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Testimony on:
HR3685: Amend and Extend the Herger Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest
Recovery Act

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My name is Michael Wood. I represent the men and women who work in the sawmills that process the wood fiber generated by the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act. Today I'm also speaking on behalf of my colleagues in the Quincy library Group.

First, I want to thank Congressman Herger for his many years of supporting the Quincy Library Group, and Congressman McClintock for his help and strong support, and Congressman Amodei for also joining and sponsoring our efforts. On behalf of all the men, women and school children in our small mountain communities, we are deeply grateful for your time and energy.

The amount of work needed to get our forests back to a fire resilient condition is enormous. Our Regional Forester puts the preferred annual amount of activity at five times more than the current level of treatments. The HFQLG is the prescription that could reach these goals, and it must be continued. It will save the forests, rivers and schools, and create thousands of jobs. It is scheduled to expire in 7 months, and we ask for an extension of the Act. It is still a pilot project so the monitoring will continue to provide the latest science to make the program better. We not only ask to extend the Act, but we also ask to make it better with the amendments included in the extension.

The USDA report R5-TP-031 titled *A Summary of Fuel Treatment Effectiveness in the Herger Feinstein Quincy Library Group Pilot Project Area* proves that the methods prescribed in the Act provide an effective treatment for creating a fire resilient forest. In turn, the treatments provide the volumes of saw log and biomass necessary to sustain the communities and jobs that are needed to treat the forest. This work generates revenue back to the U.S. treasury to pay for more treatments, and sustains the counties that provide the schools, roads and local government for the workers and their families. For example, the Meadow Valley Project created 538 direct and 856 indirect jobs, which put millions of payroll dollars back into our local economy. The project treated over 5,700 acres around a community at risk of a catastrophic fire. The project generated \$3.3 million that went back into the U. S. Treasury. And most importantly to our children, it generated \$1.1million in Forest Reserve Revenues that came back to our schools and roads.

Also enhancing the project was a plug and pond method that restored a rutted gully back into a mountain meadow with a capacity to store tens thousands of gallons of water for later natural slow release in summer months. The birds and small mammals are thriving in the entire area. The thinned forest enables the snow pack to get to the ground, and transpires far less water back into the atmosphere than when it was overgrown. The combination of vegetation management and stream restoration projects provides a much greater volume of water to replenish the aquifers and rivers downstream. The HFQLG is composed of three legs: vegetation management, scientific monitoring and riparian management.

Water is getting more and more valuable. We have a small window of opportunity to repair our forests so they may persevere and help the landscape store water. The HFQLG area covers the Feather River watershed, which provides the largest volume of water for the entire state of California. It is crucial that its vegetation is managed under the HFQLG prescriptions. The value of this water may, in the very near future, exceed the value of the timber. When water and timber are considered together, they will become a natural renewable resource with unlimited value. But we must act now to guarantee the work will continue. It is the only way we can preserve the schools, and thus the families of the men and women who will work to preserve our treasured forests and water. If this Act is not passed, they will leave and the infrastructure will collapse.

California and Nevada are heavily dependent on water that is available when it is needed. That requires storage. I don't think anyone is ready to build more dams or spend the billions of dollars to build them. Millions of gallons of water are already being stored in meadows that have been partially funded by HFQLG activity, and many more projects are planned. But they too need the support of HFQLG activity. Saving billions of dollars by not building dams but instead receiving millions of dollars by sound forest management that increases water flows sounds like a great investment to me.

I don't think spending billions of dollars annually fighting forest fires is smart either. We all know the fires are getting bigger and more frequent, and costing billions of dollars with nothing to show for it except total destruction. The largest emitter of carbon dioxide is forest fires. The carbon monoxide released from the decaying forest after a fire is ten times more damaging to our atmosphere than the carbon dioxide released during the fire. The recent fires are so intense that they bake and sterilize the ground. This loose soil then results in thousands of tons of silt into the streams and rivers, choking fish spawning grounds. When the burnt forests eventually convert to brush fields decades later, any rain falling on them is quickly absorbed and transpired back into the atmosphere. The future looks bleak at the current level of activity of forest restoration.

Getting the forests back to a fire resilient condition is the only solution. And it must be done at a pace and scale that gets ahead of the problem. There is no other plan, process, or activity that can accomplish this other than the HFQLG Act, because we still have the infrastructure, manpower, and skilled forest service personnel to accomplish it. The Forest Service, which is the largest employer of the county, is anticipating reducing

its work force by 40% when the HFQLG Act expires. Very little work will be done after they are gone. The logs will not reach the mills, and the mills will downsize or shut down completely. The knowledgeable manpower and the infrastructure will be lost. I'm sure there are many congressmen and congresswomen who know first hand what happens after a manufacturing plant shuts down. It doesn't come back. We have an opportunity to make sure this community and this infrastructure and our ecosystem stay intact, and be a model for others, but it will require the passage of this Act.

