

# **Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health**

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

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## **Witness Statement**

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**Statement of  
Sally Collins  
Associate Deputy Chief, Forest Service  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
Committee on Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
on  
June 19, 2001  
Concerning  
H.R. 2119, National Historic Forests Act**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Sally Collins, Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest System, USDA Forest Service. My comments today represent the views of the Department of Agriculture on H.R.2119, a bill to establish a program to designate, restore, and sustain historic native forests on national forest system lands, and for other purposes.

The Administration supports the worthwhile goal that H.R. 2119 embraces, but is still reviewing the bill. The Administration has serious concerns regarding the bill's fiscal impact --- specifically, the bill's use of Outer Continental Shelf revenues to fund the National Historic Forest Restoration Fund --- and the development of additional planning requirements. As soon as the Administration completes its review of the bill, we will communicate those concerns to the Committee. We welcome a discussion with the Committee and others on the important concepts proposed in this legislation.

### **H.R. 2119, National Historic Forests Act of 2001**

Title I of the National Historic Forests Act of 2001 directs the Secretary of Agriculture to designate certain national forest system lands as historic forests. These forests are to be, or after reasonable restoration will be, representative of prehistoric or historic landscapes significant in the history and culture of the United States. These forests are to be restored and maintained over time through methods including timber management activities, plant and animal control, grazing, and prescribed fire.

Title II of the bill directs the Secretary to establish an Advisory Council on Forest Restoration that would make recommendations to the Secretary. These recommendations would include designation and restoration of national historic forests; review and approval of management plans; coordination needs with other Federal, state, and local entities; and study needs. In addition, the council would prepare an annual report to

Congress, undertake forest restoration educational efforts, and prepare and submit a budget concurrently to OMB, the Department, and Congress as a related agency of the Department of Agriculture. The council would appoint a Director, who would appoint a General Counsel, and up to three additional staff that would report to the council. In addition, the council may request administrative support from the Department or contract with government or the private sector for supplies and services.

Title III of the bill directs the Advisory Council on Forest Restoration, in consultation with the Secretary, to establish local management advisory committees for national historic forests. The duties of the advisory committees are to recommend additional national historic forests to the Secretary and council; document the relevant reference forest; prepare management plans for the historic forests; monitor and assess the effectiveness of restoration activities; conduct studies; provide advice regarding forest restoration; encourage public interest and participation in forest restoration; keep state and local governments, Tribes, and private parties informed of the activities of the committee; and prepare annual reports.

The bill provides that the Federal Advisory Committee Act would not apply to the council or committee. The bill also provides for payment of \$200 per day for council members and reimbursement of travel expenses for members of both the council and the local committees.

### **Existing Authorities**

Authorities for the Forest Service to manage vegetation for a wide variety of multiple uses currently exist. These authorities include the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act and the National Forest Management Act. These statutes also require the Forest Service to involve the public in defining desirable forest conditions that integrate resources across the landscape.

We also have authority to try some new approaches in implementing forest stewardship and restoration projects. Congress, in the FY 1999 Interior Appropriations Act as amended by the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations Act, authorized 56 stewardship end result contracts that allow private contractors to perform services to achieve land management goals for national forests that meet local and rural community needs. This pilot authority authorizes the exchange of goods for services, retention of receipts, and awarding of contracts on a "best value" basis.

Last fall Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. This important legislation recognized, among other things, the need to improve cooperative relationships among the people that use and care for Federal lands and the agencies that manage these lands. Section 205 of this Act establishes resource advisory committees to improve collaborative relationships and to provide advice and recommendations to the land management agencies on restoration and enhancement projects. We hope to have many of the resource advisory committees established and functioning in their role by October 1.

We feel these authorities will assist us in bringing people together to focus on restoring the sustainable condition of our forests.

### **Analysis**

H.R. 2119 appears to have a similar objective of bringing people together at the local level to focus on the stewardship needs of our national forests. We appreciate this effort to explore new ways to build support for restoration of our national forests. Forest restoration activities are a priority in the Forest Service. Restoration activities, whether taking place under existing authorities or under H.R. 2119 if enacted, are

subject to detailed analyses, and those decisions must then withstand administrative and judicial review.

The Administration supports the goal of restoring our forests to a sustainable condition. We would appreciate an opportunity to work with the committee to discuss how H.R. 2119 might be improved to complement the programs that the agency currently administers, while addressing the Administration's concerns.

In our brief review of this legislation, we have identified several factors to consider as we proceed forward. These include the following:

- Scientific considerations for basing restoration on pre-European settlement conditions;
- The levels of review and oversight needed to make decisions about management of national forest system land;
- The inclusion or exclusion of other specially designated areas from consideration; and
- The interplay between land management plans and historic forests restoration plans.

Forest Service Research and Development has designated 88 experimental forests across the country. In addition, over 450 research natural areas have been established on national forest system lands. Some of these areas might provide opportunities to work with the scientific community to pilot-test some of the bill's concepts. We would like to explore these and other opportunities with the Committee as it considers this issue.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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