Appendix II listing proposal for Mahogany was being considered, and to solicit their expertise. This was not done, resulting in a foregone opportunity for informed input and discussion.

Even the scheduling of CITES action on Mahogany appears to reflect political dynamics more than sound fact gathering. Acting on the proposal in June would moot the efforts of the specially-formed CITES Timber Working Group (TWG) which has completed its work and has submitted its report and recommendations to the CITES Standing Committee. It is premature to forward a listing proposal until this group's report and recommendations are received and considered by the Conference of Parties in Zimbabwe in June.

The listing proposal is also premature with respect to the report of an internal study on the Convention's effectiveness which was commissioned by the CITES Standing Committee. The results of this study also will be presented in June. The consultants found (among other things) that certain governments and advocacy groups are disproportionately represented in the work of CITES, and that CITES pays a disproportionate amount of time and effort dealing with the issues surrounding a relatively small number of popular species, such as mahogany.

I am also concerned with the characteristic positions of the range states on restricting trade in mahogany. USFWS claims that

the majority of the range states support the listing of *S. macrophylla*. It is notable that only one nation (Costa Rica) has placed unilateral restrictions on mahogany exports. This is explicitly allowed under Appendix III of CITES. Additionally, it has been reported that only Ecuador expressed support for the Appendix II proposal during the USFWS consultation process, and that Peru and Brazil have registered their strong opposition. The whole CITES proves on mahogany reflects an all too familiar pattern of northern hemisphere advocacy groups dictating resource policy to their southern neighbors.

The handling of the listing petition for Big-Leaf Mahogany could set an unfortunate precedent. The recently revised listing criteria for CITES are being interpreted by advocacy groups very broadly and in a fashion which would allow almost any commercial tree species to have a CITES Appendix I or II listing. There is a widely-held belief that CITES is not a suitable forum for the regulation of widely traded tree species. CITES was never intended for this purpose. If *S. macrophylla* is listed on Appendix II, we expect that many additional species will soon be proposed for listing as well.

Many other species are prime candidates for listing proposals at subsequent CITES meetings. We call attention to the report of the first phase of a study commissioned by the Netherlands CITES Authorities and conducted by the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) that evaluated numerous timber species vis-à-vis the new listing criteria adopted in Fort Lauderdale. Phase one of the study examined 58 species, primarily from Africa and Asia. Of the 58, 41 species overall (29 from Africa alone) were found to qualify for listing in either Appendix I (a complete BAN on trade) or Appendix II (trade allowed but heavily regulated).

Proponents of listing have argued that Appendix II listing is not equivalent to an export ban. However, Appendix II listing would require certification of Mahogany exports as obtained from sustainable forests, and require routing of shipments through CITES-approved ports. This could create additional bureaucratic and logistical burdens, as well as opportunities for corruption in the allocation of permits.

Finally, it is highly questionable that trade restrictions will improve the protection of Mahogany forests, and in fact, they could have the opposite effect. History has shown that people in developing nations will not resign themselves to economic stagnation, but will choose between competing development options. In fact, it is generally recognized that the greatest threat to tropical ecosystems is clearing and burning related to housing, ranching and agriculture. By providing an economic incentive to maintain hardwood forests, responsible timber production forestalls less attractive development options. As Dr. Thomas Lovejoy of the Smithsonian Institution has said, "the key component in preserving and maintaining the tropical forests is to ensure these resources maintain their economic value."

It is for these reasons that I draw the Committee's attention to the Mahogany listing proposal. Appendix II listing by CITES would directly impact the future of the U. S. furniture workers and other American industries that rely on this resource to meet consumers' preferences. Also at stake are the emerging economies of South American nations, with whom the United States hopes to build stronger trading relations in coming years.

I encourage the Administration to reconsider their support for this proposal and to withdraw it from consideration at the upcoming CITES Conference of Parties in Zimbabwe.