

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony of Dave Bischel

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

My name is David Bischel, and I am the President and CEO of the California Forestry Association (CFA). CFA is a trade association that represents forest landowners, forestry and logging professionals, biomass energy producers, and approximately 70% of the primary wood product manufactures in California. I have been President of CFA since the tragic death of my predecessor at the hands of the UNABOMBER three years ago. Prior to that time I was the Executive Officer of the California State Board of Forestry's Licensing program, and have previous experience of approximately 15 years as Forestry Manager for Southern Pacific Land Company and Assistant Forest Engineer for Fibreboard Corporation. I have degrees in Forestry from the University of California at Berkeley, and Renewable Natural Resources with an emphasis in Wildlife & Fisheries Biology from the University of California at Davis. I am a Registered Professional Forester with the State of California (RPF 41746), and although I have a degree in biology, I don't consider myself a biologist but an applied forest ecologist.

I am pleased to appear here today on behalf of the California Forestry Association in support of the H.R. 2886, the Granite Watershed Enhancement and Protection Act of 1998.

As a lifelong forestry professional, I can speak firsthand about the importance of continually striving to develop new tools and methods of managing our forests. Today, as the members of this committee are well aware, our nation's forests and watersheds are faced with an unprecedented health crisis. As the official stewards of our public lands, the Forest Service is faced with an increasingly uphill struggle in keeping pace with this crisis. Consequently, land managers in both the private and public sectors are looking more frequently to develop innovative, proactive approaches to try and better address our forest's problems. CFA views H.R. 2886 as an important step toward meeting this challenge because it advances a concept that seeks to implement a comprehensive approach to managing our forest while at the same time streamlining government and saving taxpayer dollars.

In short, H.R. 2886 will provide the Forest Service the authority to develop and offer for public bid a management proposal that covers multiple forest management tasks under the umbrella of a single, long-term contract. As fundamental as this concept sounds, current contract law restricts the Forest Service to operating under an outdated and inefficient process that requires the agency to offer separate contracts for individual management tasks. The end result is an overly bureaucratic process that consumes staff time and scarce financial resources.

H.R. 2886 alters this dynamic by giving the Forest Service the opportunity to plan a project that looks at the landscape as a whole, rather than in separate pieces. If approved, this bill will allow the Forest Service the opportunity to develop a project that combines management activities like commercial thinning with meadow restoration and road maintenance with wildlife monitoring. In short, H.R. 2886 allows the Forest Service to remain focused on achieving optimum forest health conditions, rather than being constantly sidetracked and delayed by an inflexible contracting process.

It's important to note that the Granite project is being developed in a true public private cooperative fashion. Over the past year and a half, Forest Service officials from both the regional and local level have joined together with local area elected officials, private forestry professionals, and environmental advocates in discussing how best to develop a project that will improve the overall condition of the Granite watershed. CFA supports this effort because of its great potential in advancing the cause of forest health.

In particular, this project enjoys the active support of Regional Forester Lynn Sprague. Allow me to quote some excerpts from a September, 1996 letter sent to one of our members by Regional Forester Sprague that best captures the essence of the challenges and opportunities ahead of us as land managers, and why this legislation is needed. And I quote, "I would like to implement a project in Fiscal Year 1998 with the development of basic concepts, identifications of areas to be treated, public involvement and preparation of environmental documents and the establishment of a monitoring plan to measure results." Mr. Sprague's letter goes on to note..." we have a number of obstacles to overcome, including legal authority to participate in stewardship contracts." He ends his letter by stating, "I am looking forward to working on the development of a pilot program that will provide a valuable tool for managing National Forest Resources." Madame Chairman, in 1996 Mr. Sprague described the goal of developing a project that would involve the public, provide new legal authority, and serve as a model for future resource planning. Congressman Doolittle's bill explicitly fulfills that goal.

With the caliber of people and equipment that will lead forestry into the 21st century, we need corresponding advances in management planning and contracting authority. The Forest Service, under Regional Forester Sprague's guidance, has provided us a project area to work with. The Chief's office has gone one step further by embracing the Granite project and designating it as one of his official "pilot projects". Let's build upon the positive foundation that has been laid for this project by passing H.R. 2886. What follows next will depend upon the continued effort and support of all involved. Our association will be there every step of the way to continue helping advance the dialogue on how to best manage our forests for future generations.

