Hal Salwasser
Cheryl Ramberg and Allyn C. Ford Dean
College of Forestry
Oregon State University

Testimony on: "Failed Federal Forest Policies: Endangering Jobs, Forests and Species

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Field Hearing
U.S. House of Representatives

Cowlitz County Expo and Conference Center
1900 7th Avenue, Longview, WA
9:00 AM, May 21, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am Hal Salwasser, Cheryl Ramberg and Allyn C. Ford Dean of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University. I testify today as a private citizen, with over 20 years of experience with the US Forest Service, starting as a wildlife ecologist in California and culminating as a Senior Executive. I was the Director of New Perspectives and Ecosystem Management in the Washington Office, Regional Forester in the Northern Region and Director of the Pacific Southwest Research Station in California. In my latter two roles I provided executive guidance to the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project and the Framework for Revising National Forest Plans in the Sierra Nevada. During the first decade of the 21st century, I served on the National Commission on Science for Sustainable Forestry and was chair from 2003-2005. I have been Dean at OSU since 2000.

For the past three decades I have been engaged with an agency trying to change in response to changing societal values and science, first as one of its leaders and later as a concerned colleague and citizen. If I were to give what I have to say today a title it would be this:

Restoring Federal Forests for Prosperity in the American West

In my brief time here I will talk about four themes that, in my experience are relevant to your task:

The Grand Societal Resource Challenge--Meeting the needs of 30% more people with no more land or water than we have now and perhaps less access to fossil hydrocarbon: the 9 Billion People Challenge.

The Problem in the West--Western federal forestlands no longer make significant contributions to the grand challenge for natural resources; they no longer serve their statutory purposes; they are becoming a substantial liability to the states, their rural communities and American taxpayers; and they are a growing threat to adjoining landowners due to vulnerability to fire, insects and disease.

The Inadequacy of Current Legislative Approaches—While well intended, recent legislative proposals do not address larger problems of statutory dissonance, governance dysfunction, and long-term sustainability of new directions. The trees just keep growing and dying, victims of climate change, invasive species, uncharacteristic wildfires, insect outbreaks and insufficient funds or social license to change course.

Options Forward--Sooner or later society must confront the consequences of federal forestland management dysfunction, e.g., declining land health, rising costs, a poverty stricken rural America

hanging on through federal payments because the nation refuses to empower the responsible agencies to sustainably use public lands and their natural resources to generate wealth and jobs while improving environmental benefits. Meanwhile the nation's dependence on foreign natural resources increases. It is past time to try some grand "experiments:"

- Technical/managerial, e.g., Franklin/Johnson, ecological restoration emphasis
- Governance, e.g., Kemmis, local collaborative
- Presidential Commission with broad authority to suggest major change in policy (like the recent Entitlements/Deficits Commission)
- Congressional clarification of the statutory purposes and to clear roadblocks to effectiveness
- Transfer the lands to someone else to manage without current federal policy hurdles, e.g., tribes with capacity--the original stewards, or at minimum charter as appropriate to provide anchor forests for protection of tribal forest values

Context: The 9 Billion Challenge

We live in a world that has twice as many humans as when I was a kid; I am 66. We humans consume more space and resources and produce more pollutants than many ecosystems can sustain over the long term. To support this many people has required re-plumbing river systems, massive conversion of forests, woodlands and grasslands to agriculture, development of hard infrastructure, depletion of marine resources, and exhaustive mining of minerals and hydrocarbons. In the US, we thrive off the material production of others, often in exploitive ways. And, we tolerate a widening gap between the truly wealthy and the truly poor, a social justice problem that belies our rhetoric about equality. We are clearly not on a sustainable trajectory, let alone poised to handle 9-10 billion humans. But that is only the dark side. How about the upside?

Most humans now live longer. Most are healthier. Many are better educated. We have not exhausted all renewable natural resources due to sustainable, science-informed professional management. These statements are not true for all people or resources, but things are better in many ways than just 50 years ago. In other words, things are not as bad as they might have been. So, where do forest management and forest and other natural resource professionals fit in this complex picture?

Those now in their 20s and early 30s will be asked to meet the needs of 30% more people before their careers are over; as The Economist put it last year, addressing the 9 billion people question. They will be expected to do this with no more forested land than now exists, perhaps even with less. Using much of that land to grow a renewable material and provide substantial ecosystem service benefits in economically feasible and socially acceptable ways will be critical to future human well-being. Meeting the challenge will require highly skilled and motivated professionals. Producing these individuals and the discoveries that will help them be successful is our business at America's Land Grant Universities.

