

Subcommittee on Resources on Forest Health
Committee on Resources
US House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Chairman Walden and Honorable Members of the Committee:

First, I would like to thank you for giving me the time to speak before you supporting three positive amendments to the Small Tracts Act of 1983.

I appreciate the fact you have already approved in concept, the Christensen & McCreary property interchanges with the U.S.F.S., as because of their uniqueness, they do not fit under the Small Tracts Act.

I would like to share a little background on my family and myself. We Christensen's have lived in Indian Valley since 1939 on a legal mining claim. My father, a Danish immigrant, was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1941 where during his four years of service he helped build the Alcan Highway in Alaska and was decorated during fighting in the European Theater. He died on the property in 1994. My mother, a Portuguese immigrant from the Azores, is approaching 89 and with a care giver is still able to spend most of her time in Indian Valley. I have both an Honorable Discharge for service with the U.S. Navy during Vietnam and the U.S. Army in the mid 1980's. My son Paul has enlisted in the U.S. Army, and will start boot camp in June. Also, my son Drew is in the U.S. Air Force stationed with the National Security Administration at Ft. Meade, Maryland. I have recently retired after 30 years with the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department and continue to work part time as court security and bailiff.

I am here in support of granting many other Americans like myself the chance to interchange small parcels, with the U.S.F.S. that benefit the public trust. When the Small Tracts Act was first drafted in 1983 the exchange process had not yet ground to a halt because of overly burdensome regulations. In 1983 I could have interchanged the land in question in approximately 18 months at a price I could afford. Today, without amending the Small Tracts Act, we little Americans are swept aside. Large land owners like Sierra Pacific Industries may still be able to exchange several thousand acres in a cost effective manner under the General Exchange process. [*] Exhibit A.

As you can see by Tahoe National Forest Supervisor Steven Eubank's letter, there are other parcels the United States Forest Service believes would benefit the public trust based on their high recreational value coupled with their ecological sensitivity. Should the representative from the Virgin Islands be called to testify she, would state that you don't find a pearl already strung on a chain as a necklace on the ocean floor. You find and collect pearls one at a time and you design your own necklace. These pearls that are waiting to be collected are scattered all across the United States from coast to coast, all the way from Alaska to Florida within the National Forest system.

Without your help in amending the Small Tracts Act, you are impeding on the United States Forest Service's ability to place many of these small pearls into the public treasure chest. You are also working against Americans with smaller land holdings who do not have thousands of acres to exchange like Sierra Pacific Industries.

While I understand that there is some concern among some committee members that the U.S.F.S. is not to be trusted with the added responsibility these amendments to the Small Tracts Act would give them, I find that insulting. Coming from a small Gold Miner and testifying that the Senior U.S.F.S. personnel I have dealt with are some of the most principled government employee's I have ever met is saying something. In the small interchanges the U.S.F.S. is always wanting much more for the Public Trust than they want to give up. I would think, that if there was concern, a exchange of several thousand acres worth millions would have more room for error than a small interchange of 100 acres or less with no room for mistakes and being much easier to appraise.

I am personally aware of five small interchanges that the U.S.F.S. has looked at in the past two years. Four interchanges got the U.S.F.S.'s blessing, and one interchange did not. On the one that failed, the parties wanted river front for a bridgehead in exchange for land the public would not be able to utilize. Mr. Eubank's statement was that "we don't give up prime recreational land, we get it. But we currently don't have the ability to even get the good ones." And on interchanges, the U.S.F.S. knows which interchanges will benefit the public trust and which ones will not.

In closing I would like to again thank you for your time and emphasize that amending the Small Tracts Act should be non-partisan.

Thank you for your time,

IRVING NORDAHL CHRISTENSEN

INC: bmp

Enclosure(s)

[* Exhibit A -Letter dated 01-27-03 from Steve T. Eubanks Tahoe Forest Supervisor]