

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

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Congressman Don Young
Chairman House Resource Committee
1324 Longworth Building
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Mr. Chairman:

My name is John Conley, I am the president of Concerned Alaskans for Resources and Environment (CARE). I have also served six years on the Ketchikan Gateway Borough Assembly and manage three NAPA auto parts stores located in Ketchikan, Craig and Wrangell Alaska.

The passage of the Tongass Timber Reform Act of 1990 (TTRA) was to be the great compromise for the Tongass National Forest. TTRA was supposed to provide increased environmental protection as well as a sustainable forest products industry. I have witnessed the closing of two pulp mills in Southeast Alaska and several sawmills. At the same time I have witnessed increased funding of local environmental groups by tax exempt national foundations.

These closings have greatly affected both my business and my community. In Ketchikan alone, we have lost over 544 forest product jobs, 144 retail and support jobs, and 40 million dollars of local payroll. Today my company employs eight less people and its gross receipts have declined by 1.5 million dollars. As I look toward the future I am extremely concerned about supporting my family and the families of the 30 remaining employees in my stores. Access to natural resources is vital to Southeast Alaskans and is guaranteed by the Alaska Statehood Act.

Environmental groups have stated that tourism can and will replace lost forest product industry jobs. Mr. Chairman, this is simply not true. Tourism is important to our local economy and throughout the state. I have supported and will continue to support this growing industry. However, it is a seasonal industry providing only seasonal jobs; it does not provide families with the benefits of year round employment. These jobs will also not replace the 25 percent return to our communities for education and transportation based on timber receipts.

Mr. Chairman it has become obvious to many, that increased funding by national tax free environmental foundations to the local environmental industry leads to decreased economic activity and local employment. The environmental industry states they support a value added timber industry for Southeast Alaska. Mr. Chairman, my community and I are confused because these same groups continue to object to harvest quantities adequate enough to sustain even a small value added forest products industry.

The Forest Service has a legal mandate to manage our national forests for multiple uses which include

timber production. The new land management plan for the Tongass (TLMP) drastically reduced the amount of land available for a long term sustainable timber industry in Southeast Alaska. Even with this massive reduction of the available sale quantity on the Tongass the environmental industry continues to fight timber production. This is not acceptable. At a minimum we need to sustain our current economy. Legal challenges orchestrated and financed by the national environmental lobby continues to block multiple uses on the Tongass National Forest which is preventing our ability to maintain a stable economy.

Mr. Chairman I believe it is time to make these tax exempt foundations that fund the environmental industry accountable. As a businessman if I were to provide money to someone which they in turn used to destroy another business that would be an illegal act under the RICO laws and I would be held accountable. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the sake of my family and the families of my community I urge you to hold these foundations accountable.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

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