

Testimony of  
Mitch Friedman, Executive Director  
Conservation Northwest

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*Issues Affecting Forest Health and Management in Eastern Washington -  
National Forests, Tribal Lands, and Local Communities*

Mr. Chairman, Members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting my comments on this matter. I direct Conservation Northwest, which serves a membership of over 8,000 citizens through our offices in Bellingham, Seattle, Spokane, and Republic, Washington. The mission of Conservation Northwest is to protect and connect old-growth forests and other wild areas from the Washington Coast to the BC Rockies, vital to a healthy future for us, our children, and wildlife.

For over ten years, my science and field staff have monitored virtually every national forest project in this state. My personal involvement in these issues dates to the protests of the mid 1980s. I am familiar with every phase and tactic of what some have called the forest wars. I am here today to speak to you of the most encouraging development I have witnessed to date, which is the great progress of community-based collaboration to advance common interests and solutions on our treasured public forests. I want to explore what is working and why, and suggest ways that you and the Congress can help.

The main point of my remarks is that here in northeastern Washington, we are at the leading edge of what we hope is a new trend of collaborative solutions on our public forests. What we have seen in our early experiences of this new era indicates need for changes within the Forest Service to best facilitate and harness this positive potential.

Much has changed in recent decades. New science, new mill technology, new market realities, and diminishing ecological condition of some of our forests converge the interests of conservationists, the timber industry, rural communities, and our public land agencies. This is true both on the west side of the Cascades, where vast acres of second growth forests stand ready to be thinned in ways that can benefit wildlife while providing wood products and jobs, and on the Eastside where dry forests can be thinned to reduce wildfire risk, improve ecological health, and provide wood and jobs.

Three years ago, my organization made a deliberate decision to adopt a new approach to our work on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, in Washington's southern Cascades. Instead of focusing on opposing timber sales that we didn't support, we offered our assistance in advancing projects that we could support, such as thinning of dense, second growth forests. Today, the resulting Pinchot Partnership is bringing forth a new era of timber projects, like Smooth Juniper and Cat Creek, that solve problems on the ground and bring benefits to communities. The controversial old growth and roadless timber sales went away when the Forest Service found better uses of its time and resources.

On the Olympic National Forest, my staff found a way to use new stewardship project authorities so that the Flat Timber Sale would not only restore forest conditions, but generate an estimated \$500,000 for the Forest Service to use in decommissioning and, in places, converting to trail miles of unneeded roads that were bleeding sediment into salmon streams.

I am delighted by the progress of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, where for the first time discussion is evolving beyond just stand level work to possible long term solutions across the whole landscape.

I'm rather proud of the fact that some of the best friends I've made recently are in the timber industry. You see, while I'm a scarred veteran of the forest wars, my objective was never the war itself, but the ecological health of our forests. I believe that we are now moving much faster toward healthy forest ecosystems through peace than we did through war. That is in everybody's best interest.

I want to share now some of the things that seem to have worked for us in our experience with collaborative forestry across this state.

Obviously, leadership is paramount. It takes time and effort to build the relationships, trust, protocols, and shared knowledge and vision needed for collaborative success. Good leaders are prepared to take the risk of that investment, and have the patience to stick with it. I am very impressed by the leadership of the Vaagen's, as well as by Supervisors Rick Brazell of

the Colville National Forest and Jim Boynton of the Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest.

Community leadership has also advanced our efforts. On the Gifford Pinchot, a local woodcutter named John Squires has played an essential role. On the Colville, it has been Jim Doran, who is executive director of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition. People like this love both their community and their forest, and they provide a bridge between the more vested interests at the table.

It is worth noting that there will be lots of skeptics on all sides. My organization has been criticized heavily from some of our conservation allies, as I would guess our friends on the timber side have been. And there are personnel within the Forest Service who either resist evolving their work patterns, are dubious about the value of time invested in collaboration, or simply can't get past the grudges that have built up through years of dissension. After all, collaboration has the best results when a project is conceived and designed in all phases by the collaborative group, which chips away at the authority that agency staff are used to having. I hope all national forests have the quality of leadership that the Colville has demonstrated in guiding its staff forward.

I speculate that there may be places and times where collaboration simply won't work due to the absence of enough leadership, or the presence of enough resistance, among local people in conservation, timber, agency staff, or the community. I think, for instance, that southwest Oregon is in dire need of a collaborative approach, and I sincerely hope that the elements are in place so that it can happen.

