

**Statement of  
Jay Jensen  
Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment  
U.S. Department of Agriculture**

**Before the  
Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
and the  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources**

**U. S. House of Representatives**

**April 15, 2011**

Chairman Chaffetz, Chairman Bishop and members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the Department's views on border security on National Forest System Lands.

I would like to open by providing the Subcommittees with a brief overview of the border situation and the capabilities of the U.S. Forest Service. National Forests in the "lower 48" share a border of over 400 miles with Canada and almost sixty miles with Mexico. In addition there are other National Forests such as the Cleveland in southern California, which while not directly adjoining the border, are in close proximity and are impacted by illegal border crossing activity. While there are challenges on both the northern border and southern borders, most illegal border crossings detected take place on the southwest border. It is important to remember that while the Forest Service is dedicating significant law enforcement resources to address challenges on the border, there is much law

enforcement work to be done within the National Forests to address other issues such as marijuana cultivation, enforcing laws regarding recreation and travel management, dumping, theft, and the safety of National Forest visitors.

To begin, I would like to reaffirm that the Department of Agriculture's commitment to support efforts to secure and protect the U.S. border. Achieving the Border Patrol's mission as well as the land conservation and protection mission of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) are not mutually exclusive. We believe we can contribute to the Border Patrol's vital security mission while simultaneously protecting the environment. We have strengthened and are continuing to improve our relationships with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and our sister agencies within the Department of the Interior (DOI) to accomplish our mutual objectives. The Department takes very seriously the need to address the illegal crossings of the U.S. border between official points of entry, smuggling of illicit contraband and people, crimes against those being smuggled, and other unlawful behavior. For National Forests along the border, increased border security will increase overall safety and help decrease adverse impacts on the environment. The Department would like to work with your two Subcommittees and the rest of the Executive Branch to better understand your concerns.

The scope of the challenge is significant. Of the tens of thousands of people apprehended entering illegally each year on federal lands in the Border Patrol's Tucson Sector (Tucson Sector extends from Ajo, Arizona to the New Mexico border), a

significant percentage of them are apprehended on the Coronado National Forest, south of Tucson, Arizona. The increasing amount of illegal border crossings and related activity in the more remote and rugged portions of the Coronado National Forest can be attributed to the successful work done to physically close the border in the flatter, more accessible areas closer to population centers. Adding to the challenge, each year hundreds of thousands of pounds of marijuana grown outside the U.S. have been seized from smugglers on the Coronado National Forest.

There is also the issue of human caused wildfire. In 2010, of the fifty wildfires south of U.S. Interstate 10 on the Coronado National Forest, thirty-eight were attributed to abandoned campfires. Data shows that in this area, the number of human started fires over the past twenty-five years is trending upwards. There are other impacts to the environment from illegal activities on National Forests that can be partially attributed to illegal border crossings. For example, the Forest Service collects tons of trash annually in this area and despite these efforts, the overall amount of trash is rising.

Further, recreational use of the National Forests is impacted. Portions of the Coronado National Forest south of Interstate 10 have been posted with warning signs indicating potential danger for the recreating public because of the amount of illegal activity. The agency takes precautions for employees as well, often providing law enforcement escorts for management and fire suppression activities.

In response to illegal border crossings and related activities, the U. S. Forest Service has taken important and effective steps, especially around interagency coordination which is improving the situation. Memoranda of Understanding were signed in 2006 and 2008 that are enabling interagency cooperation, improved radio interoperability, and increased effectiveness while protecting the environment. The Agency has made it a priority and assigned thirteen sworn officers to the “Border Zone” of the Coronado National Forest. Relative to of our law enforcement workforce, this is a significant commitment. Ten of those officers who work particularly close to the border are accompanied by canine units. In addition, the USFS makes all Forest Service Law Enforcement officers in New Mexico, Arizona and across the nation available to assist the officers who work on the border for special operations such as saturation patrols and drug interdiction operations. We regularly conduct joint patrol operations with Border Patrol agents on the Coronado National Forest. And recently, we have been an active participant with Border Patrol and Department of the Interior agencies in Operation Trident Surge joint patrol operations.

