

MEMO: Tropical Hardwoods in NYC and Forest Conservation

TO: Mayor de Blasio and the Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resilience

FROM: Wildlife Conservation Society and Wood at Work NYC

DATE: August 15, 2016

Executive Summary

Over the last 30 years, awareness of tropical forest conservation has increased tremendously. Deforestation is directly linked to serious issues such as global warming, biodiversity loss, and diminished human well-being. Concerned citizens and governments are asking how they can help. Countless conservation organizations around the world are conducting research, creating programs, and providing guidance to stop and reverse tropical deforestation. The City has recognized its global leadership role in this sphere, which is reflected in the ambitious sustainability and resiliency goals it has defined in the OneNYC plan.

This memo aims to help the City develop a policy on the use of tropical timber that incorporates the latest science on tropical forest conservation and reflects the experience of the world's major conservation organizations. Drawing on this research and experience, we address the following questions:

1. Is it legal for NYC to purchase tropical hardwoods for City projects?

- Yes. State law permits the City to use many tropical hardwood species without restriction.
- Even for restricted species, the law provides an exception for wood from sustainably managed forests, in order to support those who manage tropical forests responsibly.

2. How does harvesting certified sustainably sourced tropical hardwood impact rainforests?

- Well-managed forests have the capacity to produce timber sustainably – without diminishing forest cover or ecological integrity – while providing vital economic incentives for local people to keep forests standing.
- By sourcing timber from well-managed tropical forests, New York City can play a proactive role to conserve tropical forests, support local livelihoods, and mitigate climate change, thereby advancing the City's goals of sustainability, resiliency, and equity.

3. Who supports the City using certified sustainably sourced tropical hardwood?

- A diverse group of conservation organizations and globally recognized conservation leaders support New York taking a proactive procurement approach to tropical timber.
- Experts now recognize wood as the most sustainable building material in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and renewability, and an important material for climate change mitigation.

1. Is it legal for NYC to purchase tropical hardwoods for City projects?

Current New York City policy permits the City to use certified sustainable tropical hardwood

A 2008 memo produced as part of former Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC, often referred to as the *Tropical Hardwood Reduction Plan*, explored how the City could reduce the impact of its purchasing decisions on tropical forests. This document has frequently been misunderstood to mean that the City may not procure tropical hardwood. In fact, the memorandum recommended certified sustainable tropical hardwoods as one way to advance the City's sustainability goals, but cited price and availability as barriers to their use. Specifically, the memorandum concluded that because New York State General Municipal Law §103 has been interpreted to prohibit municipalities from considering "social goals" in the procurement process, certified wood may not be able to compete with non-certified wood (which is sometimes cheaper because its price does not reflect its true cost).

However, timber from certified sustainable tropical hardwoods is now widely available: several international certification organizations, including the gold-standard Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), guarantee that certified products meet stringent environmental and social standards, and numerous companies supply certified wood in the New York City area. Certified woods are also often price-competitive, as the market for such products has matured significantly in recent years.

New York State law permits the City to use certified sustainable tropical hardwood

Section 165 of the State Finance Law prohibits government entities within New York State from purchasing certain species of tropical hardwood. However, the law does not prohibit all tropical timber – only the handful of species that appear on its list. The 2008 PlaNYC memo reached this same conclusion, as did the New York Attorney General in an analysis provided to the New York City Housing Authority shortly after §165 was enacted. The City is legally permitted to source any species of hardwoods that do not appear on that list.

Furthermore, the law clearly states that the prohibition does not apply "to any hardwoods purchased from a sustained, managed forest." As the Attorney General's analysis pointed out, this exception was included to support producers who manage tropical forests responsibly. As noted above, certified sustainable hardwoods from such sources are now commonplace. Even for the species on the §165 list, the City can comply with the law by obtaining certified sustainable wood.

Procurement challenges and opportunities

While certified sustainable tropical timber may be available at a cost competitive with uncertified wood, in instances where this is not the case there are innovative alternatives available to the City to deal with any price premium on certified wood. For example, the Wildlife Conservation Society, in partnership with several other New York City-based organizations, has developed the [Brooklyn Bridge Forest](#) project, an initiative that would enable New Yorkers to

sponsor each of the 11,000 boards that will soon be needed to renovate the Brooklyn Bridge Promenade. The new boards would be sourced from a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified forest in Guatemala. Through the sponsorship program, New York City would receive the boards at no cost, avoiding any issue with General Municipal Law §103. Similar crowdfunding initiatives could be developed for other landmarks such as the Coney Island Boardwalk, encouraging civic engagement and enabling the City to maintain the historical integrity of its wooden structures.

