

Testimony
On HR4200
The Forest Emergency Recovery & Research Act

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Good morning. My name is Sue Kupillas and I am Executive Director for a non-profit organization, Communities for Healthy Forests, based in Roseburg, Oregon.

Communities for Healthy Forests mission is: "To realize the prompt restoration and recovery of the conifer forest in the aftermath of fire and other catastrophic events ensuring the presence and vitality of forest lands for future generations."

CHF is an organization of community members, liberal and conservative, republican and democrat, large and small business, including a farmer and school board member, a local judge, the Cow Creek Tribes, Unions and many organizations, who have come together around the common interest of a need to restore forests that have been impacted by catastrophic events. CHF is funded by local businesses, Unions, the Cow Creek Tribes, and county Title III funds.

We have two goals. The first is to educate communities and grass roots organizations across the United States about current conditions of forests that have experienced catastrophic events, talk about why they aren't being restored and what changes need to be made for timely restoration. The second is to work for changes in policy so that prudent restoration can begin soon after the catastrophic event. Congressman Walden has helpfully chosen to address this important restoration issue in his bill, HR 4200.

CHF was founded because there are serious impediments to restoring forests in a timely manner therefore the number of damaged forest acres is growing annually. Witness a backlog of millions of acres of dead, and often dangerous trees that have been left to rot while allowing scrub brush taking over.

One example of a significant backlog of forests not restored is the Biscuit fire site which is in my back yard (Show picture). Some say that the Biscuit is a mosaic of live and dead trees. Here is a photo that Ralph McKecknie, Upper Rogue Independent, took in September. This photo represents mile after mile of the burned area. This is not a mosaic, and looks more like a desert. The Biscuit burned 499,965 acres, of which 178,051 is Kalmiopsis Wilderness (which will not be restored) leaving almost 322,000 acres which could potentially be restored. After harvest and replanting still approximately 312,000 acres have not been restored. Less than 10,000 acres has been replanted, which is less than 3% of the Biscuit Fire site. In Judge Cooney's recommendation, the lawsuits should be denied, however, after three years, much of the value is lost so there is no incentive and no funding.

Just as important, a "Do nothing" approach can have serious consequences, not just economic, but to the environment that sometimes slows the process of healing and recovery, possibly several hundred years. As pointed out in the Biscuit example, delay destroys much of the salvage value of the trees which results in little or no funding for restoration. If dead trees are not removed, they along with new brush, provide fuels for the next round of fires. If we act quickly before the dead trees

decay, the value can pay for rehabilitation with funds left over to help pay for roads and schools and add to the general fund of counties. With the demand for wood in the United States, why not cut the dead trees, and relieve pressure on green trees in other countries?

FERRA calls for quick action, addressing the problem of delay tactics. Shortening timelines should not be confused with eliminating environmental protections.

Are we on the right track in wanting to restore forests that have been through catastrophic events like fires, blowdown or insect infestations?

To find out we should look at what some scientists are telling us and at public opinion. Though my organization has spent considerable time with scientists, I will not spend much time covering that now, as you've already heard testimony from a number of them today.

From what we've learned, I can say that much is known in some areas about the question of logging burned trees and the potential affects on soil. As pointed out to us by Dr. Paul Adams, from Oregon State University, on a recent forestry tour, research has shown that damage to soils can be minimized or mitigated when using new advanced logging systems. In addition, some scientists say more damage is done to soils when the burned site with fallen dead trees and brush is exposed to the second, hotter burn. From experience, we have seen reburns on sites where dead burned trees provide fuels for the next lightning strike. For example, the Silver Fire reburned with the Biscuit fire and the 1987 Apple Fire reburned in 2002 in Douglas County.

Reforestation concerns are another important issue addressed by HR 4200. Some sites, such as on the Biscuit, have significant problems with reforestation. Often this is because the seed trees are destroyed and in other cases, such as the Biscuit, many of the acres are in hard to grow, rocky soils on south facing hot slopes. In the 90's, when I was a Jackson County Commissioner, we helped fund the FIR research project where hard to grow forest sites in Southern Oregon were successfully replanted. Much research has been done in this area.

Research issues relating to burned sites, insect infestations and blowdowns are also important to my area. The Timbered Rock Fire site Record of Decision included a research component with six objectives, including evaluation of mixed-species reforestation, to identify and characterize temporal patterns of vegetation structural development and species diversity, to assess temporal dynamics of fuel loading and fire risk, and to determine impacts of snag retention on survival and growth of planted trees. The judge that placed an injunction on the restoration efforts stopped the research, also.

HR4200 includes a research component, which would add to our body of knowledge about restoration through scientific, peer reviewed experiments. We have thousands

of acres of dead trees to experiment on in burned AMA's, matrix and late successional reserves (that no longer are LSRs because the trees are dead).

Davis, Hibbits and Mighall, and The Nelson Report, both excellent credible polling firms, conducted two separate polls on the issue of forest restoration. The July CHF poll, with Davis, Hibbits and Mighall and the October Mark Nelson poll showed very similar results.

In the CHF poll, it was no surprise that Oregonians consider protecting water quality a top priority (99 %). But protecting forests from wildfire was also important (91%). Seventy Six percent of Oregonians believe (or strongly believe) forest restoration should happen. In the poll, restoration included removing dead trees and replanting seedlings. (The October Nelson poll had the same results.) The poll showed that 74% of people think it takes too long to restore forests if left untouched. There was little support for leaving burned areas alone, in questions asked in various ways. Seventy six percent of Oregonians believe federal rules should be reviewed to allow restoration activity to happen quickly.

The effects of a broken system, where we don't restore our forests, is catastrophic. Here in the US we are wasting resources, throwing away family wage jobs, not adequately funding schools and allowing remaining mill infrastructure to be dismantled. In a time of federal deficit spending, federal agency fund shortages, and a state funding crisis we are literally throwing away dollars that could fuel our economy and fund our schools. Worse than that, the effect of delay is causing serious long term damage to our environment and deterioration of millions of acres in our National Forests. Those of us who live in communities with burned forests, have to drive through or fly over miles and miles of burned areas, that are now too late to restore. That is an unfortunate legacy to our children. In the United States of America we should not be letting this happen. We thank Chairman Greg Walden and the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health, for bringing leadership to the legislative process on the forest restoration issue.

Thank you for having these hearings and thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer questions.