

Committee on Resources

resources.committee@mail.house.gov

[Home](#) [Press Gallery](#) [Subcommittees](#) [Issues](#) [Legislation](#) [Hearing Archives](#)

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

Field Hearing on Crisis on the National Forests: Containing the Threat of Wildland Fire to the Environment and Communities

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2003

Opening Statement by Representative J.D. Hayworth

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for holding this hearing here in beautiful Flagstaff. I am also grateful to Congressman Rick Renzi for requesting this hearing and for bringing the House Committee on Resources to Arizona today.

Forest conditions across the country have gone from bad to worse. Communities, wildlife, and our environment are at greater risk now than ever before in Arizona and across much of the West. Simply stated, our forests are in a treacherous condition and are perfectly suited for catastrophic wildfire. Flagstaff has, for the most part, so far dodged the bullet. But the communities southeast of here are more than a little aware of the dangerous state of the forest.

The Rodeo-Chediski fire devastated the lives of thousands of people who lived on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. Although we aren't going to point fingers, one can hardly help but wonder how bad last summer's cataclysmic fire would have been, had the forest been in a condition of fire sustainability. But decades of mismanagement and, frankly, under-management, left the forest in a state where a small fire turned into the firestorm of the century. Dense forestland quickly went up in flames. Devastating crown fires ravaged the land for two weeks. The fire was so large and so intense that it jumped roads, it jumped rivers, it spread over tens of thousands of acres each day. It killed wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. It wreaked havoc on the watershed. It burned nearly 500 structures, many of them private homes. The smoke and debris was so heavy and widespread, it formed its own weather system. This is NOT the type of fire you see in a healthy forest.

The fact is, healthy forests can sustain small fires. In fact, small fires are beneficial to a healthy forest because they periodically clear underbrush and small-diameter timber. As we tragically learned last summer, our forests are not in a healthy state.

For years, our forests have been poorly managed. In fact, for the most part, our forests simply have NOT been managed. Additionally, lawsuits brought by environmental extremists have tied our hands and kept us from employing sound science and proven principles of forest management. There are some that would have us believe that a hands-off approach is natural, and that we must not actively manage our forests. These are the same people who believe that the forests should not be touched at all...not by naturalists, not by recreationists, not by picnicking families, not by anybody. That is ridiculous. I firmly believe that we should enjoy our forests, and that this can be done in a responsible way. The fact is, if we don't act to protect our forests, there may one day be no forests left. Simply put, we have a moral obligation to protect these valuable resources so that our children may have the opportunity to enjoy nature as we have.

I have reviewed the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. This plan will allow for an environmentally-friendly, common-sense approach to protecting and conserving our forests. The plan will not only save lives and forestland, but it will save each American taxpayer money. The damage from the Rodeo-Chediski fire was nearly \$60 million. The Forest Service spent more than \$40 million fighting this fire. And what is the value of endangered species that were killed??

The Healthy Forests Initiative addresses the need for hazardous fuels reduction. Investments in fuels reduction saves so much more money spent on fire suppression. The bill will reform the appeals process,

which is completely broken. It makes conservation of forestland a priority, and will allow for long-term forest health. This initiative will keep environmental extremists from holding our forests hostage. In fact, the Healthy Forests Initiative will bring us to a new age of practicing not "elitist environmentalism," but "enlightened environmentalism."

Again, I am grateful for the opportunity to revisit my friends here in Flagstaff, and again want to thank Resources Committee Chairman Pombo, Forests and Forest Health Subcommittee Chairman McInnis, and my colleague, Congressman Renzi for bringing us here to address this important issue.