

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Statement

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CHAIRMAN
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Madam Chairman, I would like to thank you for this committee hearing, and taking the time to allow rural America to have a voice in government. I would particularly like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to share some facts and opinions about the Forest service Roadless Areas Conservation Draft Environmental Impact Statement Volume #1" (Hereafter referred to as the Draft). Allow me to begin by telling you that I am in no way connected to the timber industry, the oil industry, big business or corporate America. I am an American citizen who likes clean air, water, and wildlife as much as anybody. My interest in how federal lands are managed is twofold. First, I believe that federal land managers owe a fiduciary duty to the American people to use some common sense and manage in a way that will preserve the value of those assets that they hold in trust. Second, I am forced to be interested because of the direct and dramatic effect that these decisions have on my county and its residents. I live in Newton County, Arkansas, which is home to tens- of-thousands of U.S. owned and managed acres, and it is not a coincident that it is the poorest per-capita county in Arkansas.

The Draft states that the Forest Service received 360,000 written responses to their Roadless proposal (Page S-5). It further states that 330,000 of these responses were form letters. I submit that they really received 30,000 responses from real people. In reality, they had fewer responses than that. The Draft also states that responses were received from groups, organizations, and government agencies . It causes one to wonder just how many of these responses came from government agencies and their employees. Why bother involving the public at all? In fact, they almost did not involve the public. The Forest Service informed my county and its residents just days before the period for written comment on the Notice of Intent expired. The Forest Service asked us to comment on something that we had never seen and knew almost nothing about. When questioned, the Forest Service personnel knew little more than we did, and had absolutely no specifics. Therefore, the desired results were achieved. There was a very limited response from anyone except government agencies, employees, insider groups, and organizations.

The new Roadless policy as outlined in the Draft fails the common sense test . It fails to protect and preserve the valuable assets of our National Forests. It will adversely impact my county, and literally hundreds of rural communities across America. I therefore strongly oppose the Roadless policy or any other move by the Forest Service to further restrict the public, including the handicapped, from the lands that the Forest Service holds in trust. According to the Forest service document The State of the Nation s Ecosystems , America is a net importer of wood products. I therefore must oppose any move that would further hamper the American peoples ability to harvest, in an environmentally sound way, their renewable resources on public lands.

The Draft (page S-8) states that one of the Forest Service s objectives is restoring ecological features and processes, such as fire, into the ecosystem and Creating desired wildlife habitat conditions. Does burning forests down create desired wildlife habitat conditions ? I may be inclined to believe that an adult spotted owl can outrun a fire. What about their nests and young, or the more than 250 other creepy, crawly, threatened and endangered species listed in Appendix C of the Draft, who will be destroyed by these fires? Not to mention the more than 150 threatened and endangered plants listed there. One also has to wonder, if an owl can outrun a fire, why then can t it outrun a chainsaw? How does a plant run at all?

Restoring . . . the process...fire. I am 54 years old, and do not remember a summer without forest fires. I know that the Forest Service likes to think that they are God, but do they really think that they are the keepers of the element fire? It sure worked well in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Those of us who are unenlightened might even say that it worked too well. Maybe the federal land managers should wait on setting any other fires until they also control the element rain. Even if I believed, which I do not, that the New Mexico fire created desired wildlife habitat conditions, I can tell you with certainty that it created horrific human habitat conditions. These fires destroyed 200 nesting sites of the species Homo Sapiens.

Restoring . . . the process...fire. This new age management tool was born a few years ago when the Park Service melted down Yellowstone National Park. The melting was the direct result of 50 years of mismanagement. Instead of harvesting a renewable resource, they allowed dead and diseased trees to fall over and become tinder box dry fuel. I had friends who fought those fires, and they told me that the fires could have been contained if they could have used bulldozers to plow a fire break, or even a road to the fire line. Instead, they literally had to hike hours to the fire line, and hours back to camp. The fire was in a wilderness area, and no roads or motorized vehicles were allowed. If some common sense had been used, these fires would have been contained weeks before the rains came that finally put them out. What did the Park Service learn from the burning of Yellowstone? Evidently not much. They learned when harvesting is not used as a management tool for removing dead, dying and diseased trees, fire is inevitable, and that little fires are better than big fires.

If the Roadless proposal is implemented, look for more fires like Yellowstone and Los Alamos. Roadless areas lead to more wilderness. They always have. Without the roads used for harvesting timber, that have historically been used for fighting fire, the Forest Service will be unable to effectively access fires that start in these new roadless areas. I imagine that is why they must convince us that fire is great for our forests and the plant and animal life in them. I suppose that we are to believe, as we see the smoke bellowing to the sky, that the Forest Service is creating desired wildlife habitat conditions. Just exactly what wildlife species needs a charred, denuded landscape?

