

Mr. Jim Doran  
Community Forestry Resources

Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
United States House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
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Honorable Greg Walden:  
Honorable Cathy McMorris:

Thank you for allowing me to present these comments to this subcommittee.

I have lived in Okanogan County most of my life. I was raised on a working cattle ranch outside of Twisp, in the Methow Valley. I have a small town law practice but have converted my business into a new vocation: Community Forestry. This began when I served as Mayor of Twisp and sat as a board member of the Okanogan County Economic Development Council and participated in many efforts to create a economic base that would provide good jobs and not harm the environment.

I lived in Twisp when the lumber mill shut down in 1984. When the unemployment checks ran out most of my friends left to find jobs in other places. All told over 200 union scale jobs at the mill disappeared and over 600 other jobs and local businesses failed. Now Twisp is a rather cute town with an Art Gallery, a Playhouse and lots of cultural activity. However, the Methow, the Okanogan, and to some degree most of the rural west has not recovered from the timber crises of the past twenty years. We may look cute for tourism, but there is nowhere near the same amount of money flowing around in the local people's hands that was when we had vital forest resource industries in our communities.

Ten years ago while I was the Mayor, right after the great Tyee Fire above Lake Chelan, the thought occurred to me that maybe we ought to start treating some of the overstocked and fire prone stands within the National Forests. For instance, that fire cost the taxpayers over \$300 million. Theoretically, if we had treated those same already logged forest stands to remove some of the fuel to make them fire resistant, we could have done the work on the entire area for about \$30 million. I used the "change the oil" metaphor back then and it is still appropriate. You change the oil in your car every five thousand miles for \$27.95. You don't wait till the engine blows up and spend \$13,000 every year. I think by now we have all become familiar with this situation. We can save the taxpayers hundred of millions of dollars by doing the up front preventative work instead of dealing with the disaster.

The problem ten years ago was that there was no cooperation whatsoever on forest management. Things were deadlocked in litigation and the "us versus them" mentality. Believe me, I have seen my share of community controversy and disintegration. I took the approach that we need to get all of the players to the table and figure out what we did have in common. Afterall, we all love the land, the place where we live. It is a beautiful place.

My approach has been to move beyond the blame game and talk about solutions. I first worked on what was called the "Small Diameter Wood Initiative". What we found was that there was some common ground on the issues of managing the already logged and roaded public forests. However, what we also found was that the Forest Service was pretty well paralyzed and demoralized because of the twenty years of the timber wars.

We needed a shift in the way business was going to be done. As the academicians put it, we needed a “systemic change” in the Forest Service.

We got some changes, first in the Stewardship authorities, then in the Healthy Forest Initiative, then in the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and the National Fire Plan and last year in President Bushes Executive Order regarding “cooperative conservation”. The key within all of these federal authorities is the requirement for “community collaboration”. That is why I have dedicated the past ten years of my life to this story. We, the people, have a place at the planning table. More than that, we the “problem solvers”, can actually get projects through their design phase and through the permitting phase successfully. I want to thank the Congress for not defining “community collaboration”. This has given us the leeway to create an authentic organization that includes all of the stakeholders. The one prerequisite is that each participant has to be a “problem solver” rather than a belligerent warrior from either side of the issues.

It has taken five years in the Colville National Forest but we have proven that collaboration can work. We have focused on the already logged and roaded forests. We have not harped on the blame for how we got into this mess. We have had to push the Forest Service. I have been called the agitator, sometimes, rather than the facilitator. But look at what we have accomplished. From deadlock five years ago the Colville National Forest now has seven or eight thinning projects permitted that contains more than 50 mmbf of usable material and will treat as much as 20,000 acres. We are working on a 25,000 acres stewardship project in Ferry County. There are many more ongoing projects that will set up a secure wood products resource for the future years and reduce the threat of wildfire.

Through collaboration, pre-NEPA discussions, we have permitted the Burnt Valley project, the Orient project, the Deadman project, the Quartzite project, the Bangs Mountain project, and several more. This wasn't easy but we did it. Because of these successes the Region has directed more funding to the Colville National Forest. Nothing builds success like success. I think this approach needs to be taken with all projects on federal lands, including the post fire treatments and salvage.

We are also pushing the envelope on biomass utilization. There is enough work to be done and material to be used to recreate a sustainable, longterm economic base from Canada to New Mexico. But we will need to continue to restructure the way the Forest Service does business. The key to all of this is community collaboration. No one has pointed out another potential method to get the guys and gals back into the woods restoring the long term health and productivity of the forest and all the rest of the ecological functions.

I have worked with loggers, mill owners, environmentalists, professional foresters, local government, educators and citizens at large. We have developed trust by working through issues in a calm manner with respect for each others' points of view. I have watched the environmental community change over the past five years. I can comfortably say that they have moved from the “don't cut any trees” position to the “cut

the right trees” position. I have seen the small diameter timber industry cooperate with the environmental community. They are saying, “Just tell us how you want it done and we’ll do it that way.” These are exciting times.

