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– Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, August 1, 2011



Federal Forest Resource Coalition

Now or Never: Growing the Rural Economy and Protecting Forests While Reducing Costs: Investing in Federal Forest Management is a win-win

Extreme forest health problems plague the National Forest System

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manage over 190 million acres of forest lands. By some estimates, more than 73 million acres of Forest Service lands and hundreds of millions of acres of other Federal lands are at increased risk of catastrophic wildfire¹. Even in landscapes where fires are infrequent, fuel loads and mortality are well outside of historic norms.

These overstocked, unhealthy forests lead directly to large scale forest mortality and increased occurrence of catastrophic wildfires. This year alone, more than 7.7 million acres have burned, including 1.2 million acres on Forest Service lands in Arizona and New Mexico alone². These fires have cost the Forest Service more than \$1.3 billion in suppression costs.

Poor Forest Health and Large Fires Hurt Tourism and Forest Based Recreation:

The large fires in Arizona and New Mexico this year forced the closures of popular campgrounds, destroyed dozens of recreational cabins, and forced cancellations of Fourth of July events at popular mountain resorts. A large scale beetle infestation in the Black Hills has forced local campground owners to spend more than \$100,000 annually to remove beetle killed trees and spray others in an effort to stop beetles from spreading off of the National Forests. The Pagami Creek fire in Minnesota has disrupted popular hiking and canoeing areas in an around the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Campers, hikers, hunters, and skiers all want to visit healthy, green, and growing forests.

¹ <http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/policy-analysis/fire-and-fuels-position-paper.pdf>

² <http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/sitreprt.pdf>

The Forest Service continues to treat too few acres, using too much prescribed fire, foregoing treatments that are more cost effective and produce more jobs:

With a few notable exceptions, the Forest Service continues to propose projects that are not significant enough to meaningfully reduce wildfire danger on a landscape level. Of the 73 million acres at significant risk, the Forest Service has only implemented mechanical treatments on 6.8 million acres since 2001, or less than 10% of the acres at risk. Further, by the Forest Service's own accounting, only 25% of projects produce any usable wood fiber.³

This is in spite of the fact that the Forest Service has substantial research which demonstrates that fuels reduction projects which produces usable wood fiber improve forest health, reduce fire danger, and stimulate the economy. On the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas, aggressive use of commercial harvest has led to successful forest restoration and led to more than doubling the population of the Red Cockaded Woodpecker. Researchers on this project noted that "(t)he ability to sell valuable wood products is at the very heart of restoration efforts"⁴. Studies in the Western U.S. show that fuels treatments which produce larger diameter trees could economically treat more than twice (18.0 million acres vs. 7.2 million acres) as many acres as thinnings which produce only lower value materials⁵. Chief Tom Tidwell noted this summer that these studies prove that "(t)hinning dense forests reduces the impacts of the catastrophic wildfires we've already seen this year and expect to see more and more of in the future. This work helps protect communities, provides jobs and promotes overall better forest health."⁶

Further, the Forest Service estimates that for every million board feet of timber produced, the National Forests help create more than 16 jobs. These are year round, high paying jobs in rural communities that suffer from some of the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the nation⁷.

Invest Now to Save Jobs, Preserve Forest Products Infrastructure, and Avoid Future Fire Costs:

We need to invest more resources up front to keep our forests green and healthy rather than wait until they are dead and dying, or on fire. Substantial increases in National Forest Timber Management, Hazardous Fuels Reduction, and other line items which can support large, landscape scale projects that reduce fuel loads, produce merchantable wood, can help avoid future fire suppression costs and reduce unemployment, thereby lowering Federal social program costs, such as welfare, unemployment, and food stamps. Moving from the current harvest level of 2.1 billion board feet to 3 billion board feet could produce some 14,400 direct jobs, with thousands of additional indirect jobs.

³<http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/resources/reports/documents/healthyforests/2009/FY2009HFAccomplishments.pdf>

⁴ Larry D. Hedrick et. al., "*SHORTLEAF PINE-BLUESTEM RESTORATION IN THE OUACHITA NATIONAL FOREST*", Forest Service General Technical Paper 15. http://nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr_p-15%20papers/40hedrick-p-15.pdf

⁵ Kenneth Skog et. al., *Woody Biomass Supply from thinnings to reduce fire hazard in the U.S. West and its potential impact on regional wood markets*, Forest Service publication number 7223, 2008.

⁶ <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/2011/releases/08/thinning.shtml>, Referencing Morris C. Johnson et. al, *Simulating fuel treatment effects in dry forests of the western United States*, Canadian Journal of Forest Research, Vol. 41 pp. 1018 – 1030.

⁷ <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/povertyrates/>

Reduce Overhead and Project Preparation Costs to Ensure that Funding Leads to Meaningful Management.

In addition to increased funding, the Forest Service must reduce overhead and project preparation costs in the land management programs, particular forest products, hazardous fuels reduction, and salvage sale funds. Current overhead rates are over 50%, and in some regions, 70% of appropriated dollars go into NEPA compliance, not project design and implementation.

Specific approaches currently available to the Forest Service and the Administration that would reduce costs include:

- 1) increase use of Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) Title I authorities to reduce hazardous fuels on forested acres;
- 2) expand the use of the HFRA administrative review process;
- 3) reduce project preparation costs (e.g. – greater use of designation by description and designation by prescription in lieu of marking);
- 4) achieve economies of scale by conducting project planning and NEPA analysis at much larger scales; and
- 5) declare an emergency on forest lands in Condition Class II and III, allowing the use of alternative arrangements for NEPA compliance.

*The **Federal Forest Resource Coalition** is a unique national coalition of small and large companies and regional trade associations whose members manufacture wood products, paper, and renewable energy from Federal timber resources. With members in more than two dozen states, the Coalition is building a national voice for sound management of our Federal forests. Coalition members employ over 350,000 workers in over 650 mills, with payroll in excess of \$19 billion. The Coalition will work with allied industry, conservation, and local government groups to support a growing and sustainable Federal timber program. For more information contact Bill Imbergamo, FFRC Executive Director, at 202-518-6380.*