They can t have it both ways. If they want fire introduced into the ecosystem, then we need to stop paying people to put out forest fires. An article in The Arkansas Democrat Gazette dated August 4, 2000, stated The government is spending \$15 million a day to support 20,000 civilian and military firefighters. Let s see,

Americans are paying fire fighters on one end, and fire setters on the other. According to the Government Office of Accounting's report titled Lessons Learned from the Cerro Grande (Los Alamos) Fire estimates have placed the total damage at about \$1 billion. Tax payers paid the wages and benefits to those setting New Mexico on fire, and will now pay the billion dollar bill for damages. To keep our national fire policy consistent, we should pay any American who sets fire on national land the same wages and benefits that we pay the federal arsonists.

I hear a lot about below cost timber sales but little about the cost of harvest compared to the cost of burning billions of dollars in forest assets and the cost of fighting fires. What is more economical, managing our forests by burning them or by harvesting them? An information sheet from the Buffalo Ranger District in my county states that 23 people can be gainfully employed for each million board feet of timber sold, and that \$558,082 is generated in economic benefits. In a speech dated May 22, 2000, to the American Forest and Paper Association, Mr. Dombeck stated, I don't know anyone who would suggest we return to the era of harvesting 12 billion board feet of timber per year from our national forest. I would like for Mr. Dombeck to know that I, along with many others, would like to make that suggestion. If we believe the Forest Service 12 billion board feet would equal 276,000 full time jobs, I much prefer cutting to burning, which so far this year has only provided 20,000 seasonal firefighting jobs. Cutting timber, of course, can no longer be debated on the 3.7 million acres already burned this year, and can not be debated again for fifty to a hundred years.

The Roadless proposal is not about protecting threatened and endangered species. If it were we would be hearing from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Agency. They would want to know the effect that thousands of acres of acidic ash and silt washing into the streams would have on the Bull and 5 kinds of Cutthroat trout, and the host of other fish, frogs, toads, salamanders, mussels and aquatic listed animals. They would want to know if the fires, and the fact that there are no roads to access them, harm the numbers of ground-nesting migratory songbirds. Will it put at risk den trees for the Spotted Owl, the Indiana Bat, the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, or the host of other listed mammals and birds? Can we be insured that the Spruce-Fir Moss Spider and the Pitcher's Thistle, or the numerous other listed bugs and weeds will be safe? The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has never been so big that they could not bend down to protect the smallest insect. Indeed they render millions of acres of private property worthless in their pursuit to protect even the lowliest critter. Can a bug outrun a forest fire? Surely the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be against any proposal that would hamper the ability to protect endangered species and their habitats.

The Roadless Proposal is not about the environment. If it were, the Environmental Protection Agency would be concerned about our health. They would want to know if smoke would add to the depletion of the ozone. Will the run-off from thousands of acres to be incinerated by federal employees put streams in those watersheds over their Total Daily Load Limits? In the homes that will invariably be casualties (remember Los Alamos) of creating wildlife habitats will there be asphalt shingles, asbestos, pesticides, herbicides, or other toxic substances? Will these substances end up in our streams or our ground water? What is the long term effect of these burns? When the Forest Service is burning down a large chunk of a state, should the residents be made to park their vehicles and flee on foot, so that the state will not exceed the new air quality standards? Will the Clean Water Act be violated as the rains erode the barren hills and wash sediment and ash into low areas, thus filling in a U.S. Wetland? When washing into a stream should the silt and ash be considered dumping foreign material into U.S. Waterways? A Federal agency that worries about our health being harmed by smoke from a barbecue grill, lawn mower motor, or wood stove surely would be concerned about using fire as a forest management tool.

The Roadless proposal is not about protecting animals. If it were, the People For The Ethical Treatment of Animals (P.E.T.A.) would be howling. They would never support a proposal that would put millions of

animals and their habitats at risk. They would demand to know: Do grizzly bears sleep in the woods? Would they rather see a road than have all of their berries burned up? Do they prefer their carrion and grubs cooked or uncooked? Do they prefer themselves being cooked or uncooked? Are they frustrated, hurt, or angry when federal employees set their homes on fire? Do they want to get even? Can they tell a federal employee carrying a box of matches from a camper carrying a box of matches? More importantly, can they tell a federal employee from me?

