

Dear Mr. President:

The last remnants of the world's natural areas are quickly disappearing, along with the plants and animals that call them home. As cancer survivors, medical doctors and pharmaceutical researchers, we feel this loss especially acutely. The world's ecosystems and diversity of species are critical to human health and welfare. Indeed, many of our own lives have been saved by compounds derived from nature. We are writing to urge you to take immediate steps to halt the alarming loss of species and ecosystems around the world.

More than a quarter of all medicinal drugs have active ingredients derived from nature. In addition, more than 50 percent of new drugs developed in the past 25 years have come from natural sources. Pharmaceuticals will continue to be a major engine of U.S. economic growth, with the United States expected to produce 38 percent of all medications by 2011. Ten of the world's 25 top-selling drugs are derived from natural sources including plant and animal species.

More than one third of the world's known species are threatened with extinction, and as many as two-thirds of all species could be near extinction by the end of this century. The loss of ecosystems and species is estimated to eliminate one prescription drug from entering the market every two years between 1991 and 2050. Had the ecosystems and species that contributed to modern medicines already been lost, many of us might not be here today.

Some of us were treated with chemotherapy agents derived from the rosy periwinkle plant, originally discovered in Madagascar's tropical forests. Others were treated with pharmaceuticals derived from a tree found in the forests of central China. Still others received medicines synthesized from coral reefs, soils and fungi. Prescription drugs based on these natural compounds enabled us to survive such illnesses as breast cancer, appendiceal cancer, lymphomas and childhood leukemia.

Some of us are oncologists, cancer researchers or pharmaceutical experts. We have dedicated our lives to curing disease and we understand the vast potential of the natural world to help us do that. We are alarmed by the escalating loss of ecosystem and species, because when species are pushed into extinction, vast libraries of genetic information and organic compounds potentially useful to medicine are forever lost.

Of course, the loss of ecosystems and species is part of a much larger global conservation crisis. As forests, freshwater sources, healthy soils, coral reefs and biodiversity are destroyed, the world economy loses hundreds of billions of dollars in raw material, developing countries are impoverished and local groups and communities fight over increasingly scarce resources. Burning and clearing of forests also releases 20 percent of all global greenhouse gas emissions. This deforestation must be addressed if we are ever to control climate change.

Mr. President, please take action to conserve our global natural resources by supporting the Global Conservation Act. This legislation is backed by the Alliance for Global Conservation, a coalition of leading international nonprofits that includes Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, The Pew Charitable Trusts the Wildlife Conservation Society and the World Wildlife Fund. The Global Conservation Act would require the U.S. government to develop a comprehensive international conservation strategy and to work with other nations to help fund

and support its implementation. The world's developing nations are on the front lines of the global conservation crisis. They face the highest rates of deforestation, species loss and depletion of the very resources that underpin their economic progress. But they lack the strategies, tools and funding to protect those resources.

The Global Conservation Act would set an example for industrialized nations around the world to engage effectively on halting the global conservation crisis. It would help ensure that developing nations conserve critical natural areas that support economic prosperity, protect ecosystems and species, and save human lives.

Sincerely,

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Name

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Disease survived (optional) or medical specialty (optional)

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City, State, Zip