The first amendment to the Act will extend the Act for another ten years or until the Land and Resource Management Plans are revised and implemented. It also requests that the Land and Resource Management Plan include at least one alternative that incorporates the aspects of the HFQLG, and that the revisions applied to the HFQLG area are implemented no later than September 2014. We cannot afford to wait for an undetermined length of time. Without the workers, the forests will not get treated at the pace and scale needed for either them or the forests to survive.

This amendment is direly needed. In May of 2009 I testified before this subcommittee regarding mill closures in my area. I expressed my grave concern over the impending day when our schools are closed due to the inactivity of the County's largest landowner. Unfortunately that day is upon us. For the 2012-13 school year, our county will probably close a high school and bus the students over 25 miles of snow covered mountain roads to another school. This will be an incredible burden on the families who live there and devastating for this small community who rallies around their high school. A K-6 grade school will close and its students bused 15 miles to another mountain community. Two grade schools in Quincy will be combined, neither one able to accommodate the amount of imported students from the other. Parents pay out of pocket for busing, increasing the burden on an already impoverished population. Our highly valued and loved teachers will be leaving and the much needed classes will be closing this year. Our mountain communities believe that the village makes the child, and we are proud of our students. They have become successful doctors, engineers, dentists, nurses and business people in many different fields. Just this quarter one of our students made the Dean's List at Notre Dame. We will lose this opportunity for our children without timber receipts. The qualified personnel needed to do the work that will protect the forests will leave the area if it does not have a decent school system. Our single school district serves an area larger than the state of Delaware, with little mountain communities scattered throughout. The federal government owns 75% of the land and they don't pay taxes. The pace and scale of the forest thinning projects is paramount to getting anything done at all, and the HFQLG Act provides the blue print to get it done.

The second Amendment provides for the Secretary to expand the project over the entire Sierra Nevada and Cascade province. The pilot project has proven that its aspects are a successful method of forest treatment and should be a valuable tool that may be used in other areas with similar over-stocking of trees.

The third amendment changes a specific area from "Deferred" to "Available for Group Selection" and managed according to subsection (d) of the Act. This area is south and west of Lassen Peak and is the spawning grounds of the threatened species of the

Central Valley Chinook native salmon. This sensitive area was deferred in the original HFQLG Act. We erred on the side of caution until the results of the HFQLG experimental treatments were scientifically reviewed. The National Marine Fishery Service has warned that a severe wild fire in this area could cause siltation in the spawning beds up to a degree that may jeopardize the survival of this species. The size and intensity of such a fire occurred in 2007 with the 65,000 acre Moonlight fire located approximately 50 miles to the east of this area. It is now obvious that forest thinning under the HFQLG prescription is exactly what this area needs to save the fish.

The fourth amendment provides the Forest Service with the ability to treat Sierra Nevada Forests to the desired condition of a multi-aged forest with a method called "Group Selection". The term "Group Selection" applies to areas one-half to two acres in size cleared of trees less than 30" dbh. This method opens the forest floor to sunlight where pine, oak and aspen can regenerate. These areas, when combined with the shaded fuel breaks (DFPZ) create a multi-aged, multistoried, thriving ecosystem. Although the "Group Selection" method was introduced in the original HFQLG, it is minimally used, and the current level of group selection treatments will not create the desired effects. The 0.57 percent is purely mathematics. Based on the area of treatable land, the 0.57 percent creates a 175-year rotation on the HFQLG land base available for group selection.

The HFQLG methods of treatment are scientifically proven to be ecological, economical, and an environmentally sound way of treating our forests at a pace and scale required to create a fire resilient forest for the future. At the same time the HFQLG Act will create thousands of jobs, put millions of dollars back into the federal treasury, save our schools and communities, sequester millions of tons of carbon dioxide, maintain snow packs and provide water for the entire state of California.

For reference, I have included the USDA report R5-TP-031 titled *A Summary of Fuel Treatment Effectiveness in the Herger Feinstein Quincy Library Group Pilot Project Area*. I have also included a general summary of the HFQLG that Frank Stewart, a member of the Quincy Library Group, created. It also includes the economics and water projects incorporated into the HFQLG.

On behalf of the citizens of Plumas and Lassen Counties, and especially the school children and their teachers, I thank you for allowing me to express my support for the extension and amendments of the Herger Feinstein Quincy Library Group Act. Hopefully other forested regions, and all water users of the west, will be inspired by the success of our projects.