Where are all of the radical environmentalists when you need them? The ones whose policy is zero cutting on all national lands. Those who become incensed at the sight of a stump and positively become enraged at the thought of folks making a living by harvesting timber. Are stubs somehow better than stumps? If they want to protect habitats, streams, air quality, old growth forests, and prevent erosion, they would definitely be against fire as a management tool, and any proposal that would limit access to fight fires. How can one scream about timber harvesting and a few lonely road tracks in millions of acres of forest and say nothing about a proposal that puts millions of forest acres at risk of total destruction - this year, 3.7 million acres destroyed by fire and still counting. I personally would have more respect for them if their policies were consistent. I believe that they should confront the fire, chain themselves to trees, build platforms high in the forest canopy, and refuse to move until the fire quits destroying old growth forests and degradation of our environment.

I have yet to hear one whimper from any of the Federal, and State agencies or the many non-governmental organizations who claim to be saving our forest, streams, watersheds, ecosystems, animals, plants, air, the nation, the world, us from ourselves, and the sky from falling. Not one peep against a policy that would put in harms way everything they claim to be protecting.

I have a few questions of my own. Why is it great to burn our forest removing all plant life, and bad to harvest timber? Harvesting the timber would leave the young trees and all of the soil holding understory, saving far more of our feathered and furry friends and their homes. That seems like the common sense thing to me. Why is it better to set a forest on fire than to provide thousands of jobs and cheap affordable housing material for our working families? Why is it better to let a forest burn than make fine furniture, paper for that best seller, the morning news paper, or one of the thousands of products we use every day made from wood and wood fiber? Why do all rural roads destroy streams and watersheds, but Main Street, the road to the mall, and the drives to two-car garages are necessary improvements to the ecosystem? Is smoke only harmful to ones health when it is second hand, or from a barbeque grill? Will the people who set Los Alamos on fire go to jail? Will they be treated the same as I would if I set a fire on national land?

In recent years, there has been timber cut on private property in Newton County that had never been cut before, and never should have been. In an effort to support the small mills and feed families, roads have been cut into the steepest and most rugged areas. It is a scene that has been repeated all over the South. To protect the ecosystems, we should demand the Forest Service open up for timber harvest those acres that are suitable. We should log these forest on a hundred year schedule, except for special exceptions like insuring forest health. This would provide raw materials for the mills, jobs for the timber workers, and save the Buffalo and other watersheds from truly bad decisions in timbering and road building on private land. In Newton County 57% of the forest is already in wilderness areas, special areas, scenic and wild river ways, slopes too steep to cut, or in some other way protected from logging. If the Forest Service wants to manage something with fire, then let them manage these areas and leave the other 43% that is still suitable for harvest be managed for wood products and jobs.

The Roadless Policy is not about saving the environment and habitats, or protecting plant and animal

species. The alternatives to lumber are steel, plastic, fiber glass and concrete. None of them are renewable, all take more energy, and are harsher on the environment to produce.

Whoever is building the bridge to the twenty-first century sure isn't using lumber from Newton County. That bridge has no on-ramps from Newton County, or the literally hundreds of other rural counties across America. I hear a lot about future generations, and I agree we should be building schools, roads, stability and opportunity for them right now. We owe our children the chance to carry on the customs, and cultures of their forefather. We should have the right to pass the Ozark Mountain people's forest heritage to them, and they should have the right to accept that heritage. Unfortunately Newton County's largest land owner, the Federal Government, cares nothing about our customs, our culture or our children. Once we were able to see a difference between the National Park Service and the U. S. Forest Service. The Forest Service cared about providing jobs for local people and using their lands to help communities and local governments. Not anymore. The lines between the Forest and Park Service have become so blurred that they are meaningless. The Forest Service is now little more than an amen corner for the National Park Service's land management policies.

Whether it is called a roadless area, wilderness area, or an international core area, does not matter in the final results. It matters little if the process is achieved by a Forest Service Roadless Proposal, Forest Service Ecosystem Assessment, Park Service Watershed Management plan, or a Bio-Sphere Feasibility Study, the final results are the same. If we make land owners willing sellers with regulation, and then buy them out with C.A.R.A. funds, or move them off with the point of a gun, the final results are the same. If an agenda is given a new name and gussied up in a new suit of clothes it's still the same agenda. That agenda, Re-Wilding America by moving people into Islands of Humanity, was once just a dream of the most radical fringe's of our society. That agenda is alive and being moved forward in the Roadless Proposal and the host of other programs meant to restrict the presents of humans from large areas of our country. It matters not one bit the name or face that program is wearing.

Madam Chairman the Roadless Proposal is bad for ecosystems, watersheds, streams, the health of our forest, plants and animals, the environment, our economy, working families, people's health, communities, local governments, freedom, and our sovereignty. Madam Chairman, the Roadless Proposal is just plain bad for America.

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