

Legislative Hearing
H.R. 5263: The Forest Landscape Restoration Act.
Oral Testimony

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity today. My name is Rob Davis, I own Forest Energy Corporation which has been refining wood into pellet fuel since 1992 and am a partner in Future Forest the contractor on the White Mountain Stewardship Contract in Arizona.

We all know that the forests in the US are in poor condition and we need to do something about them. Although we are treating thousands of acres annually, we are barely making a dent in restoring the forests. Our forests are a valuable resource that can provide innumerable benefits. We are wasting the opportunity in most cases to obtain those benefits. Products, that can be processed from the materials that need to be removed from our forests are just one component and perhaps a more minor component of where we can derive benefit. A vibrant, living forest with great biodiversity offers benefit to the areas in and around that forest as well. Wildlife, clean watersheds, clean air, climate change, jobs, and renewable energy all benefit from healthy forests. In addition, their beauty and recreational value offer nourishment for a society. Not all are direct economic benefits, but they benefit our entire society. And we are wasting this resource.

The FLRA is a significant step toward the resolution of these problems and it will be successful because it is not starting from scratch. It's funding and implementation will encourage a process that is already underway. Dozens of collaborative groups exist across the country finding solutions, agreeable solutions, science based solutions to these forest problems. The collaboration surrounding the White Mountain Stewardship Contract in AZ, the Front Range Fuels Treatment Roundtable and the Bark Beetle Collaborative in Colorado and various similar processes occurring from New Mexico to Washington state to the east coast are examples. But "new" funding and a commitment to long-term implementation from the federal government is necessary.

Science is not black and white. Not often is there total agreement by scientists on forest ecosystems and how to manage them. And all aspects of forests and our interactions with those forests must be considered in a management plan, so the necessary flexible, adaptive, partnership, the collaboration between all parties will arrive at the Zones of Agreement and the action to be taken.

Forests and energy are linked. Forest materials are renewable, but they are also finite so they must be used in the most prudent, efficient, economical manner. We are frustrated by subsidies that encourage development of wood dependent industry that can't pay the cost of wood from forest restoration projects and don't appear to ever be capable of reaching that milestone, when *our* goal is to reduce the cost of restoration to zero.. Efficient energy policy will assist in cost effective forest management.

But it works

In the early summer of '07, the Vincent fire broke out on the west edge of the Apache Sitgreaves NF. It was a windy day and the fire quickly became a crown fire and began to run. In it's path was a ranch / resort development. The fire crews responded quickly, but could only chase the fire and stay out of it's way. Luckily, between the fire and the ranch was Dutch Joe B. A 900

Acre Task Order that had previously been treated under the WMSC. When the fire reached the restored forest in the task order, it dropped to the ground and was contained. It worked. Restoration treatments work. We were lucky. The wind direction just happened to push the fire into a small restored area. If we are to be truly successful, that restoration needs to occur over a large landscape so that it is always a safe, controllable fire.

Another success from the WMSC is measuring the work actually performed rather than the area treated. Priority acres are treated and it is paid by the ton rather than by the acre. An acre can have 3 trees that need to be removed or it can have 1,000 trees that must be removed. Tons are a much better measure of that work.

Another example of the results of collaboration is the Northern AZ Wood Supply Analysis. Over the past year, that process, including all stakeholders, arrived at consensus on what needs to be treated and how to treat 67% of the 2.4 million acres in the analysis area, from WUI to Wildland. A consensus was reached on the volumes of materials available from those treatments, 850 million cubic feet of logs and 8 million tons of biomass. This is a major milestone. More businesses and larger investments are now considering “appropriately sized” developments based on this available resource.

But will the USFS have the staff to perform the NEPA, will they have the staff to lay out the task orders, will they have the money to do the work on the ground???. Will they be engaging in this effort to prevent future, uncontrollable fires, or will they only be putting out today’s fires?

We are seeing collaboration and restoration efforts being successful, they do provide benefit, but the FLRA must happen to provide that boost to get us to the landscape levels that are necessary. Thank you again for this opportunity.

In summary the major points are:

- The collaboration exists and is growing stronger in our forest communities. Consensus on actions necessary to restore our forests and forest communities is growing. This must be nourished.
- Commitment from all parties and funding is lacking.
- Funding, separate “new” land management funding, is needed. Funding for preparation by agencies such as NEPA and treatment marking, funding for on the ground restoration, the flexibility to move the excess funds from one task order or NEPA area to another and a resolution to the annual funding of all cancellation clauses is needed. .
- Accept that prudent lasting, solutions take time. There are no grand slams, but community based businesses and uses that all contribute to a lasting solution.
- Viable, appropriately sized, sustainable (w/o subsidy) solutions are required. Not just uses, but prudent uses, the most prudent uses for our valuable resource. Providing the maximum benefits from our forests that often aren’t measured in dollars alone.
- Flexible – Adaptive – Partnerships between all parties must be formed.
- Measure work, not land. Tons moved on priority acres should be the measure, not just acres.