

House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Eco-Terrorism and Lawlessness on the National Forests
Official Testimony of Congresswoman Darlene Hooley
February 12, 2002

Thank you Mr. Chairman:

It is very appropriate that we are gathered here today on the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, one of our country's greatest leaders. His career -- and the turbulent times he brought the nation through -- exemplify the need to forswear violence in the name of political causes and abide by the rule of law.

In the wake of an 1837 mob lynching of an anti-slavery newspaper editor, Lincoln urged his fellow Americans to "let reverence for the laws . . . become the political religion of the nation," to let legislatures and judges chosen by the people, rather than lynch-mobs motivated by passion and hatred, decide matters.

In the end, Lincoln's philosophy was vindicated. Our nation remains united, and we are committed to the rule of law.

But as is always the case, there is a minority of Americans who refuse to abide by this covenant.

They believe the rule of law does not apply to them, and in the forests and communities of Oregon and the Western United States, their actions are a rapidly growing problem.

Violence or intimidation directed against a Forest Service employee -- or arson in the name of protecting the environment -- are not lawful acts. They are crimes -- and their perpetrators should be apprehended and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Obviously, there are laws in place prohibiting assault or threatening harm against any individual, whether he or she is an environmental activist or a Forest Service employee. It is inexcusable that a Park Service ranger would have to live in fear of having their home or office bombed, or that someone monitoring water quality on public land could be beaten and left for dead.

These are just some of the crimes on federal land which have occurred in the past few years.

As such, I strongly urge the members of the Committee to ensure that our local, state, and federal law enforcement officials are effectively upholding the law in this regard.

That said, eco-terrorism poses additional challenges for the law enforcement community.

It is a well-know fact that very few eco-terrorists, especially E-L-F representatives, have been caught. These groups have no formal organization, and act in small terrorist cells which are autonomous from one another. Because these crimes are investigated with limited resources and manpower, local law enforcement officials have little success in successfully closing these cases.

Along with my colleague from Oregon, Congressman Greg Walden, I have sought to reverse the current

situation by sponsoring H.R. 2583, the Environmental Terrorism Reduction Act. This bill would provide federal assistance where it is needed most, at the local level.

H.R. 2583 would first require the Attorney General to establish a national clearinghouse for information on incidents of eco-terrorism, with the hope that investigators stay ahead of the curve in preventing additional acts of terror.

It should be noted the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) already maintains a data-base of information on every explosive device found or triggered in the United States. As we consider moving this bill forward, it should be perfected to ensure the clearing house contain input from ATF so as not to reinvent the wheel.

In addition, H.R. 2583 would establish the Environmental Terrorism Reduction Program in the Department of Justice.

This program would authorize the Attorney General, upon consultation with the heads of Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies and the Governor of each applicable State, to designate any area as a high intensity environmental terrorism area. After making such a designation local law enforcement agencies could access federal funding to assist them in solving and preventing these types of crimes in the future.

This program is similar to the Department of Justice's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program (HIDTA), which has been extraordinarily useful in Oregon and other states in helping make our communities better places to live.

Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the Committee. I would urge you and entire panel to co-sponsor H.R. 2583, and assist-Congressman Walden and I in getting this legislation approved by the Judiciary Committee.

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