

## **PDAAG KONSCHNIK KEYNOTE**

### *Introduction*

- Thank you, Chair, for your kind introduction and for your tremendous leadership during your two-year term. I am honored to open the 24<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Experts Group on Illegal Logging and Associated Trade (EGILAT) and congratulate you on this important milestone.
- The United States is proud to be the 2023 host of APEC and especially EGILAT. In the 2011 APEC meetings in Hawaii, the APEC economies recognized the importance of promoting the trade of legally harvested forest products, combatting illegal logging and associated trade, and enhancing the capacity of the APEC economies and the private sector to address both challenges. Since 2011, the relevance and importance of EGILAT has only continued to grow as we in the Asia-Pacific region and across the globe collectively tackle some of the most complex issues related to illegal logging and deforestation.
- As you know, the focus of EGILAT is two-fold: promoting trade in legally harvested forest products, and, combatting illegal logging and associated trade. These twin goals are inextricably linked to some of our greatest challenges; that is, how to:
  - Ensure illegal trade does not undermine legal trade and the economic prosperity of APEC economies;
  - Remove funding sources of transnational criminal organizations and terrorist networks;
  - Combat climate change by ensuring legal and sustainable forest management;
  - Protect wildlife and stopping biodiversity loss; and
  - Protect livelihoods of communities who rely on the forests in the Asia-Pacific region.
- As the region and the world continue to recover from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is ever more important to ensure that the illegal trade of forest products does not undermine this recovery, nor

threaten the livelihoods of those participating in the legal supply chain. We must recommit to ensuring the global forest products market does not become a financial playground to criminal elements who use illegally harvested forest products to drive other transnational crimes, perpetuate civil unrest, threaten global security, and fund terrorist organizations.

- The APEC economies account for over 50% of the world's forests. As such, our commitment to promoting legal trade and ensuring the sustainable use of forests is key in the global efforts to combat climate change and conserving biodiversity. None of us is immune to the effects of climate change. We have all continued to witness some of the most extreme temperatures in recorded times, the shift from fire seasons to large fire zones threatened year-round, extreme weather events that are becoming all too commonplace, and drastic shifts in ecosystems and habitat.

#### *US Commitments*

- The United States is proud to be a member of APEC and to work to address these issues collectively with our partner economies. Allow me to share a few of the recent commitments the United States has made, consistent with the EGILAT mandate and policy theme of *Navigating to Legal Timber*.
- In President Biden's Executive Order, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, the United States committed to conserving rainforests in the United States, the Amazon, and other critical ecosystems. This commitment was expanded upon at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, when the United States announced its *Plan to Conserve Global Forests: Critical Carbon Sinks* which prioritized protecting critical forest ecosystems in the Amazonia, Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia. Among the plan's objectives are to build long-term capacity to enhance sustainable land use planning and management, improve enforcement and prosecutorial capacity to stop illegal logging, and strengthen data, transparency, and monitoring.
- I will briefly touch on a few of the recent efforts of the United States in support of these objectives.
- First, in observance of Earth Day, this past April the Department of Justice and the Departments of Agriculture, Homeland Security, Interior, and the

U.S. Council on Transnational Organized Crime Strategic Division announced the creation of the Timber Interdiction Membership Board and Enforcement Resources (or TIMBER) Working Group. The TIMBER Working Group will use its collective resources to stop the trade of illegally sourced and commercialized plants and timber through targeted investigations and prosecutions and collaborations with our international partners.

- Second, the U.S. is committed to tackling timber trafficking by expanding and investing in human resources. The Department of Homeland Security’s Homeland Securities Investigations has received funding to create a new Environmental Crimes Unit. The U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement Investigations has expanded authority to investigate transnational timber crimes in addition to domestic timber crimes. Lastly, which I am proud to say I had a part in, the Department of Justice’s Environmental Crimes Section is adding intelligence analysts through temporary appointments from other federal law enforcement agencies to our staff to help develop more complex timber investigations and prosecutions.
- One of the most interesting developments over the last decade has been the expansion of forensic resources to identify wood species – from chemical analysis to DNA fingerprinting to hand-held devices identifying timber based on its anatomical characteristics. One of the field trip options you have this week includes the National Fish and Wildlife Forensic Mobile Lab, affectionately called the “The Woodshed,” that was debuted in November 2022. The Woodshed can be used to identify illegally traded timber from endangered species. This impressive lab is now being used across the United States to support timber investigations and provide new flexibilities to investigators to analyze in real-time potential evidence in the field.
- Meanwhile, the U.S. Forest Service has expanded its forensics capabilities through its Wood Identification & Screening Center (WISC). The WISC lab provides wood identification services to support enforcement of CITES and the U.S. Lacey Act. The WISC has also provided technical assistance and capacity building trainings to wood identification labs in Peru and Vietnam. The U.S. Forest Service strives to use its technical expertise to implement programs that support wood identification, law enforcement capacity

building, private sector engagement, and sustainable forest management to holistically address the pervasive problem of illegal logging.

### *Closing*

- I want to close by emphasizing the truly unique place EGILAT holds in the global fight to promote the trade of legally harvested forest products and combat illegal logging and associated trade. This forum allows us to collectively share and build upon established bilateral relationships that we have outside of APEC to make our APEC collaborations stronger.
- APEC also allows for effective inclusion of the private sector in our solutions. We can learn a great deal from small and medium enterprises and the forest industry about the challenges they face to comply with the law, and our need to clearly communicate, to put legal compliance into practice.
- Be it the collaborations to enforce bilateral agreements, such as the experiences of the United States and Vietnam shared at the 23<sup>rd</sup> EGILAT meeting earlier this year. Or the collaborative enforcement partnerships between economies, such as the United States and Peru in the Global Plywood Lumber Trading, LLC prosecution where restitution was obtained for Peru presented at your meeting in Thailand. Or the information sharing and consultation on domestic legislation(s) affecting timber trade that occurs at every EGILAT meeting, or the capacity building programming such as this week's workshop on technologies. These activities and collaborations provide a mutual enhancement of our knowledge to create working relationships between land managers, government and private sector, policy makers, investigators, scientists, and prosecutors who do the fundamental day-to-day work to achieve EGILAT's goal. Our bilateral and regional collaborations only make us better and more effective.
- Thank you again for inviting me to open the 24<sup>th</sup> EGILAT meeting. Please feel free to speak to me during the coffee breaks and lunch today as I hope to continue to foster our relationships and find new ways to work together. I wish you a fruitful and constructive discussions during this session.
- Thank you.