To improve the security of our borders and protect important cultural and natural resource values and recreation opportunities, the Forest Service and Border Patrol missions mesh well with one another. The Coronado National Forest is home to the highest number of threatened, endangered and sensitive species of any National Forest in the continental U.S. There are 25 listed threatened or endangered species and 162 sensitive species on the Coronado National Forest. To protect these important resource values we rely on each others’ strengths to work towards common goals and mutual interests for the public and the National Forests. For example, we have established full

time liaison positions with the Border Patrol for both the Tucson Sector, based in Tucson, and for the Spokane Sector, based in Kalispell, Montana. The liaison positions are important in coordinating joint patrol efforts, facility development, environmental analyses, and long-term staffing needs. We are currently coordinating and supervising road maintenance work with the Border Patrol on National Forests in Southern Arizona to improve access and patrol capabilities for Border Patrol agents.

We conduct numerous joint saturation patrols with DOI officers and Border Patrol agents, where we flood an area of known illegal activity with officers for a discreet period. Further guided by our 2008 MOU, we are participating in the Interagency Dispatch Improvement Project in order to better communicate between dispatch centers and agents in the field. We are also a partner in the DHS Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats, a DHS led multi-agency initiative. We are a member of and actively participate in an interagency Border Management Task Force which, among other things focuses on site specific problem solving as well as planning for the future.

Shifting to the northern border, where there is a significant amount of land designated as grizzly bear habitat as well as wilderness, our focus is to ensure Border Patrol agents have access, while protecting the environment, as described in the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding signed by then Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns. There is also the 2008 MOU that addresses effective radio communications. These memoranda still guide us today and are proven to be strong tools in our efforts to secure our border. We are also

renewing our commitment to coordinate on travel management planning and implementation across the Spokane Sector. In summary, the close interagency cooperation which GAO has acknowledged in recent reports has been a very successful partnership model that we need to continue to invest in and focus upon.

Border issues have been a focus and priority for the U.S. Forest Service for some time. Scheduled prior to the announcement of this hearing, on March 30, 2011, the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Tom Tidwell, visited with Chief Border Patrol Agent of the Tucson Sector, Randy Hill, to look at the challenges first hand. Chief Hill has indicated that one of his highest priorities is to assist the federal agencies in “taking back” public lands from smugglers for the American people. Chief Tidwell recommitted the U.S. Forest Service to work expeditiously in assisting the Border Patrol to have the support and access they need while simultaneously helping the USFS meet its mission in protecting and conserving the environment.

In closing, securing our borders and addressing impacts to our public lands are very important to this Administration. A well protected border means a better protected forest. Securing our border and protecting the environment can go hand in hand. The U.S. Forest Service is continually improving both our coordination and capabilities to work with other agencies so we can do our part to secure our borders and protect our National Forests.

We appreciate the Subcommittees' attention to this important issue. This concludes my statement and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

## **Jay Jensen, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment**

As Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Jay Jensen has responsibility for the U. S. Forest Service, which manages 193 million acres of National Forest System lands and provides assistance to the more than 10 million family-forest landowners in this country. The NRE mission area includes the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Jensen brings the combination of on-the-ground and government experience. He is a forester and has worked as a wild land firefighter with an extensive background in policy, management, and legislation. Jensen has been Executive Director of the Council of Western State Foresters/Western Forestry Leadership Coalition. Jensen has also served as the Coalition's Government Affairs Director. Jensen has served as Senior Forestry Advisor for the Western Governors Association, where he was responsible for the biomass energy program.

Jensen holds a B.S. degree from the University of California at Los Angeles and an M.S. in Forestry from Colorado State University. He resides in the DC area with his wife Shawna, daughter Kayden and a young son, Connor.