May 13, 2015 New York, NY – The Rainforest Alliance announces a new grant that will strengthen sustainable forest management with small landowners in the Southeast region of the United States. The program is funded by a $1.35 million combined investment from four major forestry and paper-goods companies including Avery Dennison, Columbia Forest Products, Domtar and Staples, Inc.

The forests in the southeastern United States are home to a vast array of wildlife, crucial watersheds, and natural resources. Nearly sixty percent of these forests are owned by small landowners and families, and changes in business patterns have increased industry dependence on these private forestlands. The Rainforest Alliance - along with the supporting companies - will work closely with local groups, landowner associations, consulting foresters, and other stakeholders to increase sustainable forest management of family forest owners in South Carolina, North Carolina, and West Virginia.

“We are thrilled to collaborate with forward-thinking American forest owners and such innovative brands in this endeavor,” said Tensie Whelan, Rainforest Alliance president. “Sustainable land-use practices and certification can help these private landowners to leverage the value of their natural resources while protecting the unique habitats, water quality and biodiversity of the Southeast region of the country. It also helps to create a legacy for these families that will last for generations.”

Working with Avery Dennison, Columbia Forest Products, Domtar, and Staples, Inc., the Rainforest Alliance aims to create sustainable management plans and improve market opportunities for these small landowners. Together, they plan to extend invitations to environmental stakeholders, landowners, state and local governments, and brands to participate, while identifying larger, regional risks associated with climate change and water preservation.

The program will formally begin in July, 2015 with components of the program including the following:

- Landowner Outreach & Education
- Streamlined Sourcing Assurance Efforts
- Maintaining Healthy Forest Ecosystems
- Measuring and Communications Project Results

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The Rainforest Alliance is a global nonprofit that works with people whose livelihoods depend on the land, helping them transform the way they grow food, harvest wood and host travelers. From large multinational corporations to small, community-based cooperatives, businesses and consumers worldwide are involved in the Rainforest Alliance’s efforts to bring responsibly produced goods and services to a global marketplace where the demand for sustainability is growing steadily. For more information, visit www.rainforest-alliance.org. For more information, please contact Brittany Wienke, bwienke@ra.org.