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Testimony on:  
**Restoring Public Access to the Public's Lands:  
Issues Impacting Multiple-use on Our National Forests**

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My name is Michael B. Jackson. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Quincy Library Group. I helped organize the Quincy Library Group in 1993 and have attended monthly meetings of the group since that date. I am familiar with the management of the federal forests from 30 years' experience as an environmental attorney who specializes in natural resource policy in the areas of water, timber, and endangered species. I have represented environmental groups, farmers, county governments, and other rural citizens in many different issues that relate to federal and state land management policy. In the course of this work over 30 years, I have developed opinions on issues impacting multiple uses on our national forests that do not fit strictly into the usual polarized views of these matters. Since the Quincy Library Group experience has played a large part in the formation of my views, it is important that I briefly sketch a portrait of the Quincy Library Group.

The Quincy Library Group was formed in early 1993 as a consensus group consisting of rural citizens in northeastern California. The group contained loggers, environmentalists, business owners, school teachers, local politicians, and other interested, dedicated citizens of all backgrounds. We spent the first six months working with the Clinton administration and the U.S. Forest Service on a pilot program to find common ground on contentious forest and water issues affecting all of the citizens of northeastern California. We found that trying to craft forest solutions that made sense for the environment and the local economy could only be done on a watershed basis. Our first recommendation to the U.S. Forest Service and the Clinton administration was that the geographic area for the Quincy Library Group effort should include the Plumas and Lassen national forests as well as the Sierraville Ranger District on the Tahoe National Forest. These areas are the headwaters of the Feather River, a tributary to the Sacramento River, that is important to California because it is also the watershed of the California State Water Project. The State Water Project supplies water to 22 million Californians in the southern part of the state through the California Aqueduct.

In the course of working with the Forest Service and the Clinton administration from 1993 to 1997, we developed a pilot program that attempted to balance environmental quality with the use of timber management. We developed a program of thinning, both by mechanical means and by prescribed fire, a program of forest restructuring using group selection logging methods, and locally developed a watershed management system to repair degraded stream courses throughout the Feather River watershed. The program had substantial support from all segments of our communities and was considered one of the leading consensus groups in the United States. While the pilot program was successful at the level of activity that was possible

using existing Forest Service authority, it was not sufficient to address the increasing forest health problems apparent in the northern Sierra. To put it simply, the program was not big enough.

In 1997 and 1998 the Quincy Library Group worked with Congressman Wally Herger of California and Senator Dianne Feinstein to develop a bill to provide legal authorization for a large expansion of the pilot project. In 1998 the House of Representatives passed the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group [HFQLG] Act by a vote of 429-1. Shortly thereafter the bill passed the Senate and was signed by President Clinton. Then there was a lengthy delay while the regional office of the Forest Service prepared an environmental impact statement on the Herger-Feinstein program. In 2000 the Quincy Library Group began to work with the new Republican administration to carry out the HFQLG Act. In the early years of the program, the Forest Service instituted a Sierra Nevada land management plan revision that delayed full implementation of the Act. The Forest Service was able to implement enough of the Act that each of the parts of the program was tested by being implemented on the ground. There was a scientific program required by the Act that was able to evaluate each of the parts of the HFQLG program.

In 2004 the Bush administration and the U.S. Forest Service issued a new Sierra Nevada land management plan. That plan accelerated the activity allowed in the Sierra Nevada, and the national environmentalists began to sue the Forest Service on most program activities. In many of the cases, the Forest Service prevailed, but the lawsuits did reduce the amount of work that could be done in the forests, to the detriment of both the local communities and the forests themselves. Timber mills began to close and logging companies went out of business.

The good news is that the forest thinnings have, over time, proven to be very successful in helping defend communities and the forest itself from catastrophic wildfire. The watershed part of the Quincy Library Group activity has proved to be extremely effective in re-watering meadows and aquifers and maintaining stream flows. The group selection part of the Quincy Library Group activity has been successful in opening the forest canopy sufficiently to re-introduce young oaks, aspen, and pine to the forest floor. Fire suppression had allowed an explosion of shade-tolerant species to crowd out these very important components of the native ecosystem, causing a loss of animal and plant species dependent upon the oaks, aspen, and pine. The present Regional Forester for Region 5 has estimated that, in order to preserve the forest in something approaching a natural state, approximately five times as much thinning work as is currently being done needs to happen.

Based upon our review of the HFQLG program history, the Quincy Library Group makes the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. A program like the Quincy Library Group program should be instituted in appropriate places throughout the Western United States on federal land.
2. Such a program should be designed to operate at a pace and scale that would allow the removal of more vegetative material each year than is grown.

3. The work should be focused on the areas that are most important for water quality, water supply, and community protection.

4. The work should be designed to return more money to the federal treasury than it costs the federal taxpayers.

5. Fire suppression money should be included in the regular budget so that each forest becomes self-sustaining financially.

6. Each forest should retain a portion of the money received for goods and services so that there is a linkage between performance and money received.

7. There should be an emphasis in Forest Service planning on jobs, both timber-related and on environmental quality, and on forest protection.

8. Congress should direct the Forest Service to return to the original purposes of the Organic Act establishing the Forest Service: ensuring favorable conditions of flow, a continuous supply of timber, and the protection of the forest resources.

9. The Forest Service should be directed to provide a program of adaptation to climate change. Present forests are too over-grown to survive the present climate.

10. The Forest Service should retain earnings from the activity described above to increase its role in science. The on-the-ground scientists in the Forest Service are extremely talented and are the best able to determine how science money should be spent to accomplish the activities listed above.

The Quincy Library Group has asked me to thank the members of this panel for the opportunity to express our views. These views are based upon living near the federal forest and being dependent for our environmental quality on actions directed by Congress and the administration. We believe that these forests belong to all of the American people in common. We do not believe that should change, even though it results in a very cumbersome system that is failing the American people who live near the forests. As an example, Plumas County, the county in which I live, is 75% owned and managed by the federal government. We are at the mercy of the decisions made by Congress and the administration, for job opportunities, for fire protection, for roads and schools, for water quality, and for recreational opportunities. If Congress decides to do nothing, the forest over-crowding will continue and all opportunities will likely go up in smoke. This will affect rural counties like Plumas County immediately but will very shortly affect the urban areas in California as the rivers and streams dry up, the air quality worsens, and the recreational value of the Sierra Nevada and the rest of the inter-mountain West vanishes.