

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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Testimony of  
Donald R. Wesson  
Pulp & Paperworkers' Resource Council  
Southern Pine Regional Director  
For the House Resource Committee  
How Federal Land Policies Affect Rural Communities  
"American Heritage Rivers"  
June 9, 1998

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and this committee for holding this very important hearing, and for allowing me to participate.

My name is Don Wesson. I am the Vice President of United Paperworkers' International Union Local 1533 located in McGehee, Arkansas. I serve as the Southern Pine Regional Director of the Pulp & Paperworkers' Resource Council. I am currently employed in the Pulp & Paper Industry as an industrial mechanic. I reside in Desha County Arkansas and I'm a constituent of the 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.

A few years ago, I was like most all Americans. I went to work, paid my share of taxes, voted in most elections, and depended on my elected officials to take care of me. I've always felt my freedoms, as well as my property was protected. After all, America was founded under the constitution. One day I heard some disturbing news of how a spotted owl put thousands of my union brothers and sisters out of a job in the very industry in which I am employed. I started paying more attention to what my government was doing, and realized some of those elected officials in which I placed my trust, was not looking out for my well being, or the well being of America. It was then that I realized that the world is run by those who show up, and I would start showing up. It was at that time I got involved with the PPRC.

The Pulp & Paperworkers' Resource Council is a grassroots group consisting of labor workers who work in the pulp, paper, and wood products industry of America. We have lost thousands of jobs in our industry in the past few years due to various government regulations. I'm here today to address "the American Heritage Rivers" we feel this is just another governmental program that will end up hurting our communities and cost us more industry jobs.

I live in Desha County Arkansas, which borders the mighty Mississippi River, the life blood of America. The Mississippi River is among the top ten rivers that is already nominated as Heritage Rivers. I have had several meetings with the office of council on environmental quality, concerning this nomination. I have met with Mr. Ray Clark, Associate Director of the CEQ as well as the Chairman of American Heritage Rivers, on three different occasions. Mr. Clark keeps insisting that the American Heritage Rivers is the greatest thing since motherhood and apple pie. He expressed that lies are being told about American Heritage Rivers. He insisted that there are no new regulations, no new money, and this is truly a bottoms up program. It is community based, and there will be no impact on private property. He stated that money was already in place. The purpose of this program would be to just manage the rivers, and to administer the funds where needed. This is why I have a grave concern over this executive order.

If a "river community" is designated for this initiative, there are potentially serious negative implications for local governments. Depending on the direction the project takes, local land use zoning boards could be negated, or completely bypassed. There is nothing in the language that would allow a designated community, or individual land owners, the ability to opt out of this program. Without the right to opt out, a private land owner or local government, should be concerned about losing any power of income or development of assets, as well as its sovereignty.

The idea of using a "river navigator" to coordinate the river communities efforts in itself is somewhat a disturbing idea. When the person selected can be a federal or non-federal employee selected jointly by the river community and federal agencies, the potential for conflict of interest exist. Many agencies, such as the department of interior, fish and wildlife service, and the army corp of engineers have become more and more active in reducing or restricting the use of our natural resources. If the "river navigator" is chosen from an agency that has a definite preservationist slant, the chances of the "river communities" choosing a plan to the detriment of private property rights and industrial development would be greatly increased.

Whenever tourism, economic security, environmental protection, and protecting/preserving our heritage are mixed into one initiative, the American public becomes skeptical. This mixture in the past has meant the decrease in high paying industrial jobs. Even when there are tourism jobs created, the employees are not paid well, and in many cases are seasonal jobs.

I urge you Mr. Chairman, and this committee, to stop the American Heritage Rivers initiative. If this program is as great as we are told, then the office of the CEQ would not mind it having congressional oversight. We do not need 16 different governmental agencies and a river navigator to manage our rivers, or to regulate our private lands that borders these rivers.

Any proposal that is set up under the premise of streamlining government, but yet would still include at least 9 different cabinet positions, as well as countless other government agencies, hardly make this initiative more user friendly. Instead, it would just lead to another level of bureaucracy that the American public is already weary of.

If you have any questions concerning how too many levels of government bureaucracy affects the jobs in resource based industry, you could ask any one of the over one hundred thousand workers from the pacific northwest who lost their job over a Spotted Owl.

Submitted by Don Wesson  
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