

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Testimony

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Testimony to the House of Representatives
Committee on Resources,
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health,
Honorable Helen Chenoweth, Chairman.

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Testimony pertains to:

Personal experience in dealing with issues specific to National Forest Systems Policy, Protection, and Public/Private Resource Management. Key points to include - real people, local citizen attempts to participate in decision making process, lack of fire preventive measures and local economic concerns, accessibility and roads maintenance issues.

Madame Chairman,

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for affording me the opportunity to testify before you today, with special thanks to the Honorable Helen Chenoweth, Chairman. Madame Chairman, you represent the citizens of Idaho with great poise and professionalism.

My name is Brett Johnson. I live on the West End of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, where I am raising my son Bryan who is twelve years old. He would be here today, but little league baseball matters more to our children than does congressional affairs. As we will see in this testimony, Congressional affairs do play a role in my child's education and our ability to continue living in this beautiful rural community.

We live outside of town with one of our closest neighbors being the USDA Forest Service, Olympic Region, Sol Duc Ranger District. I am testifying today as an individual and by no

means wish to represent my employer, or anyone else for that matter, at this time. The testimony I am giving is based upon my own personal experience visiting, as well as living on the Olympic Peninsula.

Let me begin by noting that I have lived in the Forks, WA area for nearly seven years, having moved from the Seattle area in 1992. I had spent much time camping, hiking, biking, and sightseeing on the Olympic Peninsula for many years prior to moving there permanently. I brought with me an attitude I would now call "urban think". This attitude was basically thinking I knew about environmental issues I had no personal experience with first hand. Herbert Spencer, a noted philosopher, once said "There is a principle which is a bar against all information and which cannot help but keep a man in everlasting ignorance, that principle is contempt prior to investigation". This seems to fit me quite well.

My contemptuous attitude began changing as I started to meet individuals, and families which had lived in this community for generations. Today, many of my closest friends are the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of people like the Iron Man of the Hoh, John Huelsdonk. The Federal government has incrementally taken portions of their family lands to assure our nations future generation a wilderness experience. These folks and their children have since been denied access to portions of lands and trails once developed and maintained by John Huelsdonk, Charlie Lewis and other family members. This generation has already been denied access to the wilderness experience they were promised.

Old-timers in this community have taken time personally to escort me into the woods. Providing a great beginning of truly wonderful education. Seeing first hand the reality of our local forests and the forest health issues associated with non-management of the resource has begun to open my eyes. Infestation of bugs, blow-down, fire hazard, overcrowded stands, and many other problems seem obvious to even this city boy. Little, or no action is being taken by the Forest Service to limit the devastating effects to humans by the inevitable fires that will occur in my neighborhood. Further degradation to the valuable resources of timber and wildlife continue.

Ranger Harris, the previous Sol Duc District Forest Ranger, told me that they had gotten rid of almost all the fire fighting, and roads maintenance equipment the last few years. He further suggested that if we wanted any safety assurance, we should move away from the Snyder Ridge area, and that he anticipated a uncontrollable fire in that area soon. If the right conditions were present, such as dry summer, and an east wind it would be inevitable. He also acknowledged that the Forest Service was managing lands according to the Treaty in Rio. International management seems unconstitutional, is not site and situation specific, and therefore, seems a very ridiculous option to choose.

As a member of the public, I have attended many of the Olympic Province Advisory Committee Meetings. This group was chartered out of the President's NW Forest Plan and appears to be lacking in site and situation specific management techniques also. Over the past few years, I have also attended the supposed local public meetings on the Olympic Adaptive Management Area. At these meetings, preservationists, brought in from Oregon had equal status with the local, most affected concerned citizens. This did not seem appropriate to me if it was to be a local informational and input meeting, as I was told.

The Advisory Committee is obviously trying to take local economics, other than tourism, out of the picture entirely. By the way, promises of tourism are hollowed with the lack of maintenance on some of our more scenic forest roads. When asked to address local concerns regarding economically feasible timber harvest, the group balks. The professional facilitator then steers the group back onto other feelings oriented topics, while attempting to degrade the questioner's credibility and thus by pass any talk of real economics. The committee's own feelings seem to matter more than the feelings of the local people trying to feed their children.

In 1995, I began a lunch buddy program at the local elementary school. Not having full custody of my own child at that time, I wanted to stay in tune with children his age, so as to, ready myself for the day when he moved in with me on a full time basis. While attending a reading session just prior to Christmas of 1995, I was greatly upset by something I saw and heard. One teacher, after reading Charles Dickens tale of the little Christmas Tree, asked the 4th Grade students in her class the following questions:

- 1) How would you feel if you were cut down and taken away from your Mother, & family like the little tree was in the story?
- 2) What would you think about being adorned with ornaments for display, and after a few days taken outside and set afire?
- 3) How come we humans are so uncaring to nature's other living beings?

This is an example of the twisting of our children's minds which continues daily through schools, television, and the media with regards to natural resource issues. I have since participated in getting independent people from our community into schools to mitigate the damage some teachers' personal agenda's may produce. Our children needn't feel guilty for living in homes made from forest products, or drinking the eight glasses of water as is suggested by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Total annual timber harvest in Washington State on both Public and Private lands is now less than what occurred on the Sol Duc District alone in 1988. I don't think the people living in my

rural community want the destructive band aids provided by the re-circulation of already existing tax dollars. What I hear them saying is - please let us go back to work creating new wealth from the extraction and replanting of a renewable resource. Timber grows very quickly with our approximately 150 inches of rain annually and most tourists balk at spending time in a community that gets that much rain.

Forest Health is declining, Rural Communities are being destroyed, and all this because of policies not based on sound science. Replacing science and economics, is the new international social science of Environmentalism. International Social Management has not worked elsewhere so, how about giving us back our jobs. We can help in taking care of the nations resource needs while providing habitat for a multitude of species badly in need of the wildlife openings our harvests will create with sustainability.

Recent studies by USF&WS, USGS, & WDF&W, show our Elk & Deer numbers are way down on the west-end of the Olympic Peninsula and many biologists I've spoken with say this is directly attributed to the lack of wildlife openings. Openings, that were previously being created by harvest of timber and providing for economic values to come off of the Peninsula's large public land base. Visitors tell me how bad the clear-cut looks and then explain it was on the edge of this eyesore they saw the elk they had photographed.

I would like to finish by thanking this Committee for allowing me to share a little of my own personal experience and observations on this issue. I would love for each member of this Committee to come into my back yard, upon scheduled invitation of course, and take a tour of the Olympic National Forest with real people rather than agency personnel as is typical. You will be amazed at the beauty the loggers paintbrush has created on the landscape and the danger to it that now exists because of mis-management. I welcome any questions, comments or future correspondence.

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