

Committee on Resources

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Testimony

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July 2, 2003

"Management Challenges on Montana's National Forests"

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Gordon Sanders, Resource Manager for Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Inc. here in Seeley Lake, Montana.

Pyramid is a small independent sawmill, locally owned and in continuous operation since 1949. As the oldest surviving owner operated mill in Montana, we produce everything from 1x4's to 12x12's. All species and sizes of logs are utilized to produce finished lumber sold primarily to non-traditional markets, adding value to unique products and staying away from commodity markets.

Pyramid has evolved over our long history. As reflected in our mission statement, "We are a progressive, versatile organization providing long term employment through the production of quality lumber products. This requires commitment to personnel development, on going marketing efforts, efficient utilization of all assets and good stewardship of natural resources. Pyramid is dedicated to helping landowners sustain their forests for present and future generations. We believe active forest management can create healthy forests and improve other resources". WE ARE THE STEWARDSHIP COMPANY.

Currently, Pyramid employs 131 full time dedicated and highly trained Montanans in our plant and 33 contractors and their employees. Combined, Pyramid contributes \$147,000/employee to Montana's economic base.

Small independent mills in rural communities provide the basis for economic stimulus and diversification and stability in the rural west. Pyramid and Seeley Lake characterize the West and what makes Montana the 'Last Best Place'. Timber dependent communities with community dependent timber.

In the early years there were nineteen mills within a sixty mile radius competing for timber. Now there is one. Statewide, Montana has 9 small independent sawmills (one of which is shutdown) and 4 large forest products companies, all 50 to 100 miles apart. The industry continues to change, reacting to conflicting interests on federal lands. More than 30 mills have closed in Montana since the mid 70's and the percentage of federal timber processed has likewise fallen. Until the 90's, Pyramid processed 70 to 80% federal timber and last year it was 10%. Community dependent timber. Any forest management or forest restoration requires healthy rural communities with a strong, trained and motivated workforce of skilled labor, contract loggers, log haulers, road contractors, and suppliers.

As a non-fee land owning company, Pyramid's survival has been the direct result of long term relationships, implementing landowner objectives and performance. Working closely with private forest landowners has helped us realize the relationship between forest health and the timber industry. Pyramid Mountain Lumber has been instrumental in actively supporting and participating in the changing timber industry, which has

been modernized over the last 15 years. A culture has changed. The development and adoption of voluntary forestry best management practices established guidelines of partnership between landowners and forest professionals to insure proper forest management and protection of soil and water resources.

Our professional loggers and foresters are carefully and thoughtfully harvesting trees on various ownerships and across landscapes (truly light-on-the-land). Also, state of the art mills, with computerized machine centers are utilizing all that is possible out of every tree (getting more with less).

The new paradigm for meeting the challenges for management on Montana's National forests will revolve around collaboration, transparency and openness. Rural communities and their family owned sawmills will have significant influence over federal actions and the active management of our community dependent forest resources. Healthy forests need communities with skilled labor and equipment to help manage them. They also need entrepreneurs and investors with renewed confidence in the government's ability to perform in order to provide suppliers, housing, clothing, places to shop, banks, etc. In places like Seeley Lake welcome additions to the local economy are convenience and specialty stores, a golf course, cross country ski and snowmobile trails, motels and restaurants.

Stewardship is the vehicle which opens the doors for cooperation, community involvement, transparency and rebuilding trust in our public land management agencies. Vision, combined with goods for services provides for multiple benefits within rural communities. Stewardship contracting is not the only means but, it is a start.

In conclusion, increasing support for stewardship contracting (which focuses on end results) and capitalizing on this natural progression toward a public/private partnership will achieve active forest management, ecological integrity and social and economic justice for workers and rural communities. Above all, building trust between the public and the hostile triangle - forest service/environmentalists/timber industry - leads to confidence in our professional land managers and at the same time increases certainty for the few remaining mill owners.

The supporters for such an approach are diverse and understand the interdependency between ecology, economy and community and the common concern is forest health. It is this common ground that provides the basis for a new social contract between urban and rural American.

The Forest Service and BLM role is to welcome the opportunity to participate in the dialogue, maintain transparency and stay focused on getting good work done, actively not passively, yet light-on-the-land. . protecting soil, air and water resources, and wildlife habitat.

"Rural stewardship is good for communities and good for the land." It is the new beginning to "care for the land and serve the people" and truly defines the greater good.