

Testimony of Denny Scott
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House Committee on Resources

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Chairman Walden and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today on this important matter. My name is Denny Scott and I am the Assistant Organizing Director of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. I have been a proud member of the Carpenters Union for 19 years.

Today, the Brotherhood represents more than 520,000 highly skilled men and women throughout the building-trades industries. The UBC represents and offers training to North America's carpenters, cabinetmakers, [millwrights](#), piledrivers, lathers, framers, [floorlayers](#), roofers, drywallers, and workers in forest-products and related industries.

Our members work with timber products at all stages of production - ranging from cutting timber in our forests to its end uses in buildings throughout the country. Let me be clear. We are firm believers in protecting the environment. Without a protected environment, we risk losing the one thing that gives many of us our jobs. However, we do believe that we need to find a balance between protecting the environment and protecting the jobs of our members, whether they live in the forest communities of Oregon and Louisiana, or are construction workers in major metropolitan markets.

We have been very interested in actions by the federal government and other parties that have the opportunity to undermine this balance. One issue that has long been of concern to our leadership and our members is finding ways to protect forest communities from the catastrophic effects of forest fires and other natural disasters. In 2003, we were proud to support bipartisan efforts on Capitol Hill, beginning with this Committee, and in conjunction with the Administration, to pass the Healthy Forests Restoration Act because we saw it as common sense legislation that would again allow the Forest Service to practice active forest management.

One of the events that helped crystallize public support for the Act was the series of unprecedented forest fires that swept throughout the West beginning in 2000. I saw first hand how destructive these fires were. However, once the fires were finally contained and put out, we saw a second, less publicized, disaster – the inability of the Forest Service to begin salvage and reforestation efforts that would begin the process of regenerating our national forests.

The Forest Service lacked the appropriate tools and authorizations to immediately begin salvage and reforestation projects quickly. In addition, various groups that opposed the quick removal of damaged trees forced delays through administrative appeals and lawsuits. The combination of these factors has slowed the restoration process to less than a snail's pace. Regretfully, we have been left with a situation where private lands filled with new trees border devastated public forests that have been untouched for years on end.

While the Healthy Forests Restoration Act did a good job of streamlining the approval process for necessary thinning projects that will help reduce the risk of new fires, it did not do anything to expedite salvage and reforestation projects after the fire. The Carpenters Union believes this legislation takes the next logical step that will continue to move toward healthier public forests.

Others on this panel are better able to discuss the science behind salvage and reforestation. Therefore I will confine my comments to an issue that is the top priority of the Carpenters Union and all American unions – jobs and community stability.

We learned after the forest fires that affected national forests such as the Deschutes in Oregon, the Lolo in Montana and the Lassen and Plumas in California, that we need to act quickly after the fire to clear damaged and burned trees. This is not only sound scientifically, but also economically.

After a fire, there are literally acres of downed and damaged trees that have some economic value. But that value does not last long as insects and rot quickly destroy the value of the timber. Therefore timber that could be cleared and processed in nearby mills, and therefore provide needed jobs in forest communities, instead lay decomposing on the forest floor.

One important thing that is often overlooked in these debates is that salvage and reforestation projects support rural communities. In addition to providing jobs, these projects also help maintain the local economic base. They keep alive rural forest communities by keeping up the local tax base that helps maintains schools and local governments. These jobs are

glue that keep these communities together.

This is not only true in the West. In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we have seen widespread devastation on both public and private lands in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. According to the Forest Service's Department of Forest Inventory and Analysis, between 15-19 billion board feet of timber spread out over five million acres of forestland were damaged by Hurricane Katrina. Again according to the Forest Service, the down and damaged wood would be sufficient to produce 800,000 single-family homes and 25 million tons of paper and paperboard.

The Texas Forest Service estimated on September 30, 2005 that more than 15 million acres of public land in the state, representing a value of nearly \$41 million dollars, was affected by Hurricane Rita.

