

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony of Ken Marks, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Regional Council of Rural Counties

**STATEMENT OF KEN MARKS
BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE
ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
March 24,1998
Concerning H.R. 2886**

Madam Chairman, greetings from Tuolumne County, California

My name is Ken Marks and I am currently the 3rd District Supervisor in Tuolumne County as well as the immediate Past President of California's Regional Council of Rural Counties. I am here today to offer the support of both entities for H. R. 2886 by Congressman Doolittle.

H.R. 2886, the Granite Watershed Enhancement and Protection Act of 1998, represents a very positive step toward improving forest management while making government more efficient, two items of critical importance to me and my fellow colleagues who represent rural areas in California. 2886 is an innovative piece of legislation that carries with it the solid support from my constituents back in Tuolumne County.

Located on the Groveland Ranger District of the Stanislaus National Forest, the proposed project area sits on approximately 8,000 acres of national forest land located in and around the 1973 Granite Burn. The project area is adjacent to about 12,000 acres of privately owned forestland, and lies within the watershed of the Tuolumne River. Local Forest Service officials have cited the Granite area as one of the highest severity fire risks on the forest.

H.R. 2886 offers a change for the better in approaching the management of our public lands by allowing the Forest Service the opportunity to address the increasingly important issue of watershed management and protection through the use of innovative contracting methods. Our local Forest Service professionals, in conjunction with Tuolumne County government, private forestry professionals, and interested public partners have all been involved in fashioning a pilot project for the Granite area that will hopefully allow us to expand the debate on ways to more efficiently manage and protect our lands.

In California today, over 50% of our state's developed water supply originates from our national forests. Nationwide, the link between our forests and water supply is even more dramatic: over 90% of our nation's major rivers originate on national forest land.

Unfortunately, as the members of this committee are acutely aware, our national forests today face an unprecedented threat of catastrophic fire due to our failure to remove or manage dead and dying trees. These trees, left among healthy trees, place the health of these watersheds at severe risk. As an elected official to an area whose economy is almost entirely dependent upon the health of our forests, rivers, and watersheds, these trends give me grave concern.

Increasingly, my rural colleagues and I are beginning to see active management of our watersheds as the possible answer to many of these problems. By taking steps to restore upland meadow aquifers and reduce excessive fuels loads and soil erosion, studies have shown that we can improve the quality and quantity of the water flowing in our streams. In short, utilizing active forest management techniques can help us achieve optimum watershed conditions.

Achieving these goals, however, takes money--money that is becoming increasingly scarce as Congress continues to take real steps towards balancing our nation's budget. Severe declines in the federal government's timber program over the last decade have severely crippled the budgets of our rural counties making us unable to maintain many of our

county roads, let alone fund the level of resource work needed. Coupled with the fact that the Forest Service resources are becoming increasingly scarce, and we are faced with the need to pursue alternative ways of getting this work done.

The cornerstone of this bill does just that, by moving towards simplifying an overly bureaucratic and duplicative contracting process for forest management projects. H.R. 2886 would allow the Forest Service to offer a single contract that covers multiple resource activities, ranging from forest thinning to road maintenance, to wildlife monitoring. If passed, this bill will save hundreds of hours of contract preparation time by the Forest Service, thereby saving taxpayer dollars. Additionally, and maybe even more importantly, forest management tasks will move ahead more swiftly to the benefit of the forest environment and people alike. In short, applying entrepreneurial concepts will allow us to more efficiently complete management activities like meadow restoration, erosion control, and pre-commercial thinning.

The Granite Project is the right place to test this concept. Wildfires have continually threatened to destroy the entire watershed. As recently as 1996, 27 million dollars of taxpayer money was spent fighting the Ackerson Fire. This large fire threatened a number of small towns and destroyed thousands of acres of valuable forestland on private property-- the Stanislaus National Forest, and Yosemite National Park. Only a change in the weather prevented the Granite Watershed from being destroyed. This legislation will allow us the tools to start the work so desperately needed in the Granite area before the next big fire comes along.

Let me summarize by saying that passing this bill will give us the opportunity to try what everyone is talking about. We all want to save taxpayer dollars. We all want to reduce catastrophic wildfire. We all want to see clear, cold water flowing through our forest streams. We all want to preserve our forest heritage for future generations.