2. How does certified sustainably sourced tropical hardwood impact rainforests?

Sustainably managed forests are a tool for conservation

Most people associate timber harvesting with forest destruction – after all, cutting trees seems like a logical step towards deforestation, a perception that has been reinforced through many documentaries and the popular media. The two have also been conflated in debates about use of tropical hardwood in New York City. It is true that *illegal* and *unsustainable* logging are responsible for forest destruction and degradation, sometimes initiating a process of forest colonization and further destruction via logging access roads. However, sustainably managed, certified forests (including community-managed forests) can serve as tools for conservation, significantly contributing to global forest and wildlife conservation. In fact, in tropical lowland Latin America, conversion for agriculture – especially cattle ranching – is the primary driver of deforestation. By adding value to forests, low-impact timber harvesting provides an incentive for people to conserve forests rather than pursue other, more destructive options. At the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP 21, held in Paris, all 196 parties recognized the “the role of sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks; as well as alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests.”

Tropical forests are important to NYC

There is global agreement that tropical forests play a key role in the resiliency and sustainability of coastal cities such as New York City. Forests contain a major part of the carbon stored in the world’s terrestrial ecosystems (Keith et al. 2009; Mackey et al. 2015). Keeping forests intact preserves this carbon sink, thereby helping mitigate global climate change and reducing risks associated with climate-related hazards such as floods, sea-level rise and cyclones (World Bank 2009). Given OneNYC’s commitment to reduce the City’s greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by the year 2050 (dubbed “80 X 50”), proactive and no-cost efforts to procure materials for New York City that benefit global forest conservation can help the City achieve existing sustainability and resiliency goals in a responsible and equitable manner.

In addition to mitigating global climate change, conserving tropical forests also:

- Regulates local climate (Pielke et al. 2011);
- Provides watershed services (water quality and quantity, erosion control);

- Protects biodiversity (Gibson et al. 2011, Ripple et al. 2014);
- Protects important cultural values, such as wilderness, aesthetics, threatened languages and traditional lifestyles (Gorenflo et al. 2012).

Impacts and benefits of sustainably managed forests

A substantial literature attests to the conservation, carbon, biodiversity, and livelihoods benefits of sustainably managed forests. For example, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified forests of Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve – the forest site proposed to provide tropical hardwood for the Brooklyn Bridge Forest project – are harvested at some of the lowest intensities worldwide (1-2 trees per acre) and with extremely low-impact management techniques such as directional felling, using lightweight equipment, a 40-year cutting cycle, and minimum cutting diameters. Through an [extensive multi-year study](#), the Wildlife Conservation Society documented that the ecological impacts of such harvests are nearly undetectable. The same study found high densities of at-risk wildlife such as the [jaguar](#) in managed forests (Radachowsky et al. 2004).

Rather than leading to deforestation, this type of forest management creates jobs for community members, decreasing the likelihood of other land-use practices such as clearing forests for cattle ranching. Selective timber harvests also provide an incentive and resources for community members to protect their forests against forest fires, illegal logging, and illegal colonization ([Radachowsky et al. 2012](#)). Indeed, multiple studies from around the world have shown that well-managed community forests with sustainable, low-intensity logging have been found to be more effective than national parks at protecting forests (Bray et al. 2008, Persha et al. 2011).

By sourcing wood from well-managed tropical forests, New York City can play a proactive role in global forest conservation, supporting local livelihoods and mitigating climate change.

3. Who supports the City using certified sustainably sourced tropical hardwood?

Tropical forest conservation agencies, researchers, and advocates from around the world are now promoting and developing best practices for sourcing wood to conserve forests. In the fall of 2015, a group of leaders in this field convened a conference, *Wood at Work*, in New York City to discuss how to make wood work for forests from conservation, policy, and design perspectives. Participants representing over two dozen organizations co-created and signed the following resolution:

1. New York and other cities are centers of leadership, policy innovation, culture, arts, and inspiration, and their decisions impact and influence global trends.

