

# *Interagency Cooperation In Wildland Fire Fighting,*

a Field Hearing of the

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

TESTIMONY

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I was asked if I would testify in this congressional hearing. I have lived in northeastern Arizona for over 50 years and have been associated with the lumber manufacturing business in this same region for over 25 years. I have hiked, camped, and hunted in the forests of northern Arizona for over 40 years. I have loved these forests, fought fires in these forests, and helped manage these forests. Therefore, I felt that I might add something worthwhile.

My father who was born in northeastern Arizona in 1909, worked in and owned lumber manufacturing facilities for over 50 of his 88 years. He told me that when he was a young man, you could pick up a rock in the forest, close your eyes and throw it, and you would almost never hit a tree. But today, a rock thrown in our forests will likely ricochet off several small diameter trees before it hits the ground.

The Southwestern Region of the USDA Forest Service explains the reasons for the present fire-hazard conditions of the Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto National Forests. (This would apply as well to the other forests in northern Arizona):

A reduction in fire frequency over the last century, early Forest Service fire suppression policies and high levels of livestock grazing, combined with an unusual period of increased precipitation in the southwest between 1960 and 1988, has resulted in tree densities and [sic] are above historic levels of fuel loading throughout much of northern Arizona. Insects, disease, and a prolonged drought have combined to create extremely volatile fuels over large areas. [\(1\)](#)

The fire danger is not new; it has been evolving over a long period of time and has existed for years. While tree densities, heavy fuel loads, and competition of trees for groundwater were increasing, thinning and logging were decreasing due to frivolous lawsuits filed by pseudo-environmental groups against the Forest Service. The suspension of virtually all Forest Service timber sales- even salvage sales- led to the demise of the forest products industry in northern Arizona (which was dependent upon raw materials from public lands), including a pulp mill between Heber and Snowflake, the only real outlet for small diameter wood (roundwood). The allowable cut of timber (not including roundwood) on the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest in 1992, was approximately 89 million board feet. At present, the allowable cut is approximately 5 million board feet and includes roundwood, firewood, and possibly Aunt Agatha's Christmas tree. While many are led by the pseudo-environmental movement to believe that to save a few trees is to save a forest, the wise by now have learned- recently by sad experience- the paradox that to cut a few trees is to save a forest.

Until the capitulation of the Forest Service to the pseudo-environmental forces, the forests of northern

Arizona were being managed by a sustained-yield, selective-cut (never clear-cut) process. Roundwood removal was feasible because of the nearby pulp mill. Prescribed burns were employed but were less extensive with the regular removal of roundwood and the completion of erosion control and brush disposal required by every timber sale. Huge strides had been made to amend damages from errant practices of the past. Optimal forest health conditions was a foreseeable goal of the Forest Service and the people and industries dependent upon our forests. However, impatient with the process and espousing that Nature should do the job, the pseudo-environmental movement wreaked havoc with their endless appeals and lawsuits.

Nature, left to itself will eventually reach a balance, but will the end result be desirable? How long will it take? Is the process worth it? The damage from the Rodeo/Chediski fire and the extensive destruction in our forests from drought, disease, and insects should give us a glimpse of Nature's processes and the time frame of positive change following catastrophe. Nature has no conscience. Humanity has the intellect and capability to *work with nature* to manage forests for recreation, wildlife, flora, endangered species, community stability, and the human condition. And man has a conscience. Only a pseudo-environmentalist perceives Nature and Humanity as enemies.

And only a hypocrite denies that we need what a forest provides for us- and which we demand to have. If the 100% biodegradable, renewable, and recyclable paper and wood products- which we ALL use- do not come from a managed forest, from what source will we obtain them? When the raw material of a forest is not harvested, there is no utilization of a readily available and necessary natural resource. When that unused material is from public lands, there is no recovery in stumpage fees to the national treasury. That unused material, instead, becomes something even worse than a wasted resource. It becomes fuel for devastating fires. When costs of fighting the Rodeo/Chediski fire and rehabilitating the land are weighed against the potential revenue the timber would have yielded had it been harvested indefinitely with sustained-yield, selective-cut management practices, it is obvious that the losses are incalculable.

The letter I received from the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources states that the purpose of this hearing is to "assess the role of local and federal agencies in the interagency incident management system when battling wildland fire." I have never been exposed to what the "interagency incident management system" is. With the confusion that ensued during the fire, I have to wonder if local and federal agencies know any more than I do about the interagency incident management system, particularly about jurisdiction within unincorporated towns. I have not addressed this issue of which I have little knowledge; I have instead addressed the issue of wildlands which should be managed to prevent catastrophic wildfires. The agency whose motto is "Caring for the land and serving the people" needs to return to caring for the land and serving the people, abiding by the laws and regulations by which they are bound, but without the obstruction of irresponsible and frivolous lawsuits and appeals which prevent them from honoring their stewardship to the land and its people.

1. USDA Forest Service, "Scoping Request," Rodeo/Chediski Fire Salvage and Rehabilitation Project, p. 1.

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