

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Testimony on H.R. 2458

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Before the

House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

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Madame Chair and Committee Members:

Greetings from Sonora, California. It truly is a pleasure to be here today discussing such a positive piece of forest health legislation. H.R. 2458, the Community Protection and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Act of 1997, is a welcome sign that Congress is ready to give professional foresters the tools we need to protect our forests, our firefighters and our homes.

Before I continue, let me give you a quick snapshot of who I am and what I represent. Who I am is Mike Albrecht, a registered professional forester in both California and North Carolina. I am co-owner of a small timber harvesting and forest management business. Our company, Sierra Resource Management, employs approximately 50 people dedicated to sound forest management. We specialize in forest thinning. What I represent is the future. And the future of forestry in our great nation is exciting. The potential we have to do trendsetting, positive, and profitable work in our forests keeps me optimistic about our future.

As in all endeavors, our future has been shaped by our past. I am not here today to apologize for past 'forest management practices..... because an apology is not appropriate. But I will strongly acknowledge that forest practices 50 and 100 years ago were abusive. Foresters, environmental groups, and the general public recognize this fact. The good news is, that although often contentious, the forest resource dialogue of the past 50 years has resulted in advanced forest management practices and environmental protection that today is second to none. It is my strongest professional opinion that regardless of political affiliation, and regardless of who signs our paychecks, we should all be able to agree that American forestry is the world standard.

Nevertheless, all is not well in the woods. Your field hearings held last week in Sonora produced plenty of frank discussion. We all heard prominent U. S. Forest Service managers and scientists being critical of the state of our forests. They are bewildered by the maze of regulations they confront. But the most disturbing and disheartening revelation they confided is that the sense of purpose of the national forest is gone. Our local media summed the whole situation up with the headline... "U. S. Forest Policy Broken." I have found in private business that you can always fix machines, you can build buildings and bridges, but repairing a broken spirit and defeated attitude is very difficult. After hearing the Forest Service testimony, I know we have a difficult task ahead. But I also know we can do it.

Today, I bring you no new statistics about wood supply and demand, catastrophic fire, job loss or firefighters

killed. You've heard them all by now. Instead, let's take some action:

1. Pass H.R. 2458. Give us this proactive mandate to thin the forests around our communities. I applaud the emphasis of this bill, that assigns priority to reducing fire risk. The management credit idea is innovative. H.R. 2458 dovetails perfectly with the California Board of Forestry's recent emphasis on community fuel break areas. The timing of this bill could not be better.
2. Support Congressman Doolittle's effort to fund a watershed level demonstration project on the Stanislaus National Forest. This represents an equally innovative approach to protecting and enhancing our forest resources.
3. Continue to seek out and support local projects and initiatives like the Quincy Library Group's proposal to promote forest health, local economy and consensus building.

These are the efforts to support. The result of your support will be healthier forests and safer communities. The result of your support will be vibrant wildlife habitat. But most importantly, your support will renew the optimism and spirit within the people who we charge with managing our forests.

Madame Chair, I believe that under your leadership, we are beginning to turn the corner toward better forest policy. Keep up the good work. Continue to give up your weekends to hold field hearings. The results will be worth it.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS: Support H.R. 2458

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