

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Chairman's Statement

Statement of Chairman Helen Chenoweth

Joint Oversight Hearing of the Resources Committee, Budget Committee and

Interior Appropriations Subcommittee

Management of the Forest Service

March 26, 1998

I look forward to the testimony that will be offered today by the General Accounting Office (GAO), the USDA Inspector General and the Chief of the Forest Service on the issue of the current state of management of the Forest Service.

Judging from the more than 100 different reports done by the GAO, the management of the Forest Service is in severe need of repair. The GAO outlines problem after problem with the Forest Service's lack of financial and performance accountability, and the Forest Service has nothing to offer, but empty promises to improve if simply given more time. I hate to say that we that we have heard that before, but the simple answer is that time is up. As the old saying goes, "the buck stops here."

It is fundamental for any organization to be accountable. What we have found with the Forest Service, based on the extensive work of the GAO, is that they are accountable to no one. Least of all Congress and the American people.

The GAO has revealed that the Forest Service financial practices are inaccurate, inadequate and in shambles. The Forest Service lacks the most basic element of standard accounting practices. These shortcomings mean that the agency and Congress do not have accurate financial data to make informed decisions about future funding.

This is the only agency entrusted with billions of dollars in assets, and the Forest Service has so poorly managed those assets that this agency is deep in the red. Now, the Forest Service has the audacity to come back to Congress with this poor track record and ask for an increase over last year's budget.

Bringing these three Committee's together in this oversight hearing will provide us with the answers we need to determine what changes must take place to improve financial and performance accountability. I want to thank Chairman Young, Chairman Kasich, Chairman Regula and Congressman Herger for their efforts to make this significant hearing a reality.

Now is the time to take the findings of the GAO seriously and move to prevent inefficiency and waste in this agency.

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