

**Wesley Langdale - Public Testimony**  
**Special Council on Tax Reform and Fairness for Georgians**  
**Wednesday, September 1, 2010**  
**Valdosta, Georgia – Wiregrass Technical College**

My name is Wesley Langdale. I am the Chairman of the Board of the Georgia Forestry Commission, a member of the board of the Georgia Forestry Association, and President of The Langdale Company. I want to thank you for your service on this critically important Special Council.

Beginning with one crop of timber on the western edge of the Okefenokee Swamp in 1894, The Langdale Company has grown through five generations of our family to include forestry, forest products and other businesses. Last year, we planted our one hundred millionth seedling.

For more than a century, our company and others like us have focused on developing new markets and creating jobs from the working forest. Our industry has turned trees into turpentine then lumber, poles, posts, panels – and today a diverse array of forest products. Our challenge today is the same as it has been for 116 years: How do we sustain our natural resources to continue to create economic opportunity – for our company, our employees and our state?

As foresters and forest product manufacturers, we are part of Georgia's second largest industry, which annually injects \$28.7 billion into the state's economy and employs 128,000 Georgians. The forest industry provides an average of \$539 million in state tax revenues each year.

Georgia is the home of 141 wood product manufacturing facilities, including 12 pulp mills, 9 engineered-wood product mills, and 83 saw mills. Add to this over 1,200 secondary manufacturers that further convert manufactured wood products into value-added products such as furniture, moulding, paper products, containers, cabinetry and other products. In addition, 1,200 logging contractors ensure a constant flow of raw material from forests to mills. And another 200 vendors offer a variety of reforestation and site preparation services.

We are proud that in addition to all of these forestry and forest product company employees, thousands of other Georgians are employed at trucking companies, railroads, the port and brokers, wholesalers and retailers.

Of Georgia's 37 million acres of land area, our state has 24.4 million acres of timberland available for commercial use – more than any other state in the nation. So I submit to you that Georgia's working forest is as important to economic development in our state as the airport in Atlanta and the port in Savannah.

Even in this challenging economic time, we are bullish on the future of the working forest. What will be the new markets for trees in the coming decades? We can only begin to imagine the possibilities that lie ahead. Today we're seeing the beginning of the next emerging market for the forest. Georgia's timber harvests produce an average of six million green tons of logging residues annually. Much of this can be collected to produce bioenergy. Already we are turning biomass from the forest floor and residue from forest product manufacturing into energy to more efficiently power our manufacturing facilities.

Georgia is a leader in the emerging bioenergy industry. We rank third in the nation for potential biomass energy. Georgia has more than \$2 billion worth of active renewable energy-related projects that are projected to drive nearly \$5 billion dollars into the state's economy over the next 10 years – and add an additional 2,000 jobs within the new facilities and forestry operations to support them by 2015.

And Georgia's working forest contributes to our state's economic development in another important way: Georgia needs clean air and clean water to continue to attract businesses to our state.

Georgia's working forest is a giant air-and water-cleaning machine. Trees have been called the lungs of the planet. They breathe in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and make carbohydrates that are used for plant growth. And they breathe out oxygen. Trees also help create rain, drawing water from the soil and returning it to the air – cleaning it in the process. Two out of every three raindrops that fall on our state are filtered by the forests.

If we fail to support Georgia's forestry and forest product industry, our state's timberland will become vulnerable to more and more sprawling development. This loss of trees will decrease the forest's capacity to clean the air and water. Without clean air and water, existing Georgia businesses cannot grow, and we will be unable to attract new businesses to our state. As you know, the loss of new and existing businesses will result in the loss of jobs, which we all want to avoid at all costs.

We recognize the importance of reviewing and reforming our tax system. We appreciate everything that our local and state governments are doing to work as efficiently as possible within limited resources – just as we are doing in the private sector. We wish you patience and wisdom in your crucial analyses. We simply ask you to remember as you deliberate your recommendations:

- Foresters and forest product manufacturers are turning Georgia's most plentiful, renewable, natural resource – trees – into jobs and tax dollars.
- We are cleaning our state's air and water to make Georgia an inviting place for new businesses.
- And at a time of great economic uncertainty, we are an industry that has created new markets for more than a century. As we look to the future, with the state's continued support, new markets and new jobs lie ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Distinguished Members of the Council, for this opportunity to provide public comment on this important state and local topic.