

Mr. Jim Crouch  
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Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks  
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on Park Landscape Restoration Programs  
And  
Retention of Funds from Timber Removal

December 19, 2005

Pea Ridge National Military Park  
Pea Ridge, Arkansas

My name is Jim Crouch. I am the owner of Jim Crouch & Associates, a small forestry consulting business in Russellville, Arkansas. Prior to 1987, I was a part of the United States Forest Service. I have more than 25 years experience in managing federal land for multiple uses including 8 years as Forest Supervisor of the 1.1 million acre Ozark-St. Francis National Forest.

My testimony today is on behalf of my business and the many national clients that I represent. My clients include both small and large businesses that purchase federal timber, primarily from the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. I supported the passage of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) and the Forest Stewardship Contracting legislation in 2003. In 2004, I testified before the Senate on the effectiveness of HFRA.

After more than 40 years of involvement with land management on both public and private lands, I have learned a number of things. Perhaps the most important - Nothing stays the same! Ecosystems are in a constant flux. Open fields are being invaded by pioneer species of fauna and flora. Young forests are going through a differentiation process - shade intolerant plants and associated fauna are giving way to more shade tolerant plants and associated fauna. Immature forests are becoming over crowded and stressed inviting attacks by insects and pathogens. Mature forests are dying making way for new forests and the natural cycle continues.

Through management of the vegetation, man can greatly influence the condition of the ecosystem to meet varied management objectives.

For hundreds of years, early man used fire as a tool to keep the woods open and to maintain the lush prairies that were home for many different kinds of critters. In more recent years with effective fire control, the fire cycle has become disrupted and the condition of our forests and prairies has deteriorated significantly.

Today, many of our forest ecosystems are unhealthy. The vegetation has shifted two or more fire regimes. Much of our forest is in a highly flammable condition. Much of the native flora is gone. Oak-hickory ecosystems in the Ozarks are being prematurely lost due to the red oak borer and other insects. Open savannah systems are becoming rare. Early successional habitats are disappearing. Owners must manage their ecosystems if their goals are more than "just leave it alone!"

To achieve land management goals, man must use fire and mechanical means to manipulate the vegetation. Where there is forest industry infrastructure (sawmills, paper making machines, biomass using facilities, etc) non-commercial and commercial mechanical harvests are usually the most cost effective manner. In some parts of the country ( New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado for example) adequate infrastructure no longer exists. Without sufficient logs, the mills simply disappeared along with the jobs and the local economies they supported. Today, hazardous fuels or undesirable vegetation must often be burned or cut and hauled to landfills at great expense.

I am told that the vegetative work needed here at Pea Ridge and other similar Parks could cost the tax payers as much as \$3000 per acre using traditional Agency methods. This is unacceptable! There are a number of other alternatives that must be carefully examined before committing to such an expensive approach.

If the vegetation has commercial value it may be possible to get a professionally trained logger to harvest the material for processing at a local mill or biomass plant and pay the Agency for it - a commercial timber sale. If not it might be possible to trade the material on the stump for other work needed in the Park (say some trail work requiring dozer work) with little if any money changing hands - a stewardship contract. If it has no commercial value, the agency may have to burn the material using prescribed fire or cut and pile and burn using appropriated funds.

The Forest Service and BLM have long had the authority to make commercial timber sales and retain part of the funds for reforestation, wildlife work, payments to schools and counties, etc. In 2003, they were also given the authority to use Stewardship contracts. Stewardship contracts are seen as just another tool in the agency's toolbox for use when circumstances are right. These contracts do not replace the longstanding commercial sale contracts.

In most states with forest infrastructure, there are professional loggers. These individuals complete quality training programs which emphasis best management practices, aesthetics, communications, equipment operator skills, business management, and safety. These programs produce graduates that are highly skilled and good stewards of the land they work.

American Forest and Paper Association member companies require loggers delivering logs to their mills to be certified.

In Arkansas, the Arkansas Timber Producers Association (ATPA) is responsible for our logger training program. Since October 1995, ATPA Director George Lease has held 769 workshops with more than 34,000 loggers and procurement personnel in attendance. In 2005, 1175 individuals participated in 53 workshops.

Each year, the Arkansas Forestry Commission under the leadership of State Forester John Shannon examines a random sample of completed harvest sites throughout the state on all classes of ownership to determine the BMP application rate. The BMP statewide implementation rate for 2004 was 88%. Arkansas State University is currently under contract to exam individual BMPs to see if they provide the expected protection.

Kelly Robbins and his staff at the 1400 member Arkansas Forestry Association work closely with industrial and private landowners, teachers, and other interested parties throughout the state to ensure that they have the latest information on good forestry.

In closing, I commend the Park Service for recognizing that in certain situations commercial timber sales and stewardship contracts are viable tools for removing vegetation that detracts from the agency's goal. I encourage the use of existing loggers and infrastructure to do this work where the numbers will work. The Forest Service and BLM should be called on "as experienced hands" to help the Park Service initiate these new practices. I support the notion of legislation if required to allow the agency to retain funds similar to what the Forest Service now does.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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