But merely meeting the material needs of a growing human population, while necessary, will not be sufficient. Social and environmental justice must be part of the future to prevent societies from tearing themselves asunder, just as we see today where those needs are lacking. Future industrialized societies must also transition from a hydrocarbon-dependent economy to a carbohydrate-augmented economy, and not just in what we eat, wear and how we travel. Wood and cellulose will be major factors in that transition. So will optimizing every acre of forest for its best service to society, not every acre for wood but more than we currently employ in the U.S. Optimally all forests, local to global, should have science-informed, owner-values based professional management. That will not come from those who believe forests should be managed only for wood or those who believe they should be left to nature. The former is socially and environmentally unacceptable in our nation and in many others and the latter option

disappeared with population growth and affluence enabled by the advent of agriculture 10,000 years ago, though some still live in denial of the reality of what it takes to support so many people on planet earth.

So, why focus on western U.S. federal forests? They are not industrial forests, where wood production takes precedence in desired outcomes. A major reason is they dominate the Western forest scene and they no longer play productive roles for meeting the grand societal challenges of the 21st century at any geographic scale from local to global. Further, what happens on federal forests affects others in more ways than many people think. I suspect few urbanites realize the conditions of "their" federal forests threaten other nearby landowners and communities and that lack of management is the reason.

The Western Federal Forest Case

Western states have lived with federal management of almost half to nearly all their forestland estate for over 100 years. Those forests have shaped much of what Westerners and others think about forestry and their states, not all, of course, but much. Federal forests have always been the West's preeminent watersheds; this will continue far into the future. They also are and will continue to be some of the West's richest habitats for native plants and animals, prominent among them Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, aspen, oaks, trout, salmon, elk, deer, bears and an occasional owl or wolf.

Over time, federal forests have lost a few native species, such as grizzlies and gray wolves which are now returning to a small part of their original range and they have become significant recreation and tourism assets. For a brief interlude, from around 1950-1990, Western federal forests delivered nearly a quarter of the nation's softwood lumber and panel production, and they supported hundreds of local rural communities and hundreds of thousands of jobs related to forest resources, significant sources for rural community vitality and prosperity and, because wood products are in traded sector economies, urban ones as well.

Many, but not all, of the economic, environmental and community benefits from federal forests remain; timber supply and its associated jobs and wealth creation are greatly reduced. But now, due to lack of sustainable wealth creation from renewable resources, rising costs of fire management, threats to private, state and tribal forests from wildfires and insect and pest outbreaks and loss of wood processing infrastructure, federal forests are becoming a substantial liability to rural communities, western states, American taxpayers, and, in many places, non-federal timberlands. These are all unintended consequences of how environmental laws suited to the 1970s are interpreted and implemented, most notably the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act.

The current costs of holding federal forests as a government managed public trust far exceed the revenues generated, and expenses related to fire management exceed all other investment needs. This was not always the case. Who pays the bills? Every American taxpayer does. Who bears the impacts? Mostly local people and communities in areas near the forests and throughout the west. This is hardly an equitable condition and certainly out of alignment with the social contract between urban and rural America that began eroding in the 1980s. Counties across the west are left begging for a federal transfer of wealth in lieu of revenues from sustainable economic activities on federal forests and they do not get federal timber-related jobs and indirect businesses with their check. Continuing the check it is not a path to prosperity; it is merely a bridge from the past to, well, where? Meanwhile, the trees keep growing and, in fire-prone forests dying, victims of climate change, invasive species, uncharacteristic wildfires, insect outbreaks and insufficient funds or social license to change course. I am not the first or only person to point this out.

Western federal forests are simply not sustainable on their current trajectory; they are not ecologically, economically or socially sustainable. Absent course correction, the situation will only worsen, leaving political leaders at national, state and local levels literally hamstrung for viable options, to wit, the suggestion by some that we can thin our way to economic vitality or sustainability. To me we, as a

society, are ignoring the fundamental issue: What is/are the purpose(s) of lands held and managed in the public trust by agencies of the federal government? Marion Clawson wrote a still relevant book on this in 1975: Forests for Whom and for What. That is still the question.

