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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Today I am pleased to sign S. 3091 -- the National Forest Management Act of 1976 -- an act of great significance to the conservation and management of this Nation's natural resources.

This Act is another important milestone in the evolution of forest policy and conservation law governing our stewardship of a major part of this Nation's great natural heritage, the National Forest System.

In America's first century, our forests and their vast resources seemed to our forefathers inexhaustible. By the late nineteenth century, however, the spirit of expansion and development had led to much abuse of our forest lands. Fires frequently raged out of control over millions of acres, devastating floods were increasing, and our wildlife was being depleted.

With wisdom and timeliness, this Nation began to establish Federal forest reserves to protect our forest lands and to guarantee that future generations would enjoy their benefits. Although the first Federal forester had been hired just a hundred years ago in 1876, it was the establishment of the forest reserves in 1891 which sped the development and practice of professional, scientific forestry on Federal lands.

Today the National Forest System comprises 187 million acres of forest and range lands in 44 States and Puerto Rico, and provides millions of Americans outstanding outdoor recreation and wilderness experiences, as well as many wood products, substantial mineral and energy resources, clean and plentiful water, forage for domestic livestock, and homes for many species of fish, wildlife, and plants.

From its inception, the National Forest System was administered not only to protect forest lands, but also to restore their productivity. After an early period of basic custodial protection, a philosophy evolved to manage the National Forests in such a way that they provided a variety of uses and benefits for present and future generations. This concept of managing lands on a multiple-use, sustained-yield basis, which was confirmed by law in 1960, has always been a challenge. It has led to continuous discussion and debate over the proper mix of resource uses.

In the past decade, the use and management of the timber resources of the National Forests culminated in a court suit challenging the manner in which National Forest timber is harvested. The decision in the Monongahela National Forest case had the initial effect of severely reducing timber sales on all the National Forests in South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia, causing hardships for the forest products industry and its many employees. Applied nationwide, the court's decision would severely restrict the timber supply from all the National Forests, led to the Act before me today.

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While the National Forest Management Act of 1976 evolved from a timber management controversy, the Act goes far beyond a simple remedy of the court's decision. Basically, the Act expands and refines the forest resource assessment and planning requirements of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 -- one of the first Acts I signed upon taking office. This Act reaffirms and further defines the concept of multiple-use, sustained-yield management and outlines policies and procedures for land management planning in the National Forest System. Emphasis throughout the Act is on a balanced consideration of all resources in the land management process.

Of equal importance, this Act guarantees the public full opportunity to participate in National Forest land and resource planning. Finally, it recognizes the importance of scientific research and cooperation with State and local governments and private landowners in achieving wise use and management of the Nation's forest resources.

In my consideration of this legislation, a statement made in 1907 by Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief Forester of the Forest Service, was brought to my attention. Mr. Pinchot said,

"There are many great interests on the National Forests which sometimes conflict a little. They must all be fit into one another so that the machine runs smoothly as a whole. It is often necessary for one man to give way a little here, another a little there. But, by giving way a little at the present, they both profit by it a great deal in the end."

This National Forest Management Act of 1976 is the product of diverse and often conflicting interests. Officials of the Department of Agriculture and its Forest Service, conservation organizations, the timber industry, labor, professional foresters, and members of Congress have worked for months to develop sound legislation. The Nation has profited as a result of their efforts. On balance, I find this Act to be a reasonable compromise of the many competing interests which affect the National Forest System.

Therefore, in this Bicentennial year of our Nation, and in this Centennial Year of Federal Forestry, I am very pleased to sign into law S. 3091, the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

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