If harvested quickly before the blue-stain fungus sets in, we could be providing needed jobs at mills throughout the South and producing forest products that could be used to rebuild devastated communities. Instead, given the inevitable delays under the current framework, I fear the rot will set in and we will end up importing much of this wood from Canada and other countries.

Therefore, the Carpenters union was most interested in reviewing the proposed legislation that is the topic of today's hearing. Upon our review, we find that the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act can be helpful in expediting the process to salvage trees by fire, wind, ice and insect infestation in a manner that not only provides economic benefits for communities, but also provides protections to ensure that sound science is used and the public is consulted.

I would like to address two parts of the legislation that we believe will be the most beneficial.

- First, we strongly support the expedited procedures set forth in the bill that will allow salvage and reforestation programs to begin as quickly as possible after the catastrophic event. By putting in place pre-approved procedures we can avoid the all too prevalent problem of "analysis paralysis." Moreover, it will make it possible to offer timber salvage sales when the logs have their most value. This is not only important to the timber industry and timber workers, but also to the entire reforestation program. As recent experience after fires in the West and Intermountain regions has taught us, by the time the Forest Service was finally able to offer salvage sales, the timber has decayed to such an extent that no-one is willing to bid on the sales. The new rules, if passed, will not only encourage companies to bid on the sales, but also ensure an increased level of funding for reforestation programs. In an era of tight budgets, anything we can do to make programs self-supporting must be seriously considered.
- Next, the legislation makes use of the guidelines established under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to set the rules for administrative appeals and litigation. Rather than setting a whole new set of rules, the bill lets everyone know the rules of the game. Moreover it clearly defines what can and cannot be done in a salvage project and keeps in place many of the current laws that ensure a safe environment and provide for public notice and input.

That said, there are two suggestions that the Carpenters Union would like to offer that we believe would improve the bill.

- First, we would like to suggest that the Committee add language to the legislation that would give preference to the use of local area contractors. We believe that the inclusion of this provision would help guarantee the ongoing economic viability of local communities during both the salvage and reforestation process.
- Second, we noted and applaud the comprehensive training provision that are contained in Title II of the legislation. However, we would also suggest extending these programs to Title I. Again, we believe that these provisions will help provide long-term employment in or near these forest communities after the initial crisis passes. This will allow these trained workers to remain in the area, earn a living wage and, therefore, sustain these communities alive.

Before I conclude, I would point out there is widespread agreement that the current system is a failure. In a poll conducted in August of Oregonians by the independent polling company of Davis, Hibbits & Midghall, nearly three-quarters of those surveyed supported restoring federal forests after wildfires by removing dead trees and planting seedlings. More than half said fires are growing out of control and causing too much damage and everything possible should be done to restore burned forests.

At the same time, a strong majority – 56 percent – thought it was a poor argument to say forests should be left alone because fires have occurred for centuries and more damage would be done by equipment and road construction. I remind the committee that this poll was taken in Oregon, a state with one of the most environmentally aware populations in the country.

Here is how *The Oregonian*, the largest newspaper in my home state, described the process in an editorial two days after the

poll was published:

The Forest Service launches an environmental review and salvage planning process that can drag on as long as two years. The fire-killed trees start rotting. Environmental groups appeal the Forest Service salvage and recovery plan. Then they sue. By the time a judge rules, all but the largest trees are rotten to the core.

Current post-fire policy is a failure. The Forest Service spends millions of dollars writing plans for salvage and restoration projects, many of which will never happen, often because there's no money left to pay for them. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of board feet of marketable timber are left to topple over and rot, even though rural Northwest communities are dying for jobs, even though the global demand for wood and pulp continues unabated.

It has come to this: A dead tree in the Northwest is now considered more precious than a live one about to be cut down in a poorly protected rain forest somewhere else in the world.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity to talk with you about this legislation. We look forward to working with you to ensure this bill becomes law.