You can tell from my comments that I am not going to go into “how we got here”. That is another discussion. All I want to say on that topic is that the work is going to cost money. Deferred maintenance in the already managed public forest lands is going to cost money. Fuels reduction and fire resistance treatments are going to cost money. The “goods for services” aspect of stewardship authorities is a good start, but it isn’t enough because that funding mechanism cannot be applied to the planning and permitting of projects. We are also working with the Biomass Utilization programs and the Renewable Energy programs, the National Fire Plan programs and Fire Safe programs to try to create the necessary funding for preventative fuels reduction work and to help communities become prepared for wildfires such as the Tripod Complex fires.

What we don’t need here today, or in any of our management concepts, is the “us versus them” approach. It didn’t work for more than two decades and it won’t work again. Don’t fool your selves into thinking that a change in the political landscape can give one faction the ability to steamroll the other side. If Congress were to renege on all of our legal rights to influence public projects, there would be a backlash and nothing would happen to restore the neglected forest stands that are in need of treatment. There are some constituents that would “rather fight than win”. I have watched that here for many years. Consider the water wars or the endangered species act. There are people that won’t see the positive opportunities. I am here to tell you that we have a positive opportunity, if we work together in a collaborative manner.

I have heard it said that “politics is the art of the possible”. What is possible here on the Tripod Complex post fire treatments? Lessons were learned on the Biscuit Fire. Since then there have been successful post fire salvage collaborations, such as on the Fremont Forest in southeastern Oregon. It can be done, especially when the planners adhere to the scientific knowledge about salvage and rehabilitation.

I want to comment on NEPA. In the realm of forest practices on federal land NEPA isn’t broken; the Forest Service is. It is the agency and the budget that aren’t working. We have worked through things like motivation and multi-tasking with a very cooperative Colville National Forest Supervisor and staff. It has not been easy. Supervisor Brazell has taken me aside before and reminded me that some of his staff who are reaching their eighteen or twenty year career mark have spent their entire careers in the “we can’t do it” Forest Service. Can you imagine what it must be like to work an entire career where every single one of your projects fails. Whew!

One example we had of the ability of the Forest Service, when motivated, is the Togo Fire Salvage sale in north Ferry County a few years ago. They were able to process an EA (Environmental Assessment) in six weeks. If this same “can do” attitude is used in tandem with the collaborative process, then we can expect things to happen in a timely

manner, especially in the first phase of a small diameter salvage sale on the Tripod Complex.

The Forest Service has faced drastic cuts in its staffing levels. This hurts the ability of the agency to process projects. For instance, if there were funding for the archeological, wildlife and botanical studies we could speed up the NEPA process by eight months per project. We are wondering if retained receipts shouldn't be used for these purposes. We have had the experience many times now where the collaborative group has come to a Pre-NEPA agreement on the project design, but then the Forest Service doesn't have the manpower or funding to move the project through the formal NEPA process. That is frustrating.

My comments should not be misunderstood. Something isn't working, but the problem isn't NEPA. Here is a shorthand description of what needs to be done, on fuels reduction or post fire treatments, if you want to get real and see something happen.

1. Get all the players together in a problem solving context.
2. Stay out of the areas where you know there is controversy.
3. Listen to the science.
4. Put the budget needs into the discussion.
5. Multi-task; i.e., do more than one thing at a time.
6. Fund the collaboration process.
7. Fund the Forest Service and when they are successful reward success.
8. Compromise; honor the collaborative efforts.
9. Build trust with the collaborative group and within your agency.

Once you build trust and a project or two succeeds you find that the participants take pride in their work. That is exactly what has happened in the northeastern region of Washington State. We now have such organizations as Conservation Northwest, The Wilderness Society and Vaagen Bros. Lumber here now talking about the appropriate post fire treatments on the Tripod Complex. We are using our best creative thinking to find the path to access and utilize the very small material, ten inches and below, before they check and crack and become unusable. We know that the best time to do this initial work would be this January and February on a cushion of snow.

How are we going to be able to do that? What are the obstacles? I can tell you this for sure, if we can get the collaborative process working quickly enough we may be able to solve the timing problem. There are authorities that can facilitate this. Again, the key is to have all of the interested parties come to an agreement beforehand in an authentic dialogue. We are going to proceed in this manner.

I can also tell you with certainty, that if you try to remove the rights of the people to participate in the process, either through collaboration or through the formal NEPA process, we will not see any of this burned material removed in a timely manner. It won't happen if the old wounds are torn open. It won't happen if the old wars are re-ignited.

The dream that drives me is a vision of the deferred maintenance being done throughout the inland western states. We can create real jobs, with benefits, with a long term future by doing the work that needs to be done. We have proven that it can be done through the collaborative process. And now we are working on the biomass utilization component of our future in the western states. I can see all kinds of wonderful opportunities for our communities built upon the precept of doing what is right for the land. I think our citizens want that very much. I know they would rather have jobs in the woods and in mills and wood shops than serving dinners or other meager tourist jobs.

In conclusion, please don't foment controversy by messing with the environmental laws. It won't work; we will only descend again into controversy. On the other hand, fund the Forest Service so it can timely process NEPA, especially once a project has been through the collaborative pre-NEPA process. Reward collaboration by funding those projects. Where collaboration doesn't exist, help to get it started. And finally, help us with creative solutions.

I am used to success; I know we can do this on the Tripod Complex and maximize the material removed and fund the rehabilitation and restoration work that is needed.

Thank you.

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