

Statement

By Ray Campbell, Okanogan County Commissioner

Okanogan County, Washington

Before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and
Environmental Regulation

Thursday, April 11, 2013

Good Morning, Chairman Hastings, Subcommittee Chairman Bishop, Ranking members Markey and Grijalva and members of the committee.

My name is Ray Campbell. I am a County Commissioner from Okanogan County, Washington, home of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Our county alone has 1.5 million acres of US Forest Service land.

I am grateful to Congressman Hastings for this opportunity to share my views on behalf of National Forest counties.

Each of the bills before the Committee today are significant for my county and for Washington state because they fundamentally address the failures of the U.S. Forest Service to actively manage our National Forests, and offer real hope to our historic timber-based communities for the first time in a generation.

The Hastings draft, upon which I will focus, specifically proposes to put in place an emphasis on healthy forest management by requiring timber to be cut in a time certain within identified areas of each National Forest where sustained timber growth is the most prolific. If enacted, the Hastings Active Forest management bill will assure continuation of our Secure Rural Schools payments until the new reforms are fully implemented and our rural communities once again receive access to economic opportunities.

I would ask members of the Committee to recognize that this proposed fundamental paradigm shift to restore the health and economic vitality of our National Forests is modeled after the very successful state of Washington DNR approach to forest management.

The lands owned by the people of the United States hold the potential of generating revenues far beyond their current levels and are capable of reducing the tax burdens of all of our citizens, if they are but managed properly which this draft bill will help bring about.

There is NO issue more important to our countries' public lands counties than this one.

Let me briefly, in the time allotted, express why along with a few recommendations:

1) The Status Quo is unacceptable; the current trend of increased spending on fire suppression and less spending on management needs to be reversed. 74% of USFS holdings are in serious fire danger. We need to make the commitment to change the management paradigm. If we actively manage the land, the value of the resources will create the revenue to do the job. This will also create revenue for the federal treasury, state & local economies.

2) National Forests are too dense resulting in unhealthy trees, which are susceptible to fire, insect infestation and disease. This threatens communities, fish & wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, water quality and quantity & air quality.

3) Healthy Forest management will result in our U.S. Forest Service managed lands becoming a beneficial and integral part of our rural economies.

4) Fire damaged landscapes need to be restored. Catastrophic fires emit 40 – 100 metric tons of pollutants per acre. If left to rot after the fire, emissions are 3 times that amount.

5) We can actively manage our forests or continue to leave them alone. The last 20-30 years has demonstrated leaving them alone is not working.

6) This conflict has been going on too long. We need to set aside conflict and take this opportunity to restore the health of our rural communities and national forests.

7) States, like Washington state, have fiduciary responsibilities to their taxpayers to not only protect the environmental values of state forests but through wise stewardship to generate revenues for the benefit of the schools of the state. It is time the federal government, likewise managed the American taxpayer's land accordingly. I am not saying we need to cut 14 billion board feet (bbft) nationally as we did twenty plus years ago, but last year's 2 (bbft) is woefully low. Surely, there is an achievable middle ground.

8) Americans, living in the rural timber counties of the western states, have come to know that lands owned by the federal government are capable of producing far more revenue to reduce their tax burden from the timber resources on the land than is currently the case. The fact that private and state foresters can conduct timber sales at far less cost than the U.S. Forest Service is no excuse for the professional bean counters at Office of Management and Budget (OMB) or the Congressional Budget office (CBO) to assume that environmentally sound forest management cannot similarly be efficiently accomplished on National Forests. We may simply have to retrain Forest Service employees how to efficiently conduct a sale or absent that, have others with proven track records of efficiency do the job.

9) Buried within the SRS reauthorization signed into law on October 3, 2008 was language which changed the historic statute (U.S.C. 500) how 25% revenues are shared with counties. Specifically the Act changed annual 25% revenue sharing requirements to the annual average of 25 percent of all amounts received for the applicable fiscal year and each of the preceding 6 fiscal years from each national forest. Section 403 (b) (1-2) of PL 110-343 should be repealed to ensure increased revenues from future production on NFS lands provide immediate benefit to local governments. Counties nationwide recommend the following language be added to any bill reported out of this Committee:

Excerpt from Section 403 (b) (1-2) of PL 110-343
(b) FOREST RECEIPT PAYMENTS TO ELIGIBLE
STATES AND COUNTIES.—

(1) ACT OF MAY 23, 1908.—The sixth paragraph under the heading “FOREST SERVICE” in the Act of May 23, 1908 (16 U.S.C. 500) is amended in the first sentence by striking “twenty-five percentum” and all that follows through “shall be paid” and inserting the following: “an amount equal to the annual average of 25 percent of all amounts received for the applicable fiscal year and each of the preceding 6 fiscal years from each national forest shall be paid”.

(2) WEEKS LAW.—Section 13 of the Act of March 1, 1911 (commonly known as the “Weeks Law”) (16 U.S.C. 500) is amended in the first sentence by striking “twenty-five percentum” and all that follows through “shall be paid” and inserting the following: “an amount equal to the annual average of 25 percent of all amounts received for the applicable fiscal year and each of the preceding 6 fiscal years from each national forest shall be paid”

10) Counties surrounded by National Forests long for this paradigm shift and are ready to embrace it, but they must have bridge funding through continued SRS payments at 2008 levels, not at ever declining levels, until such time as the National Forests are once again, positively open for active forest management. The Hastings bill and each of the other bills before us today, move us in that direction.

Before closing, I want to emphasize again, the successful track record of accomplishment achieved by the State of Washington's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and contrast it with the abysmal record of the federal government.

DNR has administrative responsibility over 2.1 million acres of land trusts and provides for a fiscally responsible continued yield program of sustainable tree harvests.

In 2011, state trust lands yielded a harvest of 560 million board feet (MMBF) of timber, which generated \$220 million in revenue. By contrast, National Forest lands in Washington state yielded 129 million board feet (MMBF) generating revenue of only \$638 thousand on 9.3 million Acres or one fifth of what the state produced on a quarter of the land base.

Incredibly, the state produces 500% more actual timber revenue on less than one quarter of the land base of that held by the U.S. Forest Service.

This comparison is even more striking when you look at the relative dollars generated per board foot; that is \$308 per MBF on state land vs. \$5.00 per MBF on Forest Service Land.

Most telling of all: The entire U.S. National Forest system consists of 193,000,000 acres and in 2011 produced a paltry \$180,000,000 of revenue for taxpayers. This is less than \$1 per acre of revenue to the Federal Treasury—when potentially these forests across America could produce thousands of dollars per acre for taxpayers.

Thank you for this opportunity to support this Committee's efforts on behalf of the nation's National Forest counties.