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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Inslee, Members of the Committee: Thank you for your invitation to testify today.

My name is David Calahan. I was born and raised in Oregon, a son of a timber faller. My first job out of high school was working in the woods as a choker setter. For 30 years I have lived in the wildland interface of southern Oregon. My home is located in the Applegate Valley, which is west of Medford, on 80 acres of land bordered on three sides by 6300 acres of Bureau of Land Management land. I retired from the Medford Fire Department in November, 1999. The Medford Fire Department also protects the rural area around Medford, so firefighters are trained in wildland fires and work closely with all the local fire agencies. I continue to work on the thinning of small fuels around my property and I love to advise anyone in the rural area as
how best to make their home less likely to be lost to a forest fire. I am not opposed to thinning or logging and I do both on my own properties.

In 2001 I helped defend homes threatened by the Quartz fire. This summer I worked as a volunteer on the Squires Fire, which started just 3 miles from my home. Within a few hours of the fire's ignition I was on the scene defending an absentee friend's buildings (house, shop and new barn), and I continued another four days of monitoring hot spots. This is the fire that burned the tree stands recently visited by President Bush. I have observed first hand the burned landscape, having taken multiple hikes through much of the fire area to learn what really happened on the ground. Once again I was shown that forest fires burn in a mosaic pattern, burning hot in some areas, cooler in others and sometimes it only underburns or the fire skips areas completely.

During the President's visit, the press and the public were shown very unrepresentative and misleading pictures of how the Squires Fire burned in relation to thinning and other treatment of the land. Attached are photos that will show areas burnt with quite the opposite effect.

There are a number of areas burnt by the Squires Fire where thinning had recently been done on BLM lands and yet overall the trees sustained severe mortality. As the attached photos illustrate (all taken in areas burned in the Squires Fire), stands that the BLM had thinned sometimes burned quite severely. Photos no. 1, 2, & 3 show recently thinned stands, and you will see that the fire burned up into the trees' crowns, scorching them far up the trunks, killing the needles (most of the needles on the trees in these photos are missing or brown) and the tree. These photos demonstrate thinning may help reduce a fire’s severity if the weather conditions are working for you. But when the climate/weather turns against you, thinned areas can

suffer even more than untouched areas.

You can also see from these photos where thinning (described as fuel reduction) took place there are large stumps where mature trees were cut, trees that are the most fire resistant. One of the downsides of thinning is it lets in more sun and wind that dries out the forest making it potentially even more prone to severe fire.

In the same canyon were places that BLM had not yet thinned. One such area I saw was about 60 acres that had a beautiful burn where the fire stayed on the ground and only scorched the trees when it got to the very top of the hill. Photos no. 4, 5 & 6 show stands BLM plans to thin soon but at the time of the fire was untouched. Trees planned for removal are marked with blue paint.
This stand and other untouched areas in riparian zones burned cool and the trees remain healthy. The trees in these photos are not scorched high up and the forest canopy is mostly undamaged. The effect of this burn has been to do just what we want fire to do, a nice beneficial underburn. Over time, some of the scorched small trees will die from the effects of fire and/or lack of light, reducing the stand density and leaving the strongest, largest trees to withstand future fires as they withstood the Squires Fire.

The aftermath of the Squire's Fire shows multiple factors at work to create the mosaic burn pattern. The untreated, heavily burned stand shown by President Bush and the press illustrates only one part of this. This was an area above private land logged by Boise Cascade. Boise's land (200 acres) was completely stripped of its commercial timber approximately four years ago and left covered with logging slash and small conifer trees. When the fire came through this industrially logged area covered with logging slash it burned very hot. The fire came out of this private land and traveled a short distance through BLM land to reach the ridge viewed by President Bush. Most of this area of the ridge burnt severely whether thinned or not. As the fire crested over the ridge it became less severe due to terrain burning downhill. This can explain the area President Bush also visited showing a stand of trees that had been thinned by BLM and had burned less intensely. In any fire you get many different kinds of burns, which is mostly determined by climate/weather (wind, humidity, inversion layers, etc.) and terrain. Fuel density is a factor which is many times overruled by climate and terrain. The point is, individual stands cannot be used as an example of how a fire will treat a certain area in the future. There are simply too many factors of which fuel density is only one.

The Squires Fire also illustrates problems with the 'defensible fuel profile zones,' or shaded fuel breaks located on ridges that federal land management agencies have started to favor recently. This is a wide strip on each side of a ridgetop with very few trees left standing. The DFPZ on the northern flank of the Squires fire failed to stop the fire and a number of the few trees left after the treatment were killed.

My experience and observations fighting forest fires in the wildland-urban interface have convinced me that logging of larger, mature trees in the backcountry can lead to fires burning much "hotter," which is very damaging to the health of the forest. As I saw repeatedly in the Squires Fire, some areas thinned by BLM (where they cut down larger and mature trees), burned much hotter and did more damage to the remaining trees and the soil when compared to areas that had not been touched

I would like to get the message across that most fire in the forest, when it isn't threatening someone's house, is a good thing. We know that we got into this high fuels situation by denying fire and, in much of these more remote areas, changing our approach to fire is the only
way we will get out of it.

We also need to be willing to spend the necessary money to do wildland interface thinning. We need to

remove the premise that logging mature trees is an acceptable way to pay for the thinning. We cannot log ourselves out of this problem. Logging practices and the building of more new roads contribute to the fire problem. This is partly because of opening up the forest to sun and wind, as I discussed above. Partly, too, the act of logging makes fire problems bigger and a firefighter's job far more hazardous due to the slash created once a tree is felled. Thinning has a role, but from the moment a tree hits the ground the fuel increases and it can only return to nearly the level it was before the tree's fall with intense management through prescribed burns or hand piling and burning the ground fuels. In the year or two before that can be accomplished, we have increased the ground fuel loading by 3 to 15 tons per acre (figures supplied by the BLM). And within a decade or less you need to return to thin again, as Mother Nature will fill those open spaces created between the remaining trees with lots of brush.

I believe we need to protect people and homes from the risks of fire through genuine community projects which focus first and foremost on protecting homes in the wildland interface. As my inspection of the Squires Fire area and the attached photos show, thinning the forest does not reliably solve fire problems.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.