

SUSTAINING NATURAL RESOURCES AND COMMUNITIES

U.S. Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

Production and use of natural resources has been the cornerstone of rural culture, custom, and economies in the Pacific Northwest for centuries. From the late 1800's until the mid-1970's, laws that were enacted by Congress supported natural resource production and use and further recognized the importance of the industries to the local, regional and national economies. With the advent of the 1970's and through the next several decades brought about an awareness of and need for addressing environmental issues together with natural resource production and use. Unfortunately, the last decade of the 20th century will be forever marked with the extremes of production and use versus environmental protection, neither one being compatible with the other. It is these extremes, coupled together with regulatory gridlock, that have caused significant declines in the health and vigor of our forests and great hardship, degradation and loss within our rural communities. As we begin the 21st century, I believe we have many opportunities and challenges before us as we seek to sustain our natural resources and our rural communities. It will be increasingly difficult to address forest health and environmental issues without our rural communities for the ability to use and process natural resource products lies within them.

I cannot emphasize how crucial the sustenance of these rural communities are if we expect to address broad forest health and environmental issues. Let me digress for a moment. This symposium's goal is to address the management, manufacturing, and marketing of the small diameter timber that is pervasive throughout our region's forests. The lack of management, fire suppression, and extreme wildfires to name a few have created a majority of the over-stocked, stagnated stands we see today. How should it be managed? There are those who espouse the use of prescribed fire to attain a healthy forest. Yet, others espouse a "do nothing" leave it to mother-nature approach. So how do we get to a place where prescribed fire treatments won't create stand-replacing conflagrations that have such a huge environmental and finance price tag? How successful would hazardous fuel reduction programs be without our region's ability to process and use the material? With historically high levels of forest floor fuels, we've seen that it's certainly not an option to leave the cut material on the forest floor.

I represent many such forested rural communities in the northeastern portion of the Fifth Congressional District. Communities such as Newport, Ione, Metaline, Colville, Chewelah, Hunters, Republic, and Curlew have historically relied upon natural resources for base industries. These communities are between 40 and 120 miles away from Spokane, the nearest urban center. 60-85% of the land base in Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens counties is federally owned. While counties do receive payments in lieu of taxes and revenues from the federal government as compensation for the loss of taxable land, those payments

fall considerably short of the revenue private land ownership generates. While secondary industries, such as recreation and the service sector, have helped supplant the loss of production and use of natural resources off of our federal lands, these jobs are usually much lower paying and produce a much lower multiplier effect of each dollar that is used in the communities. While these secondary industries seem to hold their own, they will not be able to sustain themselves in these communities without base natural resource industries. Frankly, the virtual shut down of the Colville National Forest's 1.1 million acre land base over the last decade has had an enormous impact on my communities. Had it not been for the private forested landowners throughout the Western United States actively managing their own forests, the resource infrastructure that is such a crucial tool for management, would cease to exist today.

Forested landowners, both public and private, have incredible opportunities today to manage and utilize these small diameter timbered landscapes and provide sustainability to our rural communities. The compilation of extensive studies by federal agencies, academia, and the private sector on fuels and wildlife management, soils, silviculture, harvesting techniques, and the economic and social considerations of managing these stands have created a wealth of information. Many mills have tooled themselves in order to utilize this small diameter material. Niche markets have been created as well. Frankly, it wasn't that long ago that there was little removal of small diameter trees because of the cost involved and the inability to process such small material. This symposium is a testament to the desire, ability and opportunity to manage these small diameter stands. I stand here with you today as a partner committed not only in supporting federal land agencies, their active management goals and on-the-ground activities, but also seeking productivity and accountability from the same. I have been proud to work with the Forest Service, its research arm, academia, and the private sector in creating pilot opportunities on the Colville National Forest from which some of the information you will be presented during this symposium came from. I will continue to support such projects as long as efforts result in meaningful information and on-the-ground activities. We now have a President who I believe will also be supportive of such endeavors.

With opportunities, however, come the challenges that have plagued federal land management today. Law and regulations that were developed over the last 25 years, albeit with the best of intentions to protect the environment and provide for resource sustainability, cumulatively have created incessant confusion and complexity. Excessive appeals, litigation and the court's interpretation of these laws have further constricted the ability of land managers to do what's needed on the landscape. Our industries continue to be reactive to public opinion instead of driving the public opinion. The majority of the public continues to be in-

20 Nethercutt

formed by those with a "conflict driven" agenda that is based upon the "sky is continually falling" and man's interaction with nature is a detriment. These groups rely upon the fact that most people continue to be so far removed from where wood, minerals and food products come from and the necessity of providing for ourselves as a matter of national security. Gridlock will continue absent meaningful and systematic changes in the approach and integration of science, public policy, public involvement and education.

I am greatly encouraged by the Bush Administration's commitment to bring about changes in federal natural resource and environmental policies, bring decision-making flexibility back to local line officers and end gridlock over several federally mandated resource plans affecting timber and other natural resource industries. I am pleased that a thorough review of the appeal sections of the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and others is underway and that agency recommendations are being sought to determine how to end the use of the appeal process as a tool in shutting down natural resource industries and disrupting rural economies.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth is acting on his commitment to reviewing his agency's own processes in order that the Forest Service can reduce the time and expense it now takes to get work done. He has tasked his agency and others to evaluate the inner-relationship of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act (MUSYA), the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Clean Air Act (CAA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and these laws' respective implementing regulations. On-the-ground case examples are being investigated in order to get a qualitative sense of the issues the agency has to deal with in carrying out project planning in today's regulatory environment. Further, Chief Bosworth has directed an analysis and graphic layout of the process steps required to carry out the legal and administrative requirements in planning for a timber sale. Most importantly, he has espoused his commitment to Congress to carry out necessary revision that he believes, in part, can be done within existing laws.

Untangling the laws and regulations in national forest management is a top priority for the House Forest and Forest Health Subcommittee in 2002. The subcommittee's first oversight hearing held in December was to address the conflicting laws and regulations that are creating gridlock in the management of our National Forests. I believe that the information and ideas garnered during that hearing will assist Congress, the Bush Administration and land managing agencies as we begin to deal with the numerous unintended negative effects that existing laws and regulations have had on the management mission of the United States Forest Service.

The Bush Administration is going to need all of your support, guidance and patience as his cabinet undertakes the daunting task of bringing natural resource management, protection of the environment and the sustenance of rural communities into balance. It is crucial that you continue to bring alternative solutions to the public that demonstrate that seeking balance and getting rid of duplicative

processes need not be at the expense of the environment. Aggressively network with like-minded groups across the nation so all of you can bring a united voice to others in Congress and to the Administration on forest management. Continue to write letters to the editor and editorial columns that provide the public with additional information, especially when resource issue articles are less than balanced. Lastly, and most importantly, all of us need to continue to look for ways to connect people back to the resource.

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