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Witnesses Agree that Healthy Forest Management Will Create Jobs, Support Rural Schools, & Prevent Catastrophic Wildfires

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation held a [legislative hearing](#) on several pieces of legislation to restore active and healthy management of our national forests in order to provide a stable revenue stream for rural schools and counties and prevent devastating wildfires.

The Subcommittee heard testimony on the “*Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act*,” draft legislation by Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04). This proposal would renew the federal government’s commitment to manage forest resources for the benefit of rural schools and counties and require active forest management in areas specifically identified by the U.S. Forest Service as capable of timber production.

“Forested counties, including many in the Northwest, have long depended on a federal promise of revenue from timber sales to help fund vital services such as education and roads. Over a century ago the federal government pledged to actively manage our forests and provide 25 percent of revenues for counties containing National Forest Lands. The federal government has failed to uphold this commitment,” [said Chairman Hastings](#). “We need a new approach – right now — that renews the federal government’s commitment to manage resources for the benefit of forested counties and their schools. Restoring active management of our national forests, as this draft legislation does, would ensure a stable, predictable revenue stream for counties and schools. Active management would promote healthier forests, reduce the risk of wildfires, and decrease our reliance on foreign countries for timber and paper goods.”

Democrat Rep. Peter DeFazio (OR-04), speaking on behalf of a proposal involving forested Bureau of Land Management lands in Oregon that face the same failures in management as lands managed by the Forest Service, noted that “*We need to provide a sustainable solution that serves our forests, our communities, and our counties better.*”

Ray Campbell, Okanogan County Commissioner in Washington underscored the need for this legislation before the Subcommittee. “*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,*” said Campbell. He also discussed how the State of Washington is able

to effectively manage their state forest lands producing *“500% more actual timber revenue on less than one quarter of the land base of that held by the U.S. Forest Service.”*

The positive impacts of this important legislation will be felt all over the Western United States. **Tommie Martin, Arizona’s Gila County Supervisor**, pointed out that communities like his WANT to actively manage their land. *“Chairman Hastings clearly appreciates that American communities would prefer to receive receipts from a working landscape, but that until we are allowed to effectively work the land again, a bridge is necessary,”* said Martin.

Justin Wood, Vice President of Fish Contracting NW and representative from the National Association of Home Builders, spoke on the positive job and economic benefits of this draft proposal noting that *“this legislation will go a long way toward helping rebuild the supply chain and reviving local mills and timber companies, while also ensuring the continued recovery of the housing industry.”*

Healthy and active forest management is also extremely important to preventing catastrophic forest fires. Today’s Subcommittee hearing also examined two bills to help prevent forest fires - [H.R. 1345](#) *“Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act of 2013”* authored by Rep. Paul Gosar (AZ-04) and [H.R. 818](#) *“Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act”* authored by Rep. Scott Tipton (CO-03).

Andy Groseta, Public Land Rancher & President, Arizona Cattle Growers Association & Member of Public Lands Council & National Cattlemen’s Beef Association noted that *“the planning process currently in use by the federal agencies is woefully broken.”* Groseta called on the Committee to quickly advance H.R. 1345. *“We urge the Committee to advance the Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act of 2013 without delay, to enact common sense solutions to reduce the threat of wildfire on public lands. H.R. 1345 will provide tools the agencies need to effectively manage the Nation’s forests.”*

Cindy Dozier, commissioner in Colorado’s Hinsdale County, knows the devastating effects of forest fires. The summer of 2012 marked one of the worst fire seasons in recent memory according to Dozier. She said that now is the time to act to pass measures to manage America’s forest lands: *“If HR 818 were to languish this year, I believe, based on last year’s wild fire season, that we could possibly see even more devastating consequences this year in our county and all over the West. Please do not let that happen!”*

While aiming to prevent forest fires, this legislation will also help local communities enjoy the benefits of increased timber production resulting in an economic boost. **John “Chris” Maisch C.F., State Forester and Division Director at Department of Natural Resources in Alaska** noted that by allowing healthy forest management in just one of Alaska National Forests *“over the next 80 years, hundreds of jobs – the equivalent of an auto factory – would be created and sustained forever.”* He went on to say that *“Alaska’s federal and state forests have the potential to be a model of sustainability, including environmental, social, and economic objectives...I urge you to act on these important pieces of legislation.”*

The common sense legislation laid before the Subcommittee today is a positive step forward to managing America’s forests in a safe, healthy, and productive manner that allows communities to grow their economies while at the same time protecting them from

devastating forest fires. For more information on the legislation before the committee today, please visit www.naturalresources.house.gov.

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