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House of Representatives

RECOGNIZING THE RACHEL CARSON COUNCIL'S "CLEAR CUT" REPORT

HON. JAMIE RASKIN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 11, 2019

Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the important work of the Rachel Carson Council (RCC), which is named after the visionary marine biologist, nature writer and environmentalist who was a proud resident of Silver Spring, Maryland.

Founded and based in Bethesda, the RCC pays tribute to Rachel Carson's imperishable legacy by linking environmental, health, and social policy solutions "with the goal of building a more just, sustainable, and peaceful future."

The RCC recently released a comprehensive report called "Clear Cut," examining wood pellet production and its adverse effects on the health and sustainability of our forests and communities. The report details the process by which Southeastern forests are being cut down, chopped up, and dehydrated before being shipped and burned as carbon-intense fuel.

According to the report, despite being touted as a "green" alternative to fossil fuels, the sourcing of wood pellets contributes to widespread deforestation and pollution throughout much of the American Southeast. In North Carolina alone, the largest producer of wood pellets, Enviva, clear cuts more than 50 acres of forest each day. Left standing, these forests would help control the climate, maintain the biodiversity of our ecosystems, and filter our air and water.

Following this environmentally invasive sourcing process of clear-cutting, pellets are burned, producing Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), particulate matter (PM), nitrogen oxides (NO), and carbon monoxide (CO₂), all of which pose serious health risks to human beings. Although the pollutants emitted by wood pellet mills are indiscriminately harmful to nearby inhabitants, the RCC report notes that wood pellet mills have been disproportionately constructed near poor communities of color, which are bearing the disproportionate burdens of deforestation, including poor air quality and increased flood risks.

Although the environmental drawbacks of wood pellet production are clear—wood pellet mills emit approximately 65-percent more CO₂ per megawatt hour than modern coal plants—the RCC argues that the industry has continued to mislead the public about the sustainability of this practice. Moreover, the RCC's report concludes that the expansion of the wood pellet industry is making it harder for us to maintain our environmental standards and address the global crisis of climate change.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to review the well-researched and well-documented "Clear Cut" report by visiting the RCC website at www.rachelcarsoncouncil.org. We must keep the profound concerns raised in this report in mind as we enact environmental, forestry, and energy policies and work to protect the public health and safety.