

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

Witness Statement

TESTIMONY OF JOHN BARNETT
Chairman, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, State of Washington
CEO and Owner, Cowlitz Timber, Inc.
Hearing: H.R. 2119, "National Historic Forest Act of 2001"
June 19, 2001

3:00 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE HEARING
The Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
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Testimony of John Barnett

Let me begin by saying that I have some very serious concerns with the health of our national forests in the Pacific Northwest now and for future generations of Americans yet to come. Since the introduction of the spotted owl as an endangered species and the environmental movement that followed, I have spent considerable time in both the Olympic and Gifford Pinchot National Forests to observe first hand the result of forest management changes. I have specifically concentrated my efforts in the Quinault Research Natural Area located between Neilton and Amanda Park in the state of Washington. This area, of some 1,000 acres, was set aside in 1931 as a research study area where Mother Nature is allowed to take its course. In 1931, this Natural Area consisted of what we now call a late successional or old growth forest consisting of varied tree species including Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, western red cedar, western hemlock, and red alder. The forest canopy was almost completely closed with a ground story of sword fern, salmon berry, and Devil's club. Early cruise figures show virtually 100% of old growth volumes.

To back up in history to 1993, it is quite evident to me that the Clinton Administration's Northwest Forest Plan placed our national forests in the middle of a collision course between politics and standard forest science. So far, politics is winning and the truth will only come out through a concerted effort nationally of all the people who have the fortitude to build enough ground swell to change a flawed national policy. It is also evident to me that the Clinton Administration's team of scientists headed by Jack Ward Thomas was instructed to present a series of "Forest Management Options" from which the Clinton Administration could choose one that would supposedly balance forests and humans. In the big court scene that will eventually come, the main characters will tell what went on behind closed doors, where science turned into politics and politics turned into special interest advocacy.

To prove the point of collusion between the Administration and the "Gang of Four," one must only turn to a book bearing an unassuming title: Annual Report of the Department of Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900, Twenty-first Annual Report, U.S. Geological Service. The book includes hundreds of pages of detailed forest inventory data gathered on the ground in Oregon and Washington, and a large collection of color maps showing the distribution, size, and age of tree species then present. What is most unsettling

about this huge body of information is the fact that the government's scientists make no mention of its existence in the proposal they wrote for the President, and in fact they say in words that it does not exist. The fact that the government scientists ignored historical forest patterns and science, contradicts their own personal biases about forests and forestry and led to the historical gap in complete information that would have changed through actual proof that our forests in the Pacific Northwest are in a continuing state of disturbance and fluctuation. Change and turmoil, more than constancy and balance, are the rule. What forest science reveals is that natural disturbances, including weather patterns, wind, fire and disease, prevent ecosystems from ever settling into a steady state. The idea that the Pacific Northwest was once a vast sea of old growth timber is a myth. It has been one of the main components expounded by the environmental movement to sway the thinking of the general public in the United States that old growth trees as they now exist will be here forever and will be available for generations to hug into infinity. Trees, as well as humans, have a measurable life expectancy. They, as humans, will eventually have an obituary.

For further information, please turn to pages 7 through 16 in the Evergreen magazine (March-April, 1994 edition). This interview with Bob Zyback, "Voices in the Forest," contains valuable information on the historical overview of our forests in the Pacific Northwest and points out some very serious flaws in the formation of the Clinton Administration's "Northwest Forest Plan." I concur with his analysis.

It is very ironic that past Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, made the following direct quotes during his observation of damages incurred recently by the Cerro Grande fire.

"It was a systematic failure in the Park Service. I think we are going to have to go back as a result of this investigation and revamp the fire program from A to Z . . . We owe that to the American people," Babbitt said. "These forests are too thick," he said. "They're explosive, they're dangerous, and the reason is because fire has been excluded for 100 years and there's too much fuel in the forests, too many trees."

Sometimes the actual truth does slip out and seriously undermines the myth being fed to the American people.

