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Verdant Energy Solutions,
Inc; Walker Enterprises, LLP;
Whitfield Forestry
Consultants, LLC; and
WindTellect.

October 20th, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

We are renewable energy business owners, developers and entrepreneurs, farmers, forest owners, academics, conservation advocates, and economic development agents writing in support of a robust national Renewable Electricity Standard (RES).

We strongly support the goals of a national RES – to diversify our nation’s energy supply and increase our economic competitiveness and energy independence. Additionally, in the Southern states, **we support an RES as a means to boost the rural economy while reducing pollution from coal.** However, an RES that does little to advance the generation of renewable energy beyond business-as-usual will not meet these goals.

While some of us are generally hesitant to recommend government intervention, we also recognize that government support for new industries has been both necessary and successful in the past (as seen in the petroleum, automotive, aerospace, biotechnology, and telecommunications industries). We recognize that an RES mandate will benefit the public interest, aiming to shift investments for the purpose of providing affordable, reliable, domestic, clean electricity.

Current Proposals are Insufficient

For these reasons, we are appreciative of the monumental efforts that have been made in House and Senate committees to include an RES in the energy legislation that is before Congress. However, after reviewing the renewable energy provisions in the House of Representatives’ American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES) and the Senate’s American Clean Energy Leadership Act, **we believe these proposals fail to drive material expansion of the market for renewable electricity and will miss the opportunity to create hundreds of thousands of clean energy jobs and save consumers money on their electric and natural gas bills.**

The discussion draft of the American Clean Energy and Security Act would have required 25% renewables by 2025, a goal we believe is feasible in the Southeast.¹ That has now been weakened to require a minimum of 12% with up to an additional 8% from efficiency, with many service areas exempted.

¹ Two studies showing feasibility of 25% by 2025: “Southern Solutions for a National Renewable Energy Standard,” February 12, 2009, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE), <http://tinyurl.com/SACE-RES>; “Southeast Energy Opportunities: Local Clean Power,” WRI Issue Brief, April 2009, World Resources Institute (WRI), <http://tinyurl.com/WRI-RES>

No Better Than Business-As-Usual

Several analyses project that the weakened renewable energy standard in ACES would create no additional renewable energy beyond the 9.9% that is predicted by the Energy Information Agency.² Moreover, the discussion draft of the American Clean Energy Leadership Act would have required 20% renewables by 2021. That goal has now been reduced to 15% of electricity from renewable sources by 2021, again with many service areas exempted.

This overall weakening fails to deliver a clear signal to investors and developers that America is open-for-business in renewable energies. A recent Pew Charitable Trusts report found that jobs directly related to renewable electricity grew by 23% between 1998 and 2007.³ In addition, a new University of California at Berkeley study finds that continuing on a business-as-usual path dependent on fossil fuels actually risks greater economic insecurity, while aggressive acceleration of clean energy assures faster and more sustained economic growth.⁴

In the Southern region two of our abundant native resources – **wind and biomass electricity – are already cost-competitive with new coal-fired and nuclear power plants.**⁵ The American Wind Energy Association estimates that the weak standards in ACES could fail to deliver 100,000 jobs for the wind industry alone, driving manufacturing investment to other countries.⁶ Data from University of Florida research on biomass electricity suggest income and economic recirculation in the billions of dollars and jobs numbering in the tens of thousands,⁷ most of which will go unfulfilled with ACES.

Other clean energy resources, such as solar photovoltaic, solar water heating, concentrated solar power, and low-impact hydroelectric, are also feasible in the Southeast. Solar is an example of proven technology that will become more commercially competitive over time: While solar photovoltaic is currently a higher-cost option, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory predicts it will be cost-competitive with other sources by 2015. Solar technologies will play a greater role during the last 10 years of a strong 15-year RES.

Because the Southeast lacks native coal and uranium resources, purchases of these energy resources cause a drain of wealth from our states' economies. However, we possess sufficient renewable energy resources to meet 25% of our electricity needs by 2025. Pursuing this goal will result in significant job creation and recirculation of wealth in our region. **These facts make a robust RES an imperative for rebuilding our economy, cleaning our environment, and addressing the causes of climate change.**

From this we conclude that if Congress fails to pass a robust RES, the Southeast will miss the job growth and localized economic returns of clean energy technologies. If we are to

² Three analyses concluding ACES will deliver less renewable energy than business-as-usual: Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) <http://tinyurl.com/UCSanalysisRES>; Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) <http://tinyurl.com/SACEanalysisRES>; Independent climate policy analyst Jesse Jenkins <http://tinyurl.com/JJanalysisRES>

³ "Clean Energy Economy Report," The Pew Charitable Trusts, June 10, 2009. http://www.pewtrusts.org/news_room_detail.aspx?id=53254

⁴ "Energy Pathways for the California Economy," David Roland-Holst, et al, University of California at Berkeley, June 19, 2009. http://are.berkeley.edu/~dwrh/CERES_Web/Docs/energy%20pathways%20final%20report.pdf

⁵ "Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis – Version 3.0," Lazard LLC, January 2009. <http://tinyurl.com/LazardEnergy2>

⁶ American Wind Energy Association press release and letter, May 15, 2009, <http://tinyurl.com/AWEAanalysisRES>

⁷ "Southern Bioenergy Roadmap," SAFER Alliance, February 2009. <http://www.saferalliance.net/projects/roadmap.html>

support an RES mandate, we need evidence that it will actually create green jobs, boost the rural economy, and help save consumers money in the long term.

We Can Do Better

Our proposal is to significantly strengthen the RES to a 30% combined energy efficiency and renewable energy standard by 2020. The improved standard would require a 17% renewable and 10% efficiency requirement by 2020, and allow an additional 3% of the standard to be met by either renewable energy or efficiency at each state's discretion. These goals are entirely feasible. Together with the World Resources Institute (WRI), the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) summarized independent research that shows that the Southeast has the resources to meet 200,000 GWh of renewable electricity by 2015, which is more than enough to fulfill a 17% RES.⁸

As business owners, developers and entrepreneurs, farmers, forest owners, academics, conservation advocates, and economic development agents, we stand ready to work with House and Senate leadership to strengthen and improve the renewable energy provisions in the energy bills so that they fulfill the promise of the historic opportunity before us. The U.S. can emerge from this process with legislation that effectively spurs clean economic development and powers our nation with efficient, renewable, home-grown energy sources. **Given a chance, American innovation and ingenuity can lead us into long-term and broadly shared economic prosperity.**

We will work tirelessly to accomplish that goal.

Sincerely,

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⁸ "Local Clean Power, Southeast Energy Opportunities," WRI Issue Briefs, April 2009, Dennis Creech, Eliot Metzger, Samantha Putt Del Pino, John D. Wilson. <http://www.wri.org/publication/southeast-energy-policy>

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