2. Thriving forest systems are a critical part of mitigating global climate change, as well as maintaining biodiversity, community livelihoods and identity, human health, and broader ecosystem services.

3. *The use of sustainably harvested wood from well-managed, certified forest systems (including community-managed forests) can significantly contribute to global forest and wildlife conservation and maintain the aesthetic and architectural qualities that only wood can provide.*

4. *We suggest that New York and other cities create policies to proactively promote the use of responsibly sourced wood in City building projects and infrastructure as part of their climate change initiatives, and to build civic awareness about the global importance of forests.*

Signatories and supporters of this resolution include:

[Arun Agrawal, Ph.D.](#), Coordinator of International Forestry Resources and Institutions, University of Michigan, arunagra@umich.edu;

[Doug Boucher, Ph.D.](#), current advisor and previous director of the Tropical Forest and Climate Initiative from the Union of Concerned Scientists, dboucher@ucsusa.org;

[John Calvelli](#), Executive Vice President for Public Affairs at the Wildlife Conservation Society, jcalvelli@wcs.org;

[Robin Chazdon, Ph.D.](#), founder of PARTNERS reforestation network and world-renown tropical forest ecologist, partnersrcn@gmail.com;

[William Keeton, Ph.D.](#), Professor of Forest Ecology and Forestry, The Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Vermont, wkeeton@uvm.edu;

[Lars Laestadius](#), Ph.D., former Senior Associate at the World Resources Institute, lars.h.laestadius@gmail.com;

[Charles McNeill, Ph.D.](#), Senior Advisor, Forests and Climate, United Nations Development Programme, charles.mcneill@undp.org.

[Frances Seymour, MPA](#), Senior Fellow at the [Center for Global Development](#), and a Senior Advisor to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Former director of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR);

[Jeremy Radachowsky, Ph.D.](#), Director, Mesoamerica and Western Caribbean at Wildlife Conservation Society - [WCS](#) (*Wildlife Conservation Society*), jradachowsky@wcs.org ;

Joshua Tosteson, Senior Consultant for Rainforest Alliance, jtosteson@ra.org;

[Sarah Jane Wilson, Ph.D.](#), Postdoctoral Research Fellow, International Forestry Resources and Institutions, University of Michigan, sjwil@umich.edu.

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Letters of Support

In the next section, please find letters of support for the use of sustainably sourced tropical hardwood in NYC from the following tropical forest and conservation experts:

Charles McNeill, Ph.D.

Charles McNeill manages the Environment Program Team within the United Nations Development Programme. He oversees the development, resource mobilization and implementation of UNDP's Environment Global Program and its Thematic Trust Fund, which provide support to UNDP's 135 country offices around the world in UNDP priority areas, including biodiversity and ecosystem services, climate change, environmental governance, poverty-environment linkages, and community-based activities. Dr. McNeill also heads UNDP's program on biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction, and UNDP's participation in the Convention on Biological Diversity. He oversees UNDP's work on the Equator Initiative, a multi-partner effort to identify and disseminate information about, and build capacity for, successful community initiatives in the Equatorial belt to reduce poverty through the protection and wise use of biodiversity. Prior to these roles, Dr. McNeill also helped establish and build UNDP's first major environment program. He also served as Director of Strategic Initiatives for The Hunger Project, and has held several academic posts addressing a range of environmental and development issues.

Frances Seymour, MPA

Frances Seymour is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Development based in Washington, DC, and a Senior Advisor to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. At CGD, she is co-authoring a book, *Why Forests? Why Now? The Science, Economics and Politics of Tropical Forests and Climate Change*. In 2013, she was awarded France's Order of Agricultural Merit. Ms. Seymour served as Director General of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) from 2006-2012, an international organization aimed at promoting forest health and human well-being, headquartered in Indonesia. She led the development of a new strategy for CIFOR, guided the launch of the new CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry, and contributed to multiple publications on forests and climate change. Prior to CIFOR, Ms. Seymour was the founding director of the Institutions and Governance Program at the World Resources Institute (WRI), and served as Director of Development Assistance Policy at World Wildlife Fund, where she led research and outreach focused on mainstreaming environmental considerations into development finance. Early in her career, she spent five years with the Ford Foundation in Indonesia, where her grant-making focused on community forestry and human rights.

