

Congressman Wally Herger (CA-02): Statement for the Record

Good Morning, I would like to thank Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for holding this hearing and inviting me to participate. The Northern California Congressional District I represent includes all or part of seven national forests. The rural forest communities near to them have been devastated by years of mismanagement of our national forests. Nearly twenty-years ago a group of local environmentalists and citizens formed the Quincy Library Group to develop a collaborative and locally-driven solution to bring health and stability to our communities and the forests they live in. The QLG's efforts brought about the bipartisan *Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act*. I have introduced H.R. 3685 to reauthorize this common sense and collaborative project.

The *Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act* established a pilot project to demonstrate the effectiveness of forest management strategies that balanced environmental, safety and economic needs. It passed the House of Representatives 429-1, and was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1998. Despite it being the product of bipartisanship and collaboration, the implementation of this legislation has been stalled by fringe groups and frivolous lawsuits. Years of partial implementation has resulted in some successes for the project's approach, but unfortunately, these groups have slowed those successes and prevented full implementation of the law as envisioned by Congress. Their obstructionist agenda is not only hurting rural forest communities, but also the very forests, watersheds and wildlife habitat they claim to "protect."

Mr. Chairman, our rural forest communities have suffered greatly from the impasse in forest management. The victims include schools left with dramatically reduced funding; communities crushed by the loss of thousands of jobs; and forests that are less healthy and at greater risk of catastrophic wildfires that burn hotter, longer, and encompass more land, especially in drought years. These catastrophic fires leave charred forests that can take more than a century to recover, in addition to the total destruction of homes and businesses. The Forest Service is spending over a billion dollars each year fighting fires. In this time of trillion dollar federal deficits, limited taxpayer dollars could be better used if we addressed the unhealthy conditions in our national forests to help prevent catastrophic fires in the first place. The Quincy Library Group Pilot Project does just that, restoring our forests in a fiscally responsible and effective manner.

H.R. 3685 would reauthorize the program for ten more years, ensuring that the Forest Service has a stable and consistent period for fully implementing the pilot project. At the discretion of the Forest Service, it would also allow for its expansion to all National Forest system lands within parts of California and Nevada. The expansion of the pilot project will enable the Forest Service to use the effective QLG approach in additional forest communities.

In the face of severe economic challenges, we need commonsense forest management that allows local communities to utilize their natural resources and create jobs, while also restoring the health of our forests. If we utilize more of this renewable natural resource, we can foster job growth, generate revenue for the treasury, and help prevent catastrophic forest fires. The Quincy Library Group Pilot Project can provide a model for achieving these critical goals. Indeed, I believe it is the solution to our catastrophic wildfire problem that can and should be replicated across the West. But, we have to give it a chance to fully be implemented and succeed. I look forward to working with the committee to extend and expand this bipartisan and common-sense project.