

Committee on Resources

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Testimony of

Kent B. Gibson

House Resource Committee

Field Hearing

Flagstaff, Arizona

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Good afternoon, my name is Kent Gibson from Snowflake, Arizona. I thank the House Resource Committee for this important field hearing and for the opportunity to express my concerns. I have worked 30 years in the forest products industry, and I am currently employed by a large paper mill as an instrument and controls technician. For 27 years I have been a member of the United Paper workers International Union and the PACE international union. Our membership working with our companies provide this country with high quality paper products. Today I represent over 300,000 of my brothers and sisters who depend on wood fiber and timber to produce our products. I am currently serving on the national steering committee of the Pulp and Paperworkers Resource Council, a grassroots labor organization representing the interests of the nation's pulp, paper, and solid wood products industry. We are dedicated to conserving the environment while taking into account the economic stability of the workforce and surrounding community.

The testimony I give today needs to be viewed within the framework of my section of the forest products industry, which is the pulp and paper industry of this country. I also ask that you remember that my counter parts in logging, lumber mills, plywood and particle board mills, and other industries who depend on our national forest lands are experiencing problems equal to or greater than those I speak of today.

In 1992 a group of five employees from Stone Forest Industries traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with members of congress and discuss the serious problems facing the forest products industry. The hard fact is that within 5 years I was the only member of that group who had a job in the forest products industry. My friends who worked at sawmills here in Flagstaff, Eagar, Arizona, and South Fork CO., along with towns like Fredonia, Heber, and Winslow were all losing their mills a vitally important part of their social and economic viability.

It is estimated that the two small lumber mills remaining in Arizona may produce about 2 % of the 500 million board feet of timber harvested in Forest Service Region 3 during 1989. As alarming as this trend is to our state, the problem is not isolated to the forest products industries of Arizona. In the last 10 years at least 135 pulp and paper mills have been closed in the United States. (See attachment A.) Since 1997 more than 30,000 people have lost their jobs in the pulp and paper industry. (See attachment B.) This represents 30,000 families who have lost their primary source of income, hundreds of counties, cities, and towns which have lost much of their tax base. This occurred despite the fact that the basic forest reserves had not declined.

The mill that I work in chose to reconfigure our operation to 100% recycle fiber. This decision in part was due to the difficulty in obtaining a reliable supply of wood for fiber. Paper mills have always used small diameter timber, thinnings, and chipped wood to produce our products; in 1989 the Snowflake mill used an estimated 60,000 cords of pulp wood and 290,000 units of wood chips, an economic impact of \$23,443,000.00. But in the 1990's it became increasingly more difficult to secure contracts for the wood needed to supply our operations. Arizona forests needed thinning but, our mill was hauling chips from as far away as east Texas and Montana to supply our operation. 39,500 cords of wood and 182,400 units of chips were used in the final year of timber based operation, 1997, with an economic impact of \$24,139,000.00. The national impact of the loss of forest products revenue in just the pulp and paper mills is significant.

In the past decade alone much of the forest products industry in this state is gone. And without industry there is no infrastructure to support the work that must be done to return the forests to sound health. We must realize that industry is a vital tool in the recovery of our forests. Some say that we can place the cost of forest health recovery on the taxpayers and require someone other than Industry to help restore the forests. I ask why pay someone else to do the work when industry has a need for the resources and will produce the products used by every one of us.

The areas that were most affected by the Rodeo-Chediski forest fire were not properly managed due to heavy restrictions. There is an absolute cause and effect relationship that exists between poor forest health and catastrophic wildfires. Had these forests been properly managed we would not have seen the hundreds of thousands of acres destroyed in our state and the millions of acres across this nation just last year. There are many tools needed to return our forests to a healthy condition, but we can not forget three important tools which are thinning, controlled burning, and logging.

The members of the Pulp and Paperworkers Resource Council strongly support The Presidents Initiative to prevent wildfires, return the forests to health and create stronger communities. There should be no place for catastrophic wildfire in our forest management philosophy. It is imperative that a healthy forest management plan be implemented, in order to protect our forest resources throughout the United States.

Attachment A: MILL CLOSURE MAP 1989-2002

Attachment B

Attachment C

Attachment D

Pulp & Paperworkers' Resource Council

AWPPW

PACE

PPRC Position on Forest Health

Wood Products Employees Support Aggressive Forest Health Approach

Forest Health Management Requirements:

Restoration of tree species best suited for site.

Prevention of unhealthy conditions.

Thinning to species composition and stand density.

Consideration of impacts of insect infestation, root disease, wildfire, and actions necessary to sustain forest health and long-term productivity.

Professional and private foresters need workable management approaches and strategies to sustain forest ecosystem.

Encourage local public involvement in forest health decisions.

Commercial thinning is useful for reducing fuel loads.

The Pulp and Paperworkers' Resource Council Supports Change and Proposes that Congress Act

Commercial thinning needs to be a top priority when the safety of home owners and communities are threatened.

Direct the Forest Service to harvest dead and dying timber to reduce catastrophic losses and re-establish healthy viable forests.

Protect timber harvest programs from lengthy delay by appeals and litigation.

Direct the Forest Service not to deviate from forest plans without proper analysis, public involvement and documentation.

Pass legislation to give the needed funding to expand forest health and timber sales. This combined with thinning, pest suppression, and fuel load treatment programs are environmentally and economical responsible.

The Forest Service should be run as intended, to provide multiple use and sustainable forestry to meet America's wood product needs now and for future generations.

If the Forest Service was operated as a business, it's net assets would make it a top five United States company. Managed as it currently is, the business would be financially bankrupt.

Attachment A:

Summary of jobs lost in the western United States – Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and California

Total Mills closed -- 396

Total Mill jobs lost -- 35,610

Total Logging jobs lost -- 10,942

Total jobs lost -- 46,552

Attachment B:

US Paper Mill shutdowns by year -- American Forest and Paper Association

Employment at Pulp and Paper Mills -- Bureau of Labor Statistics

Attachment C:

Table 102 -- USDA Forest Service -- 1989-2000

Attachment D:

Pulp & Paperworkers Resource Council Position on Forest Health