Charles Peters, Ph.D.

Charles Peters is a Curator of Botany at the Institute of Economic Botany, New York Botanical Gardens. His research, which is done in close collaboration with local forest communities, focuses on the ecology, use, and management of tropical forest resources. He has conducted

long-term field research in the Peruvian Amazon, Papua New Guinea, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Veracruz, Mexico, and has directed community forestry projects in Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Uganda, and Cameroon. In addition to his position at NYBG, he is an Associate Professor of Tropical Ecology at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies of Yale University, an Adjunct Senior Research Scientist at the Center for Environmental Research and Conservation (CERC) of Columbia University, and editor of the monograph series *Advances in Economic Botany*. He holds a Ph.D. in Forestry from Yale University.

Daniel Nepstad, Ph.D.

Daniel Nepstad is the Executive Director at Earth Innovation Institute. He has worked in the Amazon for 30 years studying the effects of climate change, policy, and land use on Amazon forests, and was the Founding President of the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM). A world authority on REDD and low-emission rural development, he was previously Senior Scientist at Woods Hole Research Center, and the Chief Program Officer of Environmental Conservation at the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Dr. Nepstad is co-founder of Aliança da Terra, and was a founding board member of the Round Table for Responsible Soy. Today he serves on the Board of Directors of Forest Trends, the Steering Committee of the Solidaridad Farmer Support Program, and the Science Committee of the Brazilian state of Acre's REDD program. He has also served on the REDD Offset Working Group of California, the External Advisory Group of the World Bank Forest Section, and was a Lead Author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 5th Annual Assessment report.

Peter Pinchot, M.Sc.

Peter Pinchot is the a Senior Fellow at the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, Director of the Institute's Ecomadera Project in Ecuador and President of Ecomadera Forest Conservation, which both work to create economic alternatives to rapid deforestation. Mr. Pinchot is directing the Pinchot Institute's program focused on developing a sustainable silviculture and conservation strategy for native forests. His work Includes studies in forest regeneration, timber harvesting, biodiversity conservation, and FSC certification. He is also an entrepreneur for Ecomadera, a hybrid business venture that combines community leadership, professional business and technical management, private investment, and NGO oversight to create a sustainable local economy based on forest conservation. Mr. Pinchot holds a Masters in Environmental Studies from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Jeremy Radachowsky, Ph.D.

Jeremy Radachowsky is Regional Director for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Mesoamerica and Western Caribbean Program. He has worked in Central America for over fifteen years on community ecology, ecological monitoring, conservation planning, adaptive management, law enforcement monitoring, environmental governance, and multi-stakeholder negotiation. Dr. Radachowsky has conducted in-depth studies, including his Master's thesis, on the effects of FSC-certified logging on wildlife in tropical forests.



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

August 11, 2016

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

Over the past thirty years, I have worked with a variety of different community groups to sustainably manage tropical forests. One lesson from my work has been very clear. If there is a reliable market for local forest resources – either timber or non-timber resources – the forest has a value to the community and there is a strong incentive to conserve and sustainably manage it. If, on the other hand, there is no good market for forest products, the community will start looking for something more profitable to do with their forest lands. This “more profitable” form of land-use invariably involves deforestation. Restricting the purchase of tropical timber removes a powerful incentive for rural communities to take care of their forests.

I would urge New York City to adopt a more nuanced policy concerning the use of tropical timbers. Sourcing certified timber from well-managed tropical forests would actually promote forest conservation, mitigate climate change, and support sustainable development. Perhaps most importantly, it would allow forest communities that have a demonstrated history of protecting and caring for their forests to continue to do so.

Sincerely,

Charles M. Peters, PhD,
Kate E. Tode Curator of Botany
Editor, *Advances in Economic Botany*
The New York Botanical Garden
Bronx, New York 10458



**Earth
Innovation
Institute**

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

August 15, 2016

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

Earth Innovation Institute understands that New York City is creating an updated policy on the use of tropical hardwoods in city infrastructure. Our organization has worked on tropical forest conservation for many years, and we would like to offer our perspective on this issue: While the tropical timber trade has contributed to deforestation, a proactive policy of sourcing only from well-managed forests can actually help protect the environment, by providing people in the tropics with an incentive to manage their forests for the long term. We urge the City to ***develop a policy that shuns irresponsibly sourced tropical timber while permitting the use of certified timber*** whose purchase helps conserve forests and wildlife, mitigate climate change, and support sustainable development.

