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Testimony at the Water and Power Subcommittee oversight field hearing on "Evaporating Prosperity: How Federal Actions Are Driving Up Water and Power Costs, Threatening Jobs and Leaving Arizonans High and Dry."

My name is Andy Groseta and I am testifying on behalf of the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association. I would like to thank the Honorable Tom McClintock, the Honorable Paul Gosar and the Honorable Trent Franks for the opportunity to testify in front of the Water and Power Subcommittee today. It is my pleasure to enlighten the committee on the failures of federal land management and how that has impacted our residence and economy, but more importantly it is drying up our watershed. I am the current President of the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association, a professional organization dedicated to Arizona's Cattle Industry and representing over one thousand ranchers across Arizona. I am a 3rd generation rancher and our family has been ranching in the Verde Valley along the Verde River since 1922. We operate on forest service, state and private lands and take our jobs as stewards of the land very seriously – in respect for those who have enjoyed them before us and to ensure that continues for future generations. We collaborate with state and federal agencies to maintain the working landscapes that are vital to Arizona's economy and its citizens. Arizona's agricultural industry is a 10.3 billion dollar economic engine, contributing to communities in every county in the state. This base industry relies on the stability of sunlight, soil and water to produce the safest, most affordable and reliable food and fiber supply in the world.

In 1955 ranchers, water users, Salt River Project Officials and employees of the United States Forest Service all met to discuss the conditions of Arizona's watershed and the future. Fifty plus years ago these folks recognized the importance of water and how the management of lands would impact agriculture, industry and the people of a growing city. From this meeting and local collaboration the Beaver Creek Watershed Evaluation Program began. The emphasis was to determine how much water yield could be increased by managing and controlling vegetation on the landscape. At the same time the project would analyze livestock foraging, wildlife, soil types and recreational values. The project encompassed tens of thousands of acres with real on-the-ground work; it went beyond the computer models we rely on today. This type of work contributed real data over time and revealed the benefits of basic landscape stewardship to our watershed. The project continues on today but is not well known and does not focus much on actual on-the-ground work of managing vegetation because of over regulation on federal lands and a process that can easily last ten plus years. Now fifty years later I have the pleasure of coming before you today to talk about the same issue that our predecessor had the insight to begin evaluating and initiating solutions. However, after Fifty years of analyzing and collecting data it is federal regulation and mountains of bureaucratic process that has kept us from implementing any type of practical solution that would benefit all the citizens of Arizona.

These former leaders understood that there were major ecosystem functions that our Forest lands provided for: the water cycle, mineral cycle, energy flow and biological succession. They also understood that management – or the lack thereof – can have a profound effect on these very important functions. Recently – over the past two decades – we have witnessed a diminished land health and productivity – most especially the diminishment of water yields from a now unhealthy water cycle. The current lack of action and on the ground management has diminished the water our forest lands yield to the several million people who live in the “Valley of the Sun.”

Part of the reason our forests are yielding less water is that the US Forest Service is caught in a process predicament, a frame work of statutory, regulatory and administrative procedure that has rendered the agency ineffective in addressing the rapidly declining forest health. This is absolute fact; the United States Forest Service recognizes this issue in a report they issued in 2002. The Forest Service spends a majority of its time managing lawsuits and job promotions and has no real time to dedicate to the actual landscapes and ecosystems that support wildlife, communities and industry. We are literally studying our forest to death, a death caused by catastrophic wildfires that threatens communities, destroys economies, wildlife habitat and drastically changes an ecosystem for a lifetime.

It was not long ago that many of the springs and creeks along the “Mogollon Rim” produced twice as much water as they do today and the rural communities nestled in the middle of the Ponderosa Pines were a buzz from the sounds of chainsaws and the bellow of cows. We had healthy working landscapes that provided jobs and safe places for citizens to recreate all year round. At one time Apache County was one of the richest counties in the nation. Federal regulation such as the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act has become a tool for radical environmental groups used to close our forest to all mankind. Commercial scale logging no longer exists in Arizona and has not for more than a decade. Apache County has become one of the poorest counties in the nation as federal regulation has driven families and entire industries out of business. You no longer see semi-trucks full of logs moving down the highways, forest equipment businesses, or the local family owned chainsaw repair shops. You would be hard pressed to even find a chainsaw in those northern communities anymore. The cattle industry is struggling to hold on as we continue to lose grasslands to over grown forests and infrastructure to massive wildfires that take more and more resources to repair.

The overgrown forest, that is growing as we speak, with no tools to properly manage timber and forage is slowly cutting the water supply of the sixth largest city in the nation, Phoenix. For decades we have allowed our forest to become dense with trees sucking up water before it hits the river and the arid climate is unable to support such a forest in periods of drought. We have left an unnatural forest at the hands of Mother Nature and now we are faced with massive wildfires charring forests to bare ground. The Wallow fire is a perfect example an after fire crew mopped up the hot spots and left, the summer rains came causing massive soil erosion and flash floods. Mismanagement of federal lands has caused massive wildfire that changed the landscape for a lifetime and has now polluted our watershed killing a whole generation of fish, frogs and owls.

Just recently the US Forest Service patted itself on the back for issuing the largest stewardship contract in history working with a collaborative group called Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI). While we all

hope this will become a reality quickly the contract that was issued has not run the gauntlet of the National Environmental Policy Act. At the same time, so called partners in the program have issued statements alluding to potential lawsuits. Once again process predicament will raise its ugly head while our forest health continues to deteriorate.

It is long past due that we take immediate action to correct federal land management to create a balanced model that recognizes communities, economies, industry, recreation, habitat and wildlife. It is possible and can be done but we have to be sure that it is driven by local residents that live and work with the consequences of decisions made from DC. The bottom line is our forest desperately needs on the ground management and for that we need man to return to our forest with chainsaws and cows. It is imperative that we actively manage the renewable resources that we have been provided before we allow Mother Nature to do it for us.

I want to thank you for taking the time to come to Arizona today and allowing me to testify before the committee. I would be happy to entertain any questions.