

**Opening Statement for Harris Sherman, Nominee for Undersecretary for Natural Resources
and the Environment, United States Department of Agriculture**

Thank you Madame Chairman. It is a great honor to appear before this Committee regarding my nomination for the position of Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment at USDA.

And Madame Chairman, it is also a great honor to be present today at this historic proceeding where you assume the Chairmanship of this crucial Committee. If confirmed, I very much look forward to working with you in your new capacity and with all the members of this Committee.

Several weeks ago when I received the news that President Obama had nominated me for this position, I was deeply humbled by the honor but also by the degree of responsibility that accompanies the position. I fully realize that the challenges ahead will not be easy but it is an extraordinary opportunity to do good things for our country. If confirmed, I promise to use my strengths, energy, commitment, and good judgment to advance the conservation and public land programs that will fall under my jurisdiction. And I promise to work closely with you and the other committees of Congress as we go forward.

My interest in overseeing the Forest Service and NRCS stems from a lifetime of experiences with public lands and conservation programs. As a child, my parents took me to the mountains outside Denver where we would camp, hike, fish, ski, and jeep. These experiences left an indelible impression on me about the grandeur and importance of our national forests. Later, I twice have had the privilege of serving as Colorado's Director of Natural Resources for two different governors where I have worked on a daily basis with the Forest Service and other federal agencies on complex, challenging resource issues. And between these two stints as DNR director I have represented as an attorney both public and private sector clients in their dealings with federal land management agencies. These experiences, combined with my earlier work with the State Soil Conservation Service and my later work with many land trust conservation organizations, have given me a background that I believe will serve me well in meeting the Forest Service's mission.

Looking forward, there are tremendous challenges regarding our forests, both federal and private, and the conservation programs associated with farms and ranches throughout the country. On the forestry side, many forests are in trouble due to past fire suppression, increasing fuel loads and changes to our climate. As a result, many forests are far more vulnerable to catastrophic fire, disease and invasive species, often in epidemic proportions. We are witnessing far more frequent, intense fires than we have seen in the past. Combining these factors with a growing human population influx within or adjacent to our public and private

forests, it is clear that we have a very challenging situation ahead. How we protect our growing communities from fire danger; protect the watersheds within our forests that supply drinking water to much of our population; protect wildlife species that rely centrally on these forests; and insure that our forests play a critical role as carbon sinks is a herculean responsibility. I believe that Secretary Vilsack's emphasis on restoration of our forests, both federal and non-federal, in a manner that addresses climate change, environmental protection, identifies new markets for wood products, creates jobs, and sustains rural communities provides an excellent framework for moving forward.

It is also important that we take a holistic approach to land conservation issues and fully integrate our approach to both public and private working lands. On the NRCS side of the ledger, I have much to learn but I am excited by the mission and scope of the Agency's charge. Conservation on private working lands plays a significant role in protecting water resources and wildlife habitat, creating jobs through market-based conservation opportunities and providing economic opportunities for rural America. NRCS's watershed protection programs help protect communities from floods – like those we just saw in Georgia. With its comprehensive programs, on-the-ground expertise and powerful technical tools, NRCS is well positioned to help private landowners play a significant role in addressing a variety of the nation's conservation challenges.

Together the Forest Service and NRCS can make a major difference. Never before have agriculture and forestry been more at the forefront of current national policy issues. This is an urgent time to make progress. I am excited by the prospect of devoting my energies to these tasks. I promise you that, if confirmed, I will undertake collaborative efforts involving appropriate stakeholders to find common sense solutions and to come up with answers that will withstand the test of time, becoming durable, longstanding, reliable programs .

Thank you.