Earth Innovation Institute advances climate-friendly rural development through innovative approaches to sustainable farming, forestry and fisheries in tropical regions around the world. Our organization and our partners work with hundreds of responsible community-based forest initiatives that are important sources of legal and sustainably produced timber products, as well as protectors of forests and scarce sources of formal employment. These small businesses compete everyday with illegal operations that dodge taxes, degrade forests, and mistreat their workers. The city of New York can choose to support these alternative businesses and send a message about its values through a policy of choosing tropical timber from certified responsible forest management operations.

Our organization endorses the use of certified tropical timber from well-managed forests and urges the City to approve its use in city infrastructure projects. I would be happy to answer any questions regarding community forest management operations in the tropics.

Sincerely,

Daniel Nepstad, PhD
Executive Director

12 August 2016

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

I write to encourage the City of New York to contribute to the conservation of tropical forests by providing a market for sustainably sourced tropical timber.

Over the last thirty years, I have been involved in various efforts to conserve tropical forests, including six years as head of a global forest policy research center based in Indonesia. I am also co-author of a forthcoming book, *Why Forests? Why Now? The Science, the economics, and the politics of tropical forests and climate change* to be published by Brookings Institution Press later this year.

I am convinced that a key role for rich countries to play in conserving tropical forests is to provide markets for sustainably-produced forest goods and services. Demand for such products can provide local communities with incentives to keep forests standing. In the absence of such incentives, the world's forests are increasingly being converted to other uses, especially commercial-scale agriculture to produce globally traded commodities including beef, soy, and palm oil, with devastating consequences for indigenous cultures and global climate stability.

Certainly consumers in rich countries must shun tropical timber that is illegally or unsustainably produced. But I believe that it is possible to source certified timber from well-managed, community-based enterprises in ways that contribute to protecting the environment and provide local people with forest-friendly development alternatives. Indeed, my husband and I have chosen to source timber for a new house we are constructing in Washington, D.C., with wood from such an enterprise in Guatemala.

I hope that the City will join us in providing a market for sustainably sourced tropical timber, and use its significant purchasing power to send a signal to sustainable forest enterprises that their efforts to keep forests standing will be rewarded.

Sincerely,



Frances J. Seymour
Senior Fellow
Center for Global Development, Washington, D.C.
Former Director General, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)



ECOMADERA
FOREST CONSERVATION

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

EcoMadera Forest Conservation recently learned that the City is re-evaluating its policy on the use of tropical timber in urban infrastructure projects. Our organization has worked on tropical forest conservation and management for many years, and would like to offer our perspective on this issue. While the tropical timber trade has contributed to deforestation, a proactive policy of sourcing only from well-managed forests can actually help protect the environment by providing forest communities in the tropics with an incentive to manage their forests sustainably for the long-term. We urge the City to adopt a policy that permits the use of certified timber sourced from well-managed forests, the purchase of which helps conserve forests and wildlife, mitigate climate change, and support sustainable development.

EcoMadera Forest Conservation has worked for 15 years with forest communities in Ecuador. We help communities make the transition from illegal logging and clearing their forests for agriculture, to conservation and sustainable forest management. We also help them establish local manufacturing of valuable hardwood products for local and international markets. By building a strong forest products economy, which can compete economically with the spread of African Oil palm plantations and cattle pasture, EcoMadera has been able to dramatically reduce the rate of deforestation in the region where it operates.

Globally, the greatest cause of tropical deforestation is not cutting trees for timber. Rather, it is the fact that land is often more valuable cleared for pasture and commodity crops than left as forest. Simply refusing to buy tropical timber - regardless of its source - does nothing to address this root cause. On the other hand, by supporting sustainable forest management, cities can help create alternative livelihoods for local people. New York City, with its vast purchasing power and cultural influence, is in a key position to help turn the tide. Policies that encourage the use of sustainably sourced timber will send a powerful signal that the City cares about - and is taking action on - tropical deforestation. Such policies would complement the City's other public commitments on climate change and environmental justice, while enabling the City to renew some of its most renowned wooden structures using traditional and extremely durable tropical hardwood.