Congressman Doolittle has supplied us with a good proposal that incorporates sound judgment and innovation. H.R. 2886 will provide a valuable improvement over current contracting law and management methods. As a representative of local government, I stand with you to try new ways to make government more responsive to the people. Let's move ahead with this bill. The results will be well worth it,

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Testimony of Ken Marks, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Regional Council of Rural Counties on H.R.3467

Testimony

Supervisor Ken Marks County of Tuolumne "Spotted Owl"

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. My name is Ken Marks and I am here today representing the County of Tuolumne as an elected Board Member, but more importantly, I am here representing as the immediate past president, an organization called the Regional Council of Rural Counties(RCRC). The Regional Council of Rural Counties is a 27-county organization composed of County Supervisors from the resource-rich regions of California. Almost half the counties of the State of California make up the heart of the RCRC. The citizens of these counties have relied for generations on natural resources found within these counties for their economic survival. The Sierra Nevada mountain range lies within the lines of 17 of these such counties.

In March of 1995, I was here testifying on what was known as the Taylor Amendment dealing with salvage efforts conducted on public lands of the National Forests. We made it known quite clearly, at the time, that we were under the interim guidelines of the California Spotted Owl sent down and mandated by a Federal judge who was relying on information presented to him that we felt was flawed and imperfect. We testified that at the time if any of the seven long-term strategies being proposed to protect the habitat of the owl were adopted, our counties would be adversely affected.

Well, today, I am here to tell you that we have a success story to share with you. Our predictions are well within the numbers we anticipated and so stated three years ago. We have a list of mill closings and auctions. The jobs tied directly to the timber industry and related industries just went away. Our unemployment spiked and now has settled as those benefits ran out, and workers who had spent their life in timber related employment are now working for minimum wage, mostly in a tourism-related industry. Sadder yet, are the stories told of worker displacement and also those who have had to just leave our community.

We testified as to what would happen to our future generations, and our schools that are supported by timber receipts known as "25 percent funds". I think with the June and November ballot issues back home in California, that deal with funding for school construction and educational -related programs, the answer is obvious. We don't have enough money to educate our children properly. It's not that we don't support public education in California, in fact, over 85 percent of our State's budget goes to education and health services. It seems that if we don't educate our children, we end up with more individuals on the latter. It also seems that as our generation ages, getting them to support higher taxes to provide educational improvements has become more difficult.

So today, we are here to ask your support in adopting another set of guidelines to further clarify the management procedures on the National Forest. It seems irrelevant as to which side of the aisle you sit on when it comes to forest health and the proper management of it. This legislation has a little something for everyone. It restricts the size of timber coming off the forest, it allows and takes a closer look at fire and the reduction of fuels, it addresses watersheds and the concerns for a total assessment of them, and most importantly, it goes away. Yes, it goes away with the revisions to the forest land management plans. In the meantime, maybe our communities can get back to work. We need to get our communities back to work. Let me say again, I represent a group of 27 counties that make up over 75 percent of the geographic history of the State of California. We need to go to work. Give the forest managers the tools and the responsibility, and the ability to make decisions and then get out of their way. If they don't perform, fire them.

We have tried short-term legislations, administrative help, injunctions, budgetary adjustments and other means to

manage the forest, but wouldn't it be easier to perhaps let the professional foresters as hired to do, manage the forest without the encumbrance of all the legislations that tries to, item by item, species by species, tree by tree, manage a forest? We need our forest plans to reflect the expertise of the professionals that have been educated on forest practices. We need to review the act under which the forest service was created, and most of all, we need to go to work. Looking at the total watersheds and using a reliable forest plan, it produces timber, fuel reduction, meadow restoration, wildlife enhancement, recreational experience conservation practices, economic opportunities and protection to our future generations. We need to go to work.

I ask you again to support this legislation, but to not end your interest in this with the passage of it. Encourage the development of forest land management plans that represent the interests of all Americans. Remember, the NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE spells disaster for the National Forest. We know we will not be able to legislate our forests back to perfect health. We must trust our managers to do that.

I believe that we as small counties have suffered at the hands of individuals with their own agendas far too long. If this spotted owl legislation allows our forests the potential to be better managed, then please proceed with it. But please keep in mind, the communities that are most affected by any decisions and most importantly do not accept the NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE as a solution. We have done nothing for far too long, and it now haunts us on a daily basis. The wildlife suffers, the communities suffer, and our nation suffers when we accomplish nothing

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