

Testimony of Mr. Pete Shumway, Supervisor
Navajo County Board of Supervisors
To: United States House of Representatives,
Committee on Resources,
Subcommittee on Forest & Forest Health,
Field Hearing on Interagency Cooperation
In Wildland Firefighting
September 28, 2002
Show Low, Arizona

"SOUTHWEST FORESTS EMERGENCY RESTORATION NEEDS"

The western forest health issue represents a crisis in massive proportions. I come before this committee today harboring a great deal of frustration over the inability of our federal government to fulfill its obligations in implementing effective strategies to resolve western forest health issues. I believe, as does Congress, that strong partnerships between federal, state, county and local governments are absolutely necessary to make meaningful progress on this issue.

The southwestern United States contains one of the world's largest Ponderosa Pine Forests. Presently these pine forests are at extreme risk of loss from catastrophic fire, insect and disease, and drought mortality due to tree densities far in excess of historic levels. The present realization of such a risk has occurred in Navajo County, where 469,000 acres of this pine forest has been destroyed in the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. Failure to implement effective strategies has not only resulted in a catastrophic fire, but is also resulting in sediment choked streams and lakes, floods, and now a multi-million dollar emergency program for restoration.

In 2001, the area of the present Rodeo-Chediski Fire was proposed for aggressive restoration under our CPR Program. The CPR Program is designed to prevent this very kind of catastrophic tragedy.

In our view, the only acceptable management response to preventing these types of emergency situations is implementing aggressive restoration programs. I am here today to request your assistance in making sure actions are taken immediately to fully launch the National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program (CPR) and a Stewardship Program to restore the area of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire.

The National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program, a national pilot restoration program developed for the Apache-Sitgreaves (AZ), Lincoln (NM), and Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison (CO) National Forests, is designed to prevent such tragedies as seen in 2002. This program restores areas of these forests determined to be at high risk, and it accomplishes it in 10 years (up to 40,000 acres per forest). Under-Secretary of Agriculture, Mark Rey, and the Southwest Congressional Delegation has endorsed this program for inclusion in the National Fire Plan.

The CPR Program:

- Is based on sound scientific principles, developed from continuing research efforts,
- Is designed as a pilot, to permit redesign for adaptation across the West if desired,
- Is co-managed by the Forest Service and local County Government representing state interests, and has extensive local community involvement,
- Follows alternative approaches that are compatible with existing law and regulations, to provide needed flexibility for resource assessments, NEPA processes, budgeting, etc,

- Will reduce catastrophic fire risk near communities, and create healthy forest landscapes and watersheds and,
- Creates sufficient restoration raw materials to encourage new industry investments and reduce public expenditures on the program.

Most critical to the State of Arizona and its people is the need for immediate action to cope with the emergency created by the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. The Counties of the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest CPR Program have worked with our Governor, legislators and communities to petition the Council on Environmental Quality and the Office of the President to declare this an emergency area and provide aid for rapid restoration to prevent further impacts to the health, welfare, and safety of our people and communities. Before you are over 5000 petitions and letters from our community citizens, mayors, county commissioners, legislators and our Governor. In short, the people of Arizona know the present post-fire conditions represent a critical emergency.

We will make available to you the National Forest CPR Program Plan, and the Co-Partnership Stewardship Plan to resolve the post-fire emergency conditions.

The Stewardship Plan includes the following:

1. The Natural Resource Restoration Plan developed by the Apache Sitgreaves Forest Supervisor, presents needs for dead tree and other material removal, stream corridor and riparian restoration, plant reseeding and replanting of trees, wildlife improvements and watershed improvements.
2. The Economic Development Activity Plan includes the following:
 - Programs for accessing equipment for removal of dead standing or down material and other material throughout the fire regime,
 - A program of contracted and volunteer labor pools for replanting of grasses and trees, rehabilitation and restoration of riparian zones and wildlife niches,
 - A program for developing wood processing capability at a Navajo County, Arizona facility and at a Catron County, New Mexico owned facility proposed for refitting for milling small trees by county cooperators in the CPR Program.

In closing I would like to ask today that you offer the assistance of your staff to help the State of Arizona move those two Programs forward by doing the following:

- Request that the CEQ Director and staff meet with representatives of the Southwestern Delegation, the Arizona Governor's Staff and Apache Sitgreaves National Forest CPR Partners, to quickly resolve this emergency condition,
- Request the Southwest Congressional Delegation to implement a proposed Stewardship Plan so that we can utilize damaged trees to offset public costs of restoration, properly restore our watersheds, and resolve the emergency conditions and,
- Support our proposed National Forest CPR Program so that we can take a proactive role with our federal partners to prevent another Rodeo-Chediski Fire.