EcoMadera Forest Conservation thus endorses the use of certified tropical timber from well-managed forests and urges the City to approve its use in city infrastructure projects. As an experienced tropical forest manager, I would be happy to meet with City leaders to discuss strategies and practices to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Pinchot', written in a cursive style.

Peter Pinchot
CEO, EcoMadera Forest Conservation
Ecuador Programs Manager, Pinchot Institute for Conservation
132 Santa Fe Avenue
Hamden, CT 0657

Ecuador office:
Verdecanandé S.A.
Inglaterra E3-263 y Amazonas
Quito, Ecuador



The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Bronx, New York, 14 August 2016

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) wholeheartedly supports New York City's use of tropical hardwoods obtained from certified, sustainably-managed tropical forests.

WCS is a New York City-based organization whose mission is to save wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. Through our work around the world, we have seen that adding value to standing forests through timber and non-timber forest products provides both an incentive and the financial resources necessary to conserve forests and their wildlife over the long term. Furthermore, when such links are made with community forest managers, local forest-based livelihoods are also improved.

Many years ago, we were skeptical about the impacts of certified logging. However, during the past 15 years, we have conducted numerous in-depth studies and scientifically verified that well-managed low-impact timber harvesting benefits forests, wildlife, and local people. In fact, we are so convinced that this is a good idea for forest and wildlife that we have begun using sustainably-sourced tropical hardwood from Guatemala in our own facilities at New York City's four zoos and the New York Aquarium.

In an era of globalized markets and climate change, the purchasing decisions of individuals and institutions have important implications on the rest of the world. Cities play an especially important role in defining global trends – both due to large-scale purchasing power and as leaders in global policy change.

We hope that New York City capitalizes on this opportunity to use wise purchasing decisions to take the lead in addressing such global challenges as forest conservation and climate change, while also achieving its own goals of equity, sustainability, and resiliency.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Radachowsky, Ph.D.
Director, Mesoamerica and Western Caribbean Program
Wildlife Conservation Society



February 15, 2016

Nilda Mesa
Director
NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability
253 Broadway – 7th Floor, New York, NY 10007

Dear Ms Mesa,

We recently met leaders of the Brooklyn Bridge Forest project at the Yale conference of the International Society for Tropical Forestry and we are writing now to endorse the project, which closely reflect the goals of the United Nations Development Programme and its Equator Initiative.

By integrating sustainable consumption in New York with global forest protection in an inclusive and equitable manner, the Brooklyn Bridge Forest project exemplifies issues of special importance for the UN, and fits seamlessly into the recently ratified Sustainable Development Goals. It is exciting to see how New York City might be able to take a proactive role in global forest conservation at this critical time in history through its own sustainability initiatives.

It is extremely encouraging that the project incorporates the community of Uaxactun, Guatemala - a UN Equator Prize winner recognized in 2002 for the sustainable management of its forest, which just happens to be the same size as New York's five boroughs.

The Equator Initiative brings together the United Nations, governments, civil society, businesses and grassroots organizations to recognize and advance local sustainable development solutions for people, nature and resilient communities. The Equator Initiative seeks to:

- *Recognize the success* of local and indigenous initiatives,
- *Create opportunities and platforms* to share knowledge and good practice,
- *Inform policy* to foster an enabling environment for local and indigenous community action, and
- *Develop the capacity* of local and indigenous initiatives to scale-up their impact.

As we see it the Brooklyn Bridge Forest is poised to further these objectives, integrating livelihoods protection with the conservation of vital forests in the tropics. It also involves citizens of New York City in this cause in a dynamic, active and transparent way.

UNDP endorses the project and hopes that the City will approve its implementation. We would be happy to meet with City leaders to discuss the project and the potential role of UNDP in its development and rollout.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Ian McNeill".

Charles Ian McNeill, Ph.D.
Senior Advisor, Forests and Climate
United Nations Development Programme
304 East 45th Street, New York, NY 10017
Tel: 646-431-8038, Email: charles.mcneill@undp.org



FORD FOUNDATION

*Working with Visionaries on the
Frontlines of Social Change Worldwide*

Dear Mayor de Blasio

The Ford Foundation recently learned that the City is reevaluating its policy on the use of tropical timber. Our organization has worked on tropical forest conservation by Indigenous Peoples and local communities for many years, and we would like to offer our perspective on this issue: While the illegal and industrial tropical timber trade has contributed to deforestation, a proactive policy of sourcing only from sustainably certified, legal, and better still community-managed forests can help protect the environment and give livelihoods to peoples which still have traditional and long term rights to their forests and lands. We urge the City to develop a policy that shuns irresponsibly sourced tropical timber while permitting the use of certified timber whose purchase helps conserve forests and supports local peoples who are actively managing their forests. This would have the added benefits of mitigating climate change, and supporting local sustainable development in poor countries.

