

December 7, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Capitol S-146A
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
131 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
125 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Section 432 of the FY23 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill
("Policies Relating to Biomass Energy")

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chairman Merkley, and Ranking Member
Murkowski:

On behalf of more than 100 local, state, and national organizations, representing millions of Americans who strongly support protecting our air, land, water, climate, and biodiversity, we urge you to exclude environmental "poison pill" policy riders from the final FY 2023 appropriations legislation. While we commend the House and Senate for removing many of the longstanding environmental riders from their respective Interior & Environment appropriations bills, we ask that you exclude all the anti-environmental legacy riders from the final appropriations package and refrain from adding new ones.

Specifically, we have concerns with Congress once again including a rider entitled "Policies Relating to Biomass Energy" that directs federal agencies to treat forest biomass energy as "carbon neutral" and "renewable." Every year since 2016, this rider has been included in the final enacted appropriations package, even when the House has omitted this language from its own appropriations bill, or as happened last year, both chambers had passed bills with amended language. It is scientifically indefensible to characterize forest biomass energy as "carbon neutral" and inappropriate for Congress to legislate the science of biomass and climate change.

Multiple credible and deliberative scientific bodies in the US and internationally, including the IPCC and the EPA's own Science Advisory Board, have rejected the notion that burning wood for energy is categorically carbon neutral. On the contrary, the science has continued to mount that promoting forest biomass for energy can have significant damaging impacts on the climate

and our native forest ecosystems. Far from being instantaneously renewable, like wind and solar, it takes decades to centuries for trees to reach maturity. Additionally, we are concerned that facilities where forest bioenergy feedstocks are processed or utilized disproportionately burden low-income communities and communities of color with harmful air pollution and other environmental hazards.

While we appreciate that both the House and the Senate amended the language in their respective bills this year to remove the objectionable “carbon neutrality” language, we believe that the new language is still problematic. Directing federal agencies to establish policies that reflect the “carbon benefits” of forest biomass energy amounts to a continuation of Congressional interference with federal agencies’ scientific process. We therefore urge you to remove the biomass energy provision altogether (Section 432 of the Interior & Environment appropriations bill).

In addition, our groups strongly oppose Senator Manchin’s dirty permitting deal and urge you not to attach this to the final appropriations bill or any other “must-pass” legislation that Congress takes up this year. In addition to fast-tracking fossil fuel infrastructure, stifling community engagement, and undermining bedrock environmental laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act, this proposal could also fast-track large-scale biomass power projects, to the detriment of frontline communities who continue to bear the brunt of harm from polluting energy facilities.

In the coming weeks, Congress has an opportunity to pass a clean budget that contains no harmful or extraneous policy riders. We appreciate the progress the Committees have made this year and urge lawmakers to keep anti-environmental provisions out of the FY 2023 omnibus entirely, whether they are new this year or carried forward from previous appropriations bills.

Sincerely,

2 Degrees Northampton
350 Eugene
350 Seattle
350 Triangle
350 Wenatchee
350PDX
A Beautiful Future Climate Healing Chorus
Anthropocene Alliance
Athens County's Future Action Network
Battle Creek Alliance & Defiance Canyon
Raptor Rescue
Bee Friendly Williamstown
Bergen County Green Party
Biofuelwatch
Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project
California Communities Against Toxics

Center for Biological Diversity
Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living
Citizens United for Renewable Energy (CURE)
Clean Energy Action
CleanAIRE NC
Climate Action Group, Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence
Climate Action Now, Western Mass
Climate Conversations NCW
Climate Reality Project Northern Colorado
Climate Writers
CO Dem Party - Energy and Environmental Initiative
Coastal Plain Conservation Group

Concerned Citizens of Franklin County
Council on Intelligent Energy &
Conservation Policy
Cultivator, Inc.
Dayenu of Western MA
Dogwood Alliance
Earth Action, Inc.
Earth Ethics, Inc.
ecoAmerica
Education, Economics, Environmental,
Climate and Health Organization
(EEECHO)
Elders Climate Action
Elders Climate Action - Massachusetts
Empower Our Future
Environmental Protection Information
Center- EPIC
FCCPR Climate Crisis Task Force
Forest Carbon Coalition
Forest Keeper
Forests Forever
Friends of Big Ivy
Friends of the Clearwater
Friends of the Earth
Gallatin Wildlife Association
Gedakina
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives
(GAIA)
Green Belt Movement International - NA
Green Cove Defense Committee
Greening Greenfield
GreenLatinos
Greenpeace USA
Hilltown Anti-Herbicide Coalition (HA-HC)
Hispanic Access Foundation
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater
I Heart Pisgah
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
John Muir Project
Last Tree Laws
Los Padres ForestWatch
Massachusetts Forest Watch
Mighty Earth

Mothers & Others For Clean Air
New Progressive Alliance
NJ Forest Watch
North Country Earth Action
North Parish UU Climate Justice Group
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
NY/NJ Environmental Watch
Occupy Bergen County (New Jersey)
Old-Growth Forest Network
On Your Side Health
Oregon Wild
Organized Uplifting Resources & Strategies
(OURS)
Partnership for Policy Integrity
pivot point
Protect the Adirondacks!
Rachel Carson Council
Resist the Pipeline
RESTORE: The North Woods
Save Massachusetts Forests
Sierra Club
Slingshot
SmogFree Denver
Southern Forests Conservation Coalition
Springfield Climate Justice Coalition
Spruill Farm Conservation Project
Standing Trees
Taproot Earth
The Clinch Coalition
The Enviro Show
The Peanut Factory, Inc.
The Wei LLC
Umpqua Watersheds
Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic
Community
Unite North Metro Denver
United For Clean Energy
United Plant Savers
Vermonters for a Clean Environment
Wild Heritage
Wild Nature Institute
WildEarth Guardians
Williams Community Forest Project
Yaak Valley Forest Council