

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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Testimony on  
Oversight Hearing on  
Management of the Stanislaus National Forest  
KEN MARKS  
President  
Regional Council of Rural Counties  
Before the  
House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
September 13, 1997

Good Morning

My name is Ken Marks, Supervisor from Tuolumne County, and I sit here before this Federal Subcommittee for the third time in the last two years testifying on another forest-related issue that has the potential to severely alter the social and economic course of our small County.

Thank you Madam Chair for taking the time to investigate personally, the issues of forest health, and a warm welcome to you and Congressman Doolittle and your staff. Tuolumne County is honored to have you as guests.

Today, I would like to describe to you, not only Tuolumne County, but an organization called the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCR of C), which is an organized effort on behalf of 25 small California rural counties, to address various issues of interest all vitally important to these small counties.

They comprise many counties of origin within this State. It is from these counties that the water-ways of California originate. It is within these counties that the snow packs are laid down in winter--melt away in the spring, and yearly renew the life of the rivers. It is within these counties that the vast timber and grazing lands provide the watershed health essential to the wellbeing of those rivers, and ultimately the San Francisco Bay-Delta itself. It is within these counties that the forests provide stability and cover to an otherwise fragile and transient soft mantle; which in place is a blessing, but when washed away, can devastate the state's waterways. It is within these counties that millions of people come to recreate during all four seasons. It is these counties that are irrevocably linked to the great rivers of California and to the Bay-Delta, not by politics or by a process devised by man, but by the very laws of nature.

It is also within most of these counties that the giant Sierra Nevada mountain range lies, and the 19 national forests that make up the Pacific Southwest Region of the National Forest System. The Stanislaus National Forest accounts for most of the geography of Tuolumne County, and amongst other things, accounts for the export of over 2 million acre feet of water annually in our counties' water that quenches the thirst of Californians, from Siskiyou County at the top of the State, to San Diego, at the bottom -- water used to make things from micro chips to potato chips. Water that grows crops to feed the world. Water makes California's economy, making it the seventh largest in the world. Water that supports growth, powers an economy,

provides life and begins in part on the Stanislaus National Forest.

The reason I bring this information to you is, because every time I have testified before you, it is because the Forest Service, either on a regional basis, as in the case of the Spotted Owl, or on a local one, most recently with the Emmigrant Wilderness checkdam issue, have failed to make sound management decisions. Resulting in harm to small rural counties up and down this State, and ultimately to the taxpayer of America.

Believe me, I need more than five minutes to explain to you how critical proper watershed management decisions are to, not only the State of California, but also to our small counties, and to our local National Forest. It is equally critical that there be leaders on our local forests that are capable of making decisions that are consistent with some land management plan approved by the region and Congress and the Administration that is in line with the basic acts under which the National Forest Service was created and directed to operate. A plan not driven by emotion, but by scientific data laced with common sense, and not hyped by scare tactics driven by the threat of a lawsuit. Our local Forest Service has such a plan available right now. It's the Stanislaus Forest Land Management Plan. It's written, it's tested, in its place -- all it needs is a leader.

I need to stress that proper management of this forest and the one north of us, and the one south of us, and all the rest of them that feed the waterways of California, is vital to the future health of this great State. However complex, believe me when I say a decision on a forest has far reaching effects for the health of this nation.

Recently, the taxpayers of California passed on Proposition 204, the "Safe Clean Water Act" committing over \$31 million to watershed management alone. The proposition passed by over 63% of the voters of the State. The Federal government has budgeted \$430 million to supplement the State's money. In Prop 204, it states that JPAs made up of federal, state and local stakeholders will make up the consensus group for designing these watershed programs. Tuolumne County is committed to a collaborative process that promotes public participation with a broad-based stakeholder group in creating non-partisan management plans that promote the restoring of our upper watersheds to the health they once experienced. Tuolumne County is committed to participating in these JPAs. We ask you to please promote individuals at the Federal level with professional credentials in forestry and commit them to these JPAs. Professional people who can make a decision for the health of our forests, our county, our state, and our nation.

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