Very few people want to see species go extinct or water quality to decline. So, any path forward must guard against those outcomes and the latter will prove more feasible than the former. Declining political support for the federal check in lieu of wealth creation from federal forests shows that very few people support such a wealth transfer. So, any path forward must deal with this issue as well. Thus, the critical policy question must be: Are there ways to sustain/restore resilient federal land ecosystems that deliver desired environmental, economic and social benefits to society with less impact to economies and communities than current approaches? If so, would laws need to be changed? Yes and yes.

Let's drop back to what Congress has said are the original purposes for federal forests. Three laws define the purpose(s) for national forests (Organic Act of 1891, Multiple-Use, Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, and National Forest Management Act 1976 amendment to the Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974), two for Public Lands (BLM) (Oregon and California Lands Act of 1936 and Forest and Rangeland Policy and Management Act of 1976). Other laws have overlaid purposes not meshed with these organic statutes: Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (ESA), Clean Water Act (CWA), and Clean Air Act (CAA). Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) and Administrative Procedures Act (APA) give activist groups essentially a free ride to use those other laws to subvert the statutory purposes of federal forests, with taxpayers paying their bills.

Pioneering conservation leaders of the late 1800s and early 1900s championed federal land tenure to promote protection and conservation of wild places, wild life and waterways and the shared, sustainable, ethical and productive uses of natural resources. There was tension in the balance among these purposes from the very beginning of federal land tenure and aggravated distortions appeared post World War II as the nation increasingly relied on federal forests for its home construction boom. The distortion now is the false notion that not managing forests for some wealth creation is a form of protection. In our nation's current financial situation it is actually a path to degradation of a once prime asset.

Our current framework of resource and environmental policies, suited to and based on 1960s issues, and science are simply not working for 21st century challenges. Nor are they reflective of current scientific understandings of ecosystem dynamics and resilience. Perhaps it is time for a big **Forest Policy Rummage Sale**. Before a rummage sale, you sort through the "stuff" in your attic to rediscover the treasures you want to keep and identify the junk you want to jettison. Along the evolutionary course of conservation on federal forests several "grand experiments" have been, and some still are, carried out (though they were not thought of as experiments in the true sense). This is 2012, so I'll give you 12 that come to my mind. This is some of the stuff in the attic.

1. Governance by scientifically trained managers in consultation with local, state and legislative leaders (1905-on),
2. Curtailment of the worst forms of domestic livestock grazing and timber poaching (1905-on),
3. Eradication of top predators (done by 1920s),
4. Suppression of all wild-land fire (10 AM policy, post Big Burn, 1910-on),
5. Development of recreation infrastructure (1920s-on),
6. Use of unemployed people to carry out conservation projects (CCC, 1930s),
7. Engineering waterways for flood, irrigation and hydropower control (generally 1930s-1960s),
8. Dedication to domestic timber supplies (1950s-1990),
9. Congressional creation of no-development Wilderness Areas (1964-on) and agency dedication of de-facto wilderness, i.e., Roadless Rule (2001-?),
10. Protection and conservation of at risk species (ESA 1973-on),

11. Widespread judicial enforcement of single resource legislation, e.g., ESA, CWA, and CAA, at the expense of multiple-use sustainability mandates, e.g., MUSY, NFMA, O&C Act, and FLPMA, (mostly post 1970s) and lately
12. The era and euphoria of collaboration (1990s-on).

During the course of these "experiments" our human population grew threefold and migrated from rural to urban settings, the climate changed, economies and technologies changed, and policies and social norms enabled a highly consumptive culture fed by non-domestic resource production. Yet, we remain saddled with laws written during an earlier time, based on antique science, and designed to solve yesterdays' challenges. Some of yesterdays' challenges are still with us and some or all of them may grow in magnitude. But the times are vastly different and new science has shown that the vitality and resilience of ecological, social and economic systems are ill-served by single-species, single-industry, single-engine dominance, i.e., what we seem to have high-centered on with federal forest management lately as single-species protection is trumping all other purposes.

Are we, as a nation or as citizens of western states, satisfied with this situation? If yes, stay the course and bear the consequences. If not, what must we do to change course? What outcomes would we likely favor if options forward were put to a vote, with those most directly affected by the outcome given the largest number of votes, i.e., those living in closest proximity to federal lands? Assuming clarity of purposes is possible, how might we act to further those purposes? These questions call for more than timid legislative proposals to address limited technical or managerial challenges.

