



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**  
ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

# Opinion Editorial

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## **Out-of-State Interests Mobilizing Against Mississippi's Working Forests**

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Should out-of-state interests decide what's best for a rural Mississippi town of about 3,000 people, or should the local community decide?

You'd think the answer to that question would be obvious, but for an outspoken eco-group from North Carolina, the town of Lucedale should not be able to decide its own destiny.

The heart of the dispute? Mississippi's second largest ag industry, our growing forest products industry – a potential economic boon for our state.

Today, wood products are becoming more prevalent in our daily lives. From sustainable wood buildings to paper packaging needed for e-commerce giants like Amazon to wood pellets, a growing form of renewable energy, wood is increasingly in demand.

With plentiful, well-managed forests, Mississippi is well-positioned to benefit from this and gain hundreds if not thousands of new jobs. That is, unless a group of largely out-of-state interests has their way.

Based in Asheville, North Carolina, they call themselves the "Dogwood Alliance" – and they're against pretty much anything that comes from the forest.

In March, the group's Executive Director [penned](#) an op-ed in *The Hill*, a Washington D.C. publication, arguing against using trees for building products, paper, packaging, or energy. They effectively oppose the entire forest products industry, which supports more than [2 million jobs](#) nationwide.

Now, they're coming here.

This month, Dogwood and their out-of-state allies will travel to Mississippi to protest the construction of a renewable wood energy facility in Lucedale set to create [100 direct jobs](#) and hundreds more indirect and related jobs in George County, while increasing earning potential for local landowners.

Dogwood's efforts are misguided – both from an economic and even an environmental perspective.

We've seen this move before in Mississippi – out-of-state interests from wealthy cities traveling to Mississippi to protest jobs in our small towns.

While Asheville, North Carolina, may not need 100 new jobs, we want them here in Mississippi, particularly in rural Mississippi. Gaining investment in the talented people and growing economic engine of Mississippi should be a top priority for our local and national leaders. Throwing up roadblocks to new jobs isn't just unhelpful; it's an immoral harm to those who are most in need in our rural communities.

In George County, for example, the unemployment rate is nearly [twice](#) as high as Asheville's. Simply put, we need the jobs supplied by the forest products industry. In fact, working forests support over 47,000 jobs in Mississippi and a payroll of more than \$1.7 billion.

But this isn't just an economic win. It's also a win for our environment. Mississippi, like other Southeastern states, has high standards for sustainable forestry practices. Because of this, we actually have more trees today – not less. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the total volume of trees grown in the U.S. Southeast has increased by 50 percent over the last 50 years, and today, private forest owners are growing 40 percent more wood than they remove every year. The reality is that a strong market for forest products ensures that landowners keep planting trees.

While these out-of-state activists may live in a place that doesn't need or want forest industry jobs, we know better here in Mississippi. Let's continue finding ways to sustainably harness our abundant natural resources and grow our rural economy, providing more opportunities for all Mississippians.

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