

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Opening Statement

STATEMENT OF THE
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CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
FOREST SERVICE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2000

February 23, 1999

Today we convene to discuss the President's Fiscal Year 2000 budget request for the Forest Service. To paraphrase an old saying, "same old tax and spend -- different fiscal year." It is obvious from the President's budget request that the Era of Big Government is back with a vengeance! And no where in the budget is this more apparent than the request for the Forest Service which includes a laundry list of new spending initiatives.

What's even more mind-boggling is that the GAO and the IG have testified, time and time again, that the Forest Service is incapable of managing their fiscal and administrative affairs. And, yet, the Administration wants to increase their budget, their staff, and their responsibilities. Where's the sense in that?

The Administration has proposed a program, the Lands Legacy Initiative, to add tremendous amounts of land to the national forest system at a time when there is a huge backlog of infrastructure and maintenance needs on currently owned lands. Where's the sense in that?

The Administration is attempting to deprive the Forest Service of a valuable forest health management tool -- timber sales. At a time when 1/3rd of the nation's federal forests are at a high risk of catastrophic wildfire, the Administration is proposing to dramatically decrease the budget for the timber sales program. Where's the sense in that?

I cannot, in good faith, support budgetary increases for an agency that has, according to the GAO, an accountability crisis or that is concerned more with political correctness than with correct management. Nevertheless, I am willing to work with the Forest Service and the Appropriations Committee to craft a common sense budget for the agency that responds aggressively to current forest management -- and agency management -- needs.

In light of the changes from previous year's budget requests, I have asked Undersecretary Lyons and Chief Dombeck to come before the Subcommittee to explain the Administration's proposals and to answer questions. I hope that by the conclusion of this hearing, we will have a better understanding of these proposals and the Agency's funding needs.

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