

Testimony of Chuck Blackburn on HR 233 on July 14, 2005

I am honored to sit before this committee today to testify on behalf of Del Norte County in opposition to HR 233. I would like to introduce myself. I am Chuck Blackburn, a Supervisor for Del Norte County, California. I was a teacher and a coach in Del Norte County schools for 33 years before retiring in 1994. I worked seasonally as a fishing guide on the Klamath and Smith Rivers for steelhead and salmon for over 30 years. I continue to broadcast all the Del Norte Warriors high school football and basketball games over KPOD radio as I have done for 22 years. I got involved in Del Norte County government when the Department of Fish and Game was threatening to close salmon and steelhead fishing on the South Fork of the Smith River just below my property in 1996. I am humbled and proud to say that my wife, Missy, and I were honored as the Grand Marshals for the parade this last July 4th.

I am here to let this committee know that the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors voted 3 separate times in 2002, 2003, and 2005 to oppose HR 233. The state and federal government currently own and control close to 80% of the land in Del Norte County. We lost 25,000 acres in 2002 in a sale of Miller-Rellim timber lands to the Save-the-Redwoods League and California State Parks, land that is still locked up. We fought hard and finally received \$5 million in mitigation. There is a projected 9,000 acre sale of Green Diamond Resources timber land to Western Rivers Conservancy which will then be turned over to Six Rivers National Forest/Smith River National Recreation Area. We are negotiating for mitigation and concessions for access and campgrounds. This is within one mile of my ranch at Big Flat.

The political way that HR 233 has been handled in Del Norte County should be of major concern. At no time since 2002, when I was Board Chair, was there a real effort to meet with the full Board on the impacts or mitigations of this Bill. Congressman Thompson made several trips to Del Norte County between 2002 and 2005 but meetings were coordinated through one Supervisor and select constituents. There were no efforts to hold a public hearing or meet with those in opposition to discuss concerns.

After the Board of Supervisor's last vote on March 8, Chairperson McClure made contact with several local resource industry representatives to try to sway their opinion to support the Bill. This was followed by a visit by Congressman Thompson for a private field trip into the Siskiyou Fork area of eastern Del Norte County, located in my District. After the field trip, several of these representatives told me they felt pressured to change their positions.

There apparently has been a frantic attempt to make some last minute changes to appease Del Norte County concerns regarding this Bill. My question is why wasn't this done in 2002 and 2003 in an open manner to see if mitigations and agreements could have been reached then?

There is a tremendously organized preservation effort to put pressure on Del Norte County to change its vote, including hate mail. This is politics at its worst. Our community needs its traditions and cultures to be protected and those timber, fishing and agriculture businesses need to be supported for the economic well-being of our community.

Tourism is certainly an important part of the equation but with over 100 inches of rain between October and May, our major tourism season is 4 months long.

I hope that this committee will honor the request of Del Norte County to be removed from this Bill. The County looks forward to working more positively with Congressman Thompson on other needs for our community.

It is an honor to be here with California State Senator Sam Aanestad before this Committee. Thank you, Congressman Pombo and Committee.