

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

---

### Witness Testimony

---

Prepared Statement for the Record  
Sheila Keller  
On Behalf of Montana Women in Timber  
Before the Resource Committee  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
Concerning Issues of Public Forest Management As They Impact  
Small Business,  
Grizzly Bears, Roads, Fire and Huckleberries

Thank you, Congresswoman Chenoweth, and members of this committee, for this opportunity to present my views as a small business owner, concerning issues of forest management and how they impact me. My husband and I own three log trucks and other equipment. Currently, we have just one other employee. My husband puts in extremely long hours to keep everything running smoothly, and I do what ever I can as bookkeeper and parts runner to help out. In addition, I am an independent contractor representing a national company. In that capacity, I call on all types of businesses in western Montana, northern Idaho and Spokane, Washington.

I am also representing Montana Women in Timber because I know first-hand the value of education in resolving issues in the resource debate. I grew up in Iowa and had little knowledge of the timber industry. In 1987 I attended a meeting in Libby, Montana, with my husband about a proposal called the Kootenai-Lolo Accords. The gymnasium was packed with perhaps 500 to 600 people. A gentleman came to the microphone who talked about the social and family problems emerging in Forks, Washington. A small group of only six or eight people sitting by themselves just to my left began to boo and hiss. At that moment it is as though I was galvanized. Shortly after that, I was invited to attend a forest service meeting where the discussion focused on historical fire and current conditions. It has been nearly ninety years since the catastrophic 1910 fires, and timber harvest and fire together since have not equaled what was lost in that one event. I felt I had been lied to, and things have not been the same since.

If there was just one thing I could do, it would be education instead of legislation. I would urge every Congressman, especially those who support the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act and "zero cut" legislation, to take twenty minutes to watch the video, "America's Forests: A History of Resiliency and Recovery." Produced by the Forest Service, it is a history of the

United States as it relates to our forests. Douglas McCleary who was with the Forest Service felt that it was important to understand the past and how we got to where we are today in order to make responsible decisions for the future.

Montana has been known as the "Treasure State," yet the per capita income has been in steady decline until last year when we hit the bottom of the nation's payscale, along with an increasing poverty rate. Montana and her people are in trouble as we lose our industry's infrastructure with mill closures. The oldest family-owned mill in the State is now becoming desperate as Flathead National Forest management comes to a halt.

On the 29% of the Flathead that is in the timber base, a 1994 inventory showed annual growth of 138 mmbf and annual mortality of 53 mmbf. The primary manager of the forest has been appeals and, most recently, the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, which agreed that timber harvest levels would harm the grizzly. The Flathead National Forest developed Amendment 19 that reduced timber harvest to 54 mmbf and added road density standards for grizzly bear security that have resulted in hundreds of miles of forest road destruction.

Unfortunately bears cannot eat security. It seems that implementation of Amendment 19 had lead to an increase in human-bear incidents as bears have come down to a school yard, many homes and even subdivisions, in search of dog food, bird seed and garbage. Their preferred fall food, sun-loving huckleberries, are being crowded out by dense forests. Researchers are concerned that "lack of efforts to manage wild stands for huckleberries and decreasing use of clearcuts will reduce the available habitat for this valuable plant." As roads are closed, fire will become the major or forest manager. But their shallow rhizomes and weak root systems are easily injured by even moderate fire.

Dr. Victor Kaczynski, a limnologist who has been working for several years on salmon recovery for Pacific Northwest rivers, said "No single forest practice - not timber harvesting, not road building - can compare with the damage wildfires are inflicting on fish and fish habitat. It is a paradox that the very fish we are trying to protect from extinction are now being threatened by fires many so-called environmentalists believe should be allowed to bum unchecked."

Sustainability has become the buzz word for just about everything, including forestry. At the turn of the century, the forests certainly could not have sustained the population or the demand and need for wood. Today the U.S. has four times the population, living at a much higher standard of living than it did one hundred years ago. It is important to realize that the forests that everyone wants to save are here because they have been managed, and that no forest can be preserved in exactly the same condition over time.

I have been involved in the collaborative process called Flathead Common Ground and am now

participating in Senator Baucus's stewardship meetings. It's a process born of grant writers and "paid volunteers." It is lengthy and time-consuming, and given the current state of health of our national forests, it may be too little, too late. Flathead Common Ground met twice monthly for more than a year, but we came to the table with a lot to lose and little gain because the objective was to implement Amendment 19. From our recommendations, the Forest Service is proposing to use vegetation treatments on less than 800 acres, prescribe burn 8600 acres, and then obliterate 119 miles of roads to meet the objectives of Amendment 19 for grizzly bear security. For the timber industry, it was as though we were writing our plan for going out of business.

Laws governing our forest management are so many, in conflict with each other, with so many regulations, with one-size-fits-all dictates that defy common sense, it has become impossible to manage our forests while caring for the land and the people, and not end up in the courts. Perhaps nothing better illustrates this than Vice-President Gore facilitating the salvage of 270 mmbf of blown-down timber in Texas by completely bypassing the NEPA process because of the need for "common sense over strict regulation." There is a very serious bark beetle infestation in northern Idaho. Home owners along lakeshore property are supportive of logging to reduce the danger of wildfire to their property. Yet an environmental group out of Spokane has issued their intent to sue.

There might be some solutions. First, there needs to be a recognition of the forest health crisis. The Forest Service seems to have acknowledged the situation with their maps of the forest health situation across the United States. Now they need to commit to the common-sense action on the ground that is needed to resolve the situation. In this regard, there should be absolutely no more land acquisitions from any source of funding until the federal agencies again become responsible land managers. Just as the Forest Service has implemented the road moratorium, there needs to be an end to the destruction of our forest road system, the necessary infrastructure for addressing the situation on our forests.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before this committee.

###