With the above remarks being said, let me turn back to some observations and conclusions that I have reached. First, from the Cascade Mountain Range to the Pacific Ocean and from the Canadian border through Oregon and Washington and into northern California, our national forests are gradually changing from the mixed species of the past with its vast biodiversity to a monoculture of western hemlock. Western hemlock is the climax species of our so-called late successional forest that included trees of many species that were there prior to the coming of white settlers to North America. The term late successional is also a myth as it infers that the national forests will continue with replacement stands of mixed species as in the past. Western hemlock is the only conifer specie that will grow and thrive in the shade. When holes are created in the forest canopy due to wind or other disturbances or with the natural death of trees, the opening will naturally reseed with virtually exclusive stands of western hemlock regeneration. Over time, as the late successional forest eventually dies out and is replaced by the western hemlock monoculture and by the elimination of one of Mother Nature's tools - fire - the hemlock will repeat itself over and over until humans realize their mistake. Through preservation of our forests in their natural state, we are inviting an extremely heavy buildup of fuel content on the forest floor that will eventually climax with massive forest fires with the potential of burning millions of acres of our national forests.

Under the preservation mode presently in place, the magnificent Douglas fir is entering the downward spiral to extinction because it needs total sunlight to grow and thrive. The towering Sitka spruce, which will grow to a height of 250 feet with a diameter of more than 14 feet, is rapidly moving into extinction due to

infestation of tip weevils in young trees of 10-15 years of age. The weevil eats the growth leader, which in turn causes a new growth of multiple leaders which diminish the height of the tree. Instead of 200 feet mature spruce, we are saddled with a multiple topped bush in the form of a snowball 20 to 40 feet tall at maturity. The Sitka spruce also needs total sunlight for survival.

Perhaps the worst feature of the Northwest Forest Plan is that tree species 80 years or older are now considered to have "old growth characteristics." The maximum age of our second growth tree plantations in the Pacific Northwest is 70 years. Once these plantations reach 80 years of age, they will automatically be "off limits" forever due to the old growth classification. The vast majority of Forest Service timber sales now consist of commercial thinning sales in these second growth stands. As the window is closed due to the 80-year tree age distinction, the true agenda of the Northwest Forest Plan becomes a reality - total preservation.

As the tribal chairman of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe for the past 20 years, I have a feel for their thoughts. My people look at the forest as a cornerstone of our culture along with the salmon. We look at the forest as a tool left us by the Creator - a tool not only to be used spiritually but for our survival. The cedar tree is a very special tree to my people. Since time immemorial we have used the cedar bark for basket making, the trunk of the tree to make our canoes, and the branches for ceremonial purposes. My people believe that we can live in harmony with what was left for us by the Creator. We believe that it was given for our survival - as Native Americans. We also know that we must protect, preserve, and conserve what was given to us as a natural resource to continue as a replica of the past.

I have spent 55 years of my life in and around the forests of the Pacific Northwest. I fell the first tree in my life at the age of 12 on one end of a crosscut saw with my dad on the other end. I have had, during those years, extensive experience in all phases and use of the forest. My forest experiences have been hands on. My degrees in forestry are hanging in my garage in the form of 20 pairs of worn out caulk boot - each with stories all their own.

I have been very honored to have been able to testify before you today on subjects most dear to my heart. Change will only occur through the will of the people speaking the truth.

I would like to leave you with the following thoughts. In my opinion, drastic change in policy regarding use and management of our national forests is needed immediately. We have altered the Master Plan provided by the Creator. We must reverse this alteration and recreate the forest landscape as was intended. This means sound forest stewardship to revive our multiple species of trees that were here prior to white settlement of the land. This must be based on the landscape, soil type and climate. Without this biodiversity, all creatures of the forest may face extinction.

As history unveils, I, for one, do not want my great grandchildren to see our forests as they once were - only in pictures.

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