At the Ford Foundation we are concerned with strengthening and securing forest and land tenure for marginalised ethnic minorities and remote communities that have little other opportunities. For this reason we work with other philanthropic Foundations in the Climate and Land Alliance. Globally, the greatest cause of tropical forest loss is not the cutting of trees for legally sourced timber. The main driver of deforestation is land clearing for large-scale exported-oriented commercial agriculture. This contributes to carbon emissions and climate change. New York City, with its vast purchasing power and cultural influence, is in a position to help turn the tide, and make a public commitment to support local communities that are protecting and managing their forests. Where communities and indigenous peoples manage their forests and earn a living from them, the forests are better protected than under other management regimes. In other words, purchasing timber from these communities would be to demonstrate support is a socially just, climate solution, while at the same time enabling the City to renew renowned wooden structures using traditional and extremely durable tropical hardwood, and raise awareness about the communities of origin.

I would be happy to meet with City leaders to discuss this issue.

Sincerely,

Penny Davies
Program Officer, Ford Foundation
Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA)
P.davies@fordfoundation.org



15 August 2016

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

The Overbrook Foundation, a fifty-year-old private philanthropic foundation based in midtown Manhattan, has learned that the City is reevaluating its policy on the use of tropical timber. Our foundation has supported tropical forest conservation for many years, and we would humbly like to offer our point of view as you carry on your discussions.

It is clear that for decades the legal and illegal trade in tropical woods has been a major factor in the destruction of the world's tropical forests. From Asia and Africa to the heart of the Amazon, rampant deforestation is unnecessarily driving scores of species and indigenous peoples to extinction.

At the same time, in pockets of the tropics, we have seen encouraging glimmers of best management practices where local and indigenous communities are doing an outstanding job managing their forests for the long term while maintaining the integrity of forest ecosystems. While there have been too many examples of bad forest management, it is critical that we encourage and support those communities and companies that manage their forests well. Indeed, we need to do all we can to highlight these practices and try to replicate them around the world.

We at Overbrook believe that the proactive policy of sourcing from well-managed forests encourages conservation by providing people in the tropics with an incentive to better manage their natural resources for the long term. Indeed, our foundation has supported efforts of this kind for years and years. We know that this works, works well and creates a fantastic long-term best management incentive. Consequently, we urge the City to adopt a forward thinking policy that permits the use of certified timber sourced from well-managed forests, the purchase of which helps conserve forests and wildlife, mitigate climate change, and support sustainable development.

Over the past three decades we have seen almost every possible option for conserving tropical forests, from boycotts to creative ecosystem conservation projects. We know that not placing and keeping an economic reason to maintain forests is a nonstarter. That is, without mechanisms to keep forests standing and supporting the communities of those who live in and around them, there is often little reason to not cut them or use them for cattle grazing.

Merely refusing to buy tropical timber--no matter its source--does nothing to address the root causes of deforestation. On the other hand, by supporting sustainable forest management, cities can help create an important economic alternative for local peoples. New York City, with its vast purchasing power and cultural influence, is now in a position to help turn the tide. Policies that encourage the use of sustainably sourced timber will send a powerful signal that the City cares--and is doing something--about tropical deforestation. Such policies would complement the City's other public commitments on climate change and environmental justice, while enabling the City to renew some of its most renowned wooden structures using traditional and extremely durable tropical hardwood.

The Overbrook Foundation strongly endorses and supports the use of certified tropical timber from well-managed forests and urges the City to

approve its use in city infrastructure projects. We would be happy to meet with City leaders to discuss strategies and practices to achieve these goals. We would also be interested in joining forces with the City in ways that support forest conservation and management, and help renew New York's iconic structures.

Please feel free to let us know if you would like more information or have any questions.

Sincerely,

Daniel R. Katz
Senior Program Director, Environment
The Overbrook Foundation