

Statement of Jim Durglo
Fire Technical Specialist, Intertribal Timber Council
Before the House Natural Resources Committee
Forum on Forest Health and Active Management
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My name is Jim Durglo and I am the Fire Technical Specialist for the Intertribal Timber Council. My role is to work with member tribes across the country and federal agencies to improve forest health and reduce the impact of wildfire on our resources and communities. I previously served as the Forest Manager for the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes in Western Montana and have been engaged in forestry and fire management for over 35 years including a three-year stint with the US Forest Service as a smokejumper in Missoula Montana.

Tribal nations maintain a vested interest in our forest resources because they hold our first foods, medicines, and are spiritually and culturally significant to our way of life. They also provide a valuable economic return to both tribal and surrounding communities. Countless generations of our ancestors have utilized these same lands and it is our responsibility to care for it for future generations. We should also recognize that fire, both natural and human lit are part of the natural world. We need to re-learn how to live and use fire for the benefit of our people and communities.

In the mid-1990's the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes began to write a new forest management plan, under Indian Self Determination (PL-93-638). In the new plan we recognized that fire, both natural and human lit, played a significant role in developing our forest composition and structure, especially in the northern Rocky Mountains. We recognized that because of the oppression of Indian burning since the mid- 1880's and the national fire suppression policy after 1910- that our forests have dramatically changed. We have since intentionally attempted to apply more prescribed fire on the landscape.

Of course, fire should only be prescribed when forest conditions allow it. Mechanical treatment may often be needed first before it is appropriate to re-introduce fire into a forest ecosystem.

Indian forests and their management, under the directive of the National Indian Forest Resources Management Act 1990, are reviewed by an independent scientific panel every ten years. For the fourth time since 1994, the Indian Forest Management Assessment Team (IFMAT) is currently generating a report to Congress. In the past, the IFMAT report shows that Tribes are suffering from chronic underfunding and challenges created by the loss of leadership and staffing. On the other, it also shows significant progress being made on tribal forests.

Nevertheless, tribes are efficient in the use of scarce resources to prepare our forests for fire, recover after fire and ensure the continuity of forest resources for generations to come.

On a total of 334 reservations in 36 states, 18.6 million acres of forests and woodlands are held in trust by the United States and managed for the benefit of Indians. Pursuant to both tribal direction and federal law, our forests must be sustainably managed. Indian Tribes in several states have instituted programs in partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including active timber management, large hazardous fuels reduction treatments, prescribed fire, assisting property owners with fuels assessments, and other programs to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire. Our approach is holistic, striving to simultaneously sustain economic, ecological, and cultural values, the so-called “triple bottom line. We recognize that we need to increase the pace and scale of our treatments.

Many tribes retain off-reservation treaty rights on ceded lands that became National Forests. Catastrophic wildfire on these forests directly and negatively impacts tribes-sometimes-for generations. Even with effective treatments on our own lands, severe wildfires from adjacent federal lands inflict significant damage and economic cost to tribal forests and resources.

Congress noted this when it passed the Tribal Forest Protection Act in 2004. The TFPA was intended to provide tribes a means to propose projects on adjacent federal lands that would protect their rights, lands, and resources by reducing threats from wildfire, insects, and disease. TFPA provides the authority, but no funding has been appropriated for its implementation, however.

The ITC is working with the Forest Service and tribes to better implement the TFPA and get more acres treated. We appreciate the 2018 Farm Bill authority to use the “638” contracting authority to propose TFPA projects, as well as adding tribes to the Good Neighbor Authority.

Tribal land and historical knowledge will play an important role in changing the way forests on all jurisdictions are managed. The Tribal Forest Protection Act, specifically acknowledges the value of “indigenous knowledge and skills of members of the Indian tribe,” borrowing from both traditional practices and forestry and fire science.¹

Finally, the loss of forest products infrastructure – both private and tribal -- threatens the ability to economically treat forests before fire. The ITC would like to work with the committee on a holistic approach to forest management that contemplates protection of that infrastructure.

I invite you to visit reservations to see how Tribes are actively managing our forests to maintain healthy, resilient landscapes. Our management approaches could provide informative examples and contrasts to the results of over a century of misguided fire

¹ H.R. 3846 - Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004, 25 U.S. Code § 3115a (2004), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/3846>

suppression policies on neighboring federal lands.