The conundrum for western federal lands is not, after all is said and done, merely forestry, environmental or resource management challenges. It calls for what USFS Chief emeritus, Jack Ward Thomas and the National Commission for Science on Sustainable Forestry called for: Congressional action to clarify purposes and processes for more efficient and effective stewardship of some of the world's most remarkable natural land and resource assets. It may also call for experimentation beyond how forestry or other resource management is practiced, perhaps also experiments with more effective and equitable models of governance, as called for by ex-Speaker of the Montana House of Representatives Dan Kemmis. Or, as is currently being considered for some federal lands in Oregon, it may just be time to stop the incremental experiments and start transitioning federal lands and policies for those lands to states, trusts, or back into the hands of their original stewards. A majority of federal and perhaps even state political leaders appear unwilling or unable to go there at this time but sooner or later society must confront the consequences of federal forestland management dysfunction: let me repeat, declining land health, rising costs and a poverty stricken rural America hanging on through at-risk federal checks because the nation refuses to use its federal forest lands and resources to generate wealth and jobs. Rep. Hastings and Reps. DeFazio, Schrader and Walden have some proposals on the table. They deserve thoughtful consideration.

Among the options forward so far are the following. Drs. Norm Johnson and Jerry Franklin, are championing pilot projects in fire-prone forests on Public Lands in SW Oregon. It could be one option in changing course. It involves restoration of stress-resilient forests and structural class diversification through a combination of thinning and modest regeneration harvests that would produce commercially viable timber sales. Jobs and wealth would be created by both, though not in the magnitude of management activities of the mid to late 20th century. It is worth trying. But it may not be the only technical or managerial option. Their pilots do not address the fundamental underlying issues: lack of clarity on purpose, alignment of process to purpose, and governance effectiveness (though the pilots do rely on local collaboration). Other, well-thought proposals should also be tried, if someone will be bold enough to create and present them. I suggest that these so-called "pilots" not be ad hoc, anecdotal efforts; they should be well designed "grand experiments" to test ecological, social, managerial, and governance hypotheses.

The current course is not a rosy path for the future of Western federal forest. It is certainly not focused on roles for federal lands on the 9 billion people question (in Oregon it is a 4 million challenge and in the nation it is a 500 million challenge). And it comes at a time when Forest Service leaders are proposing yet another new collaborative approach to forest planning. You may not agree with my assessment. Perhaps the Forest Service and BLM will find a collaboration pony in the pile of convoluted laws and legal precedent. But for me it is a sober reality check and perhaps a wake-up call. It is not too late to change course. It is never too late. But the longer we wait the greater the challenges will become and the higher the costs will be for future generations. Simply stated, we cannot thin our way to sustainability for federal forests, we cannot save single species by doing nothing in dynamic ecosystems, and no amount of collaboration will ever satisfy those who see only one purpose for federal lands, their purpose. So far, resistors won't let restoration happen fast enough, large enough or heavy enough to make much of a dent in disturbance vulnerability or effective governance. And if they did, one must ask, ok, then what? Where's the money going to come from to sustain mixed-use management when the federal treasury is drained every year by defense, health care and social security payments? Is saving single species even possible and would it be better for the future than managing for resilient, dynamic ecosystems?

Closing Thoughts

When I was a kid my grandpa told me money doesn't grow on trees, you have to work to earn it. He was a mechanic. He was brilliant but he didn't know much about forestry. Experience has shown me he was half right; he got the work part right. Many, though not all, Western federal forests not only still have the potential to grow money, they have the potential to grow jobs, productive wildlife, clean water, happy fish and the greenest, most renewable raw material on earth. It is time for federal forests to re-start doing their share for the future well-being of our communities, states, and nation, and, yes, even for the health of our federal forests. From many conversations, I am convinced the people in our federal forest agencies would love to chart a more sustainable course for their future as forest stewards, as citizens of our communities and as contributors to addressing the 9 billion people challenge.

So, let's cycle back to where we started. Sustainable management of renewable natural resources has always been one of the keys to human well-being. It was and is key to all that is good about our current lifestyle. But staying the course in a finite world with a growing human population will not make the grade. We must seek continual improvement and change course when evidence makes the need for change clear. Our Endangered Species Act is not saving many species and, at least here in the Pacific Northwest, its social and financial costs are substantial. Something must change and the Congress is the only agent capable of meaningful change.