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Concerning H.R. 3467**

Madam Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health:

My name is David Bischel, and I am the President and CEO of the California Forestry Association (CFA). CFA is a trade association that represents forest landowners, forestry and logging professionals, biomass energy producers, and approximately 70% of the primary wood product manufactures in California. I have been President of CFA since the tragic death of my predecessor at the hands of the UNABOMBER three years ago. Prior to that time I was the Executive Officer of the California State Board of Forestry's Licensing program, and have previous experience of approximately 15 years as Forestry Manager for Southern Pacific Land Company and Assistant Forest Engineer for Fibreboard Corporation. I have degrees in Forestry from the University of California at Berkeley, and Renewable Natural Resources with an emphasis in Wildlife & Fisheries Biology from the University of California at Davis. I am a Registered Professional Forester with the State of California (RPF #1746), and although I have a degree in biology, I don't consider myself a biologist but an applied forest ecologist.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on H.R. 3467, the California Spotted Owl (CASPO) Interim Protection Act of 1998. The California Forestry Association strongly supports this bill because it is good for the environment, good for local communities, and good for taxpayers. We believe that this bill is a positive interim step to amend the existing interim CASPO guidelines to begin to address the serious forest health concerns and risk of catastrophic wildfire we face in the Sierra Nevada mountains today, by using the best available science developed over a half-decade of scientific evaluation. In addition, this bill will help to break the gridlock of our national forest planning process that has spun out of control as a perpetual planning machine through which it has become impossible to implement even the most basic forest management goals.

The California Spotted Owl (CASPO) is an issue that first began with the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) as a threatened species under the Endanger Species Act (ESA) in July of 1990. In a pro-active effort to address the status of the CASPO, the California Forestry Association first requested that the State of California and the USFS co-chair a committee of stakeholders to study the biology of the CASPO, and the social and economic implications of alternative conservation strategies to find a balanced solution to a then perceived decline of Spotted Owl populations in California. That request has sent us on a seven year journey involving three separate extensive studies, over \$10 million in expenditures, thousands of hours of scientific investigation by hundreds of scientists, dozens of public meetings and tens of thousands of public comments and correspondence, culminating in a Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIS) that subsequently underwent two independent scientific peer reviews. The resulting environmental document, with some technical amendments recommended by the peer review teams will meet all of the requirements of our nation's environmental laws as an interim owl conservation strategy. Unfortunately, the administration summarily rejected this effort as being inadequate, and be2an implementing a new plan to start all over again.

During this journey, short-term management guidelines were implemented in January 1993 and deemed to be insignificant in impact on communities and the environment because they would only be in place for two years (even though they were clearly stated to be unsustainable in the long-term). Five years later, timber harvest has dropped by nearly 70%, 27 sawmills have closed their doors, and there are now three times as many trees that die each year in our state's national forests than are harvested; And the Administration is no closer to a solution to the original owl habitat

issue even though the draft EIS states, "The California spotted owl appears to be abundant and well-distributed within the forests on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. It is possible that the spotted owl is more abundant today in some areas of the Sierra Nevada than in the past 100 years or prior to Euro-American settlement."

The original mission of the CASPO EIS was not to change the charter of the management of the Sierra Nevada national forests, but to protect and enhance key elements of owl habitat, contribute to the viability of other widely distributed species as well as contribute to the economic and social well being of local communities and the nation, and to provide sustainable levels of renewable resources consistent with multi-use objectives. As an interim owl conservation document, the RDEIS does all of these things. It is not perfect, no environmental document is because the science of applied forest ecology is not perfect. But H.R. 3467 allows up to an additional six months to complete any revisions to the RDEIS that may be appropriate to address issues raised by the scientific peer review teams. Moreover, through adaptive processes the environmental protections included in the EIS will continue to be enhanced as we learn more about these ecosystems.

What it is not, is a new "Charter" for the management of the Sierra Nevada National forests. It was never intended to be such. As the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) stated, "Before a different management policy for the Sierra Nevada ecosystem proceeds, society must define the future vision, the charter for the future Sierra Nevada."

As an interim solution to the original question of conserving owl habitat, the RDEIS is the best available science and provides the best opportunity to reduce fuel loads and fire risk. And through selective forest thinning projects with biomass energy production, this solution can provide 97% cleaner air than prescribed fire, increase owl habitat by 42%, and contribute to the economic and social well-being of our rural communities through an additional 6,000 five-wage jobs, while providing sustainable levels of renewable natural resources for our nation that can be 50-100% higher than current levels.

H.R. 3476 provides all of these benefits and is a win-win for the environment and our economy. As President of CFA, and on behalf of our members who represent most of the forestry profession of our State, I strongly support its adoption.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address this critical issue.

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