Collaboration also seems to prosper when clear side boards define the common ground and preclude the battle ground. Jim Doran tells of how a breakthrough ingredient here on the Colville was the agreement to not log old growth forest and to not build roads. There are years worth of work to do on countless acres. But proposals to log big old trees or build roads, especially in roadless areas, unnecessarily act as a wedge to drive us apart and obstruct the good collaborative progress that could otherwise be achieved. The Siuslaw National Forest, along the central Oregon coast, was one of the first to learn that good restoration projects can happen without controversy or appeals and can make money. If only that approach were replicated everywhere, we'd be a lot better off.

All of the forests in Washington have been making great progress in this regard, but a recent example serves to make the point. Tensions have recently been high with the Wenatchee National Forest's timber sale to salvage log in the area of last year's Fischer Fire. The sale proposed would log big trees, including in an old growth reserve, and leave behind small fuels, thereby harming habitat while making no improvement in wildfire conditions immediately adjacent to the town of Leavenworth. This sale is presently under a temporary injunction.

Lastly, a consistent regulatory framework gives guidance and reassurance to collaborative partners. I believe that the National Environmental Policy Act, for instance, is already flexible enough to accommodate efficient development of noncontroversial projects while still meeting the need of public disclosure and review of the trade-offs associated with controversial projects.

Our elected leaders and Congress can help. You can nurture collaborative groups by convening meetings, spotlighting successes, and smoothing the way for us when faced with resistant agency leaders. There are lots of funding needs that you can work for, such as:

- Agency staff time spent on collaborative projects and perhaps a dedicated Collaboration Coordinator at management level of key national forests.
- Outside facilitators to assist new groups in exploring common interests, establishing groundrules, and maintaining focus. Such help has been invaluable both here and on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.
- Multiparty monitoring and compliance of collaborative projects.
- Forest Service research stations, which produce the science that guide our actions.
- Essential community programs, like the Economic Action Program, that provide technical assistance and start-up funds for rural community entrepreneurs looking to utilize the small-diameter material generated from collaborative restoration projects.
- Passage and Funding of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2005 (H.R. 517 and S. 267) which provides payments to counties for road maintenance and restoration projects.
- And, perhaps, incentivized funding for preparation of noncontroversial projects. The Siuslaw National Forest could sell almost twice as much timber without controversy if it had more funding. Will the Colville National Forest have enough funding to meet the challenge of implementing fuels-reduction projects necessary to protect lives and property of local citizens? If the money wasted on the controversy of damaging timber sales was somehow shifted to better projects, that would be a start.

There may be modest authorizing needs. I submit to the record the summary of proceedings from a recent summit of the Western Counties Partnership on Restoration. Among their many key recommendations, they suggest the need for a definition

of what constitutes collaboration beyond the loose guidance provided by the Western Governors' Association. Also, perhaps stewardship authorities could be changed to allow receipts of genuine collaborative sales to be used to fund the monitoring and evaluation work that is necessary for informed collaboration and science-based adaptive management. The area of biomass also calls for more Congressional work, both to stimulate and fund the use of small diameter wood for biomass and biofuel, and also to constrain that growing market so that it doesn't become a source of management abuses in the future.

But perhaps the most important changes needed to facilitate collaboration are to be made not by Congress, but by the Forest Service. Collaboration is about trusting relationships. This means that the agency needs to evolve to achieve some key objectives:

- Keeping staff in place at a particular district for much longer than is currently the case;
- Providing institutional incentives, such as evaluation standards and internal awards, for collaboration;
- Finding ways to hold staff accountable for actions that violate trust and common interest of community collaborators.

In conclusion, my experience makes me optimistic that community-based collaborative forestry efforts will continue to grow across the West to resolve old disputes, address ecological needs, and benefit communities. As trust builds, so will the scale of projects so that in a few years, the amount of acres treated is commensurate with the need. The biggest threat I see to this scenario is actions that return us to our old battle lines over logging of old or roadless forests, damaging post-fire salvage, or divisive legislative proposals. Let's let these things fade into the past so that a better future can be at hand for our forests and rural communities.

Thank you.

Follow-up address:

Mitch Friedman, Executive Director  
Conservation Northwest  
1208 Bay Street #201  
Bellingham WA 98225  
360/671-9950 (ext. 13)  
mf@conservationnw.org