

Committee on Resources

Full Committee

Witness Statement

TESTIMONY OF GEORGE T. FRAMPTON, JR.

ACTING CHAIRMAN, COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 3, 1999

I am very pleased to appear before the Committee today to discuss the President's recent announcement regarding long-term protection for roadless areas in our national forests. The President, Secretary Glickman, Undersecretary Lyons and Chief Dombeck have long identified the transportation system on national forests as a major priority for long overdue attention for several reasons. First, scientists have identified roads as a major threat to habitat, watershed protection, wildlife and other valuable natural resources. Second, while roads are essential for many reasons, we simply do not need a road system for national forests that is so large it could circle the globe eight times. Third, as you have heard previously from the Chief, the Forest Service cannot maintain appropriately and safely the very extensive road system that exists today. Fourth, when new roads are needed, they must be built carefully, taking into account today's best science and technical information regarding public safety and the environment. And finally, bringing me to the the subject of today's hearing, there are places where more roads need not and should not be built.

President Clinton has supported all of the Forest Service's initiatives related to the transportation system. In regards to roadless areas, scientists have long identified retention of roadless areas as critically important to the protection of watersheds and wildlife. Roadless areas also have important social and economic values. As the President stated in November, 1997, "... These last remaining wild areas are precious to millions of Americans and key to protecting clean water and abundant wildlife habitat, and providing recreation opportunities."

As you know, an eighteen month moratorium was put in place in February of this year suspending new road construction and reconstruction on most national forests. Thousands of letters received in response to the proposed moratorium urged that more permanent protection be afforded roadless areas of the national forest system. This support was reinforced by letters signed by numerous Members of Congress, including Members of this Committee.

The President's announcement on October 13, 1999, launched the beginning of a very public process to determine how best to protect roadless areas. The President directed the Forest Service to develop and propose for public comments regulations that reflect the best available science and the full range of ecological, economic and social values represented by these lands. The proposed regulation, not yet drafted, will be the subject of an environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Preceding publication of the draft EIS, which is expected to be issued

this spring, the Forest Service will hold numerous meetings around the country. Following publication of the draft EIS, the Forest Service will again hold numerous public meetings as well as, of course, take comment on the draft EIS and draft regulation. CEQ plans to work closely with the Forest Service to assure full compliance with NEPA and our regulations.

Because there has been some confusion, I would also like to briefly clarify what this announcement did not do. The President did not issue an executive order. He did not put into place any new interim management rules or restrictions. He did not close any roads, nor does this announcement anticipate road closures.

I know that this announcement is controversial. Controversy over our national forests has existed since their very inception and will no doubt continue. However, the President strongly believes that is the right direction to go in at this time. We will move forward in a way that is respectful of everyone's views in a fair and open process.

I will be happy to answer questions from Members of the Committee.

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