

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Statement

**Prepared Statement for the Record of
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Before the
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Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
of the United States House of Representatives
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Madam Chairman and Members of the House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health, my name is Eric Kingsley and I am currently the Executive Director of the New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association. Our association represents over 1,500 landowners, loggers, foresters and wood using industries in the Granite State. Our members own and responsibly manage well over a million acres of productive forestland. New Hampshire has a healthy forest with a good balance of species, ecosystems, and age classes. We grow considerably more timber than we harvest. Forest industries in the state contribute roughly \$3.9 billion - eleven percent of the gross state product - to our economy annually, and employ 6,500. New Hampshire is the second most heavily forested state in the nation, with roughly 84 percent of the state covered by hardwood, white pine and spruce-fir forests. Of this forestland, 20 percent is under federal or other government ownership -- primarily the White Mountain National Forest.

I am here today on behalf of the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), of which the New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association is a member. AF&PA is the national trade association for the forest products industry. AF&PA represents more than 250 companies and related associations that engage in or represent the manufacture of pulp, paper, paperboard and wood products. The forest products industry accounts for more than eight percent of total U.S. manufacturing output, employs 1.5 million people and ranks among the top ten manufacturing employers in 46 states.

I am here today to talk about the current state of our Forest Service and offer some recommendations that I believe will point them in the right direction. Currently, the National Forest System has fallen prey to overlapping and conflicting laws and regulations that have riddled the management of our forests and grasslands with bureaucratic red tape. This is preventing the agency from fulfilling Congressionally mandated responsibilities to manage these lands according to The Organic Act, The National Forest Management Act, the Multiple Use/Sustained Yield Act, and the Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act.

According to a Government Accounting Office report, the National Forest System currently has 65 million

acres at high risk to catastrophic wildfire, insect infestation, or disease. This equates to roughly one out of every three acres of our 192 million acre National Forest System being in a state of poor health and is susceptible to catastrophic occurrences. The Forest Service has acknowledged this and yet has failed to produce a cohesive strategy to deal with the problem. This may be no more evident than in the current fire season. To date, over 78,800 fires have burned over 6.9 million acres of public land - an area larger than my home state of New Hampshire, including 2.2 million acres on our national forests, resulting in what many are calling the worst fire season since 1910.

Recently proposed regulations only threaten to further restrict and limit the Forest Service's ability to actively manage federal forestlands and address the current forest health crisis. The current administration has proposed major rulemakings that include the President's roadless initiative, forest planning regulations, transportation policy, and a draft strategic plan. Further, regional assessments, national monument designations, and regional management plans have been proposed and are in various phases of completion.

Taken in isolation, these actions are troublesome. Viewed as a whole these actions serve to undermine the multiple use mission of the Forest Service. The regulatory initiatives that the Forest Service is pursuing, an agency strategic plan, the land management planning regulations, and the roadless area initiative (affecting over one third of the national forest land base), are intimately related. The outcome or decision on one of these clearly impacts the outcome or decisions on the others. To date, the Forest Service has not provided any analysis on this inter-relatedness and how they will collectively affect the future of our Forest Service and National Forest System.

A highly vocal and extreme preservation community is marching in lock-step with the Forest Service in development of these proposals. One after another they are introduced and continually pull much needed resources from the agency and the forest level work needed to be done to address the current forest health crisis.

This has led to a lot of rhetoric at the Washington Office level with limited action on the ground, where it is most needed. But, even at the Washington level, there is a severe lack in the development and implementation of proposals and regulations. An example of this is the Forest Service's roads moratorium. On January 28, 1998 there was an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in the Federal Register to set up an 18-month moratorium on road construction and reconstruction while developing a policy on road management. The Final Interim Rule was published on February 12, 1999 initiating an 18-month moratorium effective March 1, 1999 through August 2000. It is now September 2000 and the moratorium has expired with no new policy or direction for the construction and reconstruction of forest roads. In over 31 months, the Forest Service has been unable to finalize a new policy, even as Mike Dombeck, Chief of the US Forest Service, testifies that there is currently an \$8.2 billion backlog for maintenance and reconstruction on forest roads and in the annual appropriations process submits a budget request that fails to fund even 20% of the backlog.

