

**File Code:** 1910-2

**Date:** June 7, 1999

Dear Colleague:

The 214 million acres of forestland in the South provide an increasingly large portion of the nation's wood and fiber for domestic and export use, while the region's population continues to rapidly increase and expand into formerly forested areas. These factors are creating increased pressures on forests to produce a wide range of forest products and amenities, and to do so in a way that sustains forest productivity, health, and integrity. This challenge demands thoughtful, timely and expert attention if it is to be successfully met.

The USDA Forest Service, in partnership with the US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Tennessee Valley Authority, and southern state forestry agencies, is initiating an assessment of the forest resources of 13 southern states. The assessment will bring together agency and other experts to collect and evaluate the most current information available on the status of the forests; their productivity, ecological diversity, and sustainability. We believe this is a critical first step in meeting the challenge. Attached is a brief description of the project.

Almost 90% of the South's forests belong to and are managed by private landowners. Their input and involvement, and that of a wide variety of forest users will be sought and utilized throughout the assessment process. We're confident that the result will be a thorough and objective compilation and evaluation of information that will prove useful to the private and public sectors in making decisions that affect the region's forest resource and its many users. We anticipate completing the assessment by mid 2001.

While this undertaking is formidable, we look forward to working with our natural resource agency partners and the public to produce a product that should be useful to so many.

Sincerely,

**ELIZABETH ESTILL**  
Regional Forester

**PETER J. ROUSSOPOULOS**  
Station Director