

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Testimony

The Community Protection and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Act of 1999

Testimony by James E. Coufal

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before the Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

U.S. House of Representatives

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Madam Chairman, my name is Jim Coufal, President of the Society of American Foresters (SAF). The almost 18,000 members of the Society constitute the scientific and educational association representing the profession of forestry in the United States. SAF's primary objective is to advance the science, technology, education, and practice of professional forestry for the benefit of society. We are ethically bound to advocate and practice land management consistent with ecologically sound principles. I am especially pleased to be here today and I thank the Subcommittee for its continued support of professional forestry. I thank the Chair for the opportunity.

In September of 1997, we provided comments on an earlier version of this bill. You and your staff, have addressed our concerns and have produced a bill that SAF supports. Working together has produced an improved bill.

The forests and communities that are the focus of this bill are too important to be embroiled in partisan politics. We believe this bill is a good faith effort to address a very serious problem, and hope that it will attract bipartisan support.

The Forest Service estimates that 40 million acres of forestland are at risk from catastrophic events. The agency is currently producing risk maps to describe the location of these areas, and we eagerly anticipate the release of that information. This bill provides an important tool to address some of those problems. The legislation provides an innovative funding mechanism of using the proceeds from harvesting activities solely designed to reduce hazardous fuels to perform other forest management activities that cannot pay for themselves. The bill allows the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) the flexibility to make long-term investments in the forest while reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire. Additionally, the bill focuses on the wildland urban interface, an area that deserves great attention as human lives are at risk.

The bill also seems consistent with aspects of our upcoming report on the national forests and the public lands administered by the BLM. While this report will address a range of issues surrounding the

management of national forests and public lands it will likely recommend that Congress set clear and appropriate goals for these agencies, that land-managers are given appropriate discretion to implement those goals, and that Congress ought to find innovative funding mechanisms to support those activities. This bill addresses all three of those issues appropriately.

This bill is one tool to address this problem. The Forest Service and the BLM will need other tools and significant funding over a sustained period to address the hazardous fuel buildup on the national forests and public lands. Although this legislation is a welcome step in the right direction, the proceeds from these hazardous fuels reduction sales will not be enough to address all aspects of this very serious issue. A Congressional Research Service study estimated the cost of reducing these fuel loads at \$3.5 billion. The cost of reducing hazardous fuels and investing in these lands are quite high, but the cost of doing nothing is higher still.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am also providing copies of the October 1997 issue of the Journal of Forestry which addresses wildland urban fire issues. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

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