These regulatory initiatives and their development also threaten the proper management of our federal lands because they withdraw significant monetary resources. Funding is being diverted from the regional and forest level of the Forest Service to the Washington Office to support overhead. A layoff analysis found that over 6,500 permanent jobs, 19% of the Forest Service work force, has been eliminated. However, at the same time, top management jobs in the Forest Service increased by 6%. This shift in employment demographics is leading the Forest Service in the wrong direction.

In the past 3 years, the Forest Service has been unable to meet its congressionally mandated goals because

the staff and monetary resources have been siphoned away and placed at the Washington, D.C. level to help create a "legacy" out of our national forests. What will that legacy be? And what do we want that legacy to be?

Due to all of the reasons I have stated, I believe that the future of the Forest Service needs to be one where science-based, active forest management is utilized to return forest lands from their current state of neglect. The forest products industry is not just concerned with logging as claimed by Secretary Babbitt in a recent editorial in the Los Angeles Times. We recognize that forest products are just one of the multiple uses of healthy federal forest lands. I am here to say that the forest products industry is part of the solution to the forest health crisis; therefore, to contribute to the development of solutions, AF&PA has developed a new federal land management initiative called New Federal Forestry which proposes just such a paradigm shift in the policies of the Forest Service's land management program. New Federal Forestry was developed based upon a set of long term principles for federal forest lands. New Federal Forestry:

- recognizes that forests are unique and dynamic,
- sustains the long-term health of the forest landscape,
- protects clean water, clean air, wildlife and fish in the forests,
- seeks to achieve landscapes which contain a broad spectrum of ecological conditions,
- seeks to strike a balance between ecological objectives, economic sustainability and social needs, and
- allows decision making at the local level in a collaborative working environment that enables participation by all forest stakeholders.

In applying these principles, the Forest Service needs to focus land management decisions at the local level. Local level planning and decision-making has proven effective throughout the country in projects such as the Quincy Library Group in California. This is not only a western issue. New Hampshire's federal forests are not experiencing the catastrophic wildfires plaguing much of the country, they are among those lands identified as having a high risk of mortality due to insect infestation and disease. Local level, collaborative efforts have been implemented here as well in the development of the forest plan for the White Mountain National forest.

In New Hampshire, we are fortunate to have a culture that values citizen participation in government. While viewed as quaint in other areas of the country, our annual town meetings serve as the legislative body in many municipalities. They require citizens to work together, respectfully disagree when necessary, and come together to support the shared goals of the community. This participation in decision making extends beyond town government and into other reaches of our lives - including forest planning. Stakeholders representing the forest products industry, environmental organizations, recreation groups, local towns, and many others have come together to craft a management plan for the White Mountain National Forest. This plan, mandated under the National Forest Management Act, governs actions on the forest for the next decade.

Citizen participation in forest planning is difficult to manage, but achieves a result that strengthens the relationship between the people and their land. The value of locally led forest planning was recognized by all major presidential candidates, including both Governor Bush and Vice-President Gore, during our

presidential primary. Unfortunately, the long hours and thoughtful discourse that the citizens of New Hampshire and New England have put into developing this plan are threatened by the top-down, one-size-fits-all actions of the Forest Service. Unilateral decrees, made outside of this planning process, undermine public faith in the value of their participation. This is unfortunate, and will not serve the public or our forests over time.

This is why our trained professional forest managers should have the opportunity to implement land management decisions at the local level. Private land managers are not currently experiencing the same risks to their forests' health. Private land managers are able to actively manage their forest lands and do so based upon management principles similar to those I mentioned earlier. An example of this is the forest and paper product industry's Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program, a program that has received national conservation awards and recognition from many environmental organizations. This is why I believe that learning from private land management and conservation efforts, and past national forest successes, such as the forest plan for the White Mountain National Forest, can enable the Forest Service to empower its local professionally trained officials and local stakeholders to develop plans to restore forest health and sustainably manage the national forests to meet their sustained yield/multiple use mandates. With my testimony, I submit a brochure on the New Federal Forestry initiative I discussed earlier. Not only will this help the Forest Service overcome its stagnant and ineffective forest management program, but it will restore our national forest lands to a healthy state, and then we will have a legacy for our National Forest System lands.

Thank you for this opportunity Madam Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Subcommittee.

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