

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Jim Crouch. I am the owner of Jim Crouch and Associates, a small forestry consulting business in Russellville, AR. We are involved primarily with wood supply problems associated with the national forests. I have owned and operated this business for 17 years. Prior to 1987, I was a career U.S. Forest Service employee for more than 26 years including eight years as the Forest Supervisor of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests in Arkansas. So I understand both the agency and forest industry.

My testimony today is on behalf of the Ouachita Timber Purchasers Group, the Ozark-St. Francis Renewable Resource Council, and the Lake States Federal Timber Purchasers Committee. These groups are comprised of a broad array of forest product companies that buy and process wood from the national forests into many different products for use by people worldwide. They range in size from "mom and pop" operations with a handful of employees to vast far flung multi-national companies with thousands of employees worldwide.

The folks that I represent have a direct interest in the management of American forestlands, both public and private. Their mills depend on these forests for their feed stock. They support local communities and the social and economic benefits that accrue from using the wood fiber that comes from improving forest health. They also strongly support the important environmental values - clean air, clean water, and quality wildlife/fish habitat - that are associated with healthy forests.

Today, I will testify in support of FERRA. I will talk about the condition of our national forest lands and the need for the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act (FERRA) with limited references to BLM and state and private lands. I'll also suggest several minor changes to the bill.

### Current Forest Crisis

Today, national forest managers are faced with almost insurmountable challenges from unhealthy forests, catastrophic events, a hostile stakeholder minority that opposes active forest management, and budgets that are woefully inadequate for implementing newly revised forest plans. However, there are many good, dedicated, hard working, and highly skilled managers and specialists at all levels of the agency who know how to restore forest health and increase productivity. They are terribly frustrated. They need your support and guidance.

The catastrophic events that we see unfolding on the evening news programs are merely symptoms of deeper, underlying problems in the forests. Management of national forest lands in recent years has been limited, custodial at best. Less than half of the work specified in the first generation of forest plans was accomplished by the Forest Service. Many would argue that the national forests are no longer sustainable. The forests are severely overstocked, are approaching biological maturity, and are highly stressed during periods of prolonged drought making them highly susceptible to stand replacing insect and disease attacks and fire. Mortality far exceeds growth or harvest. There is ample evidence that well-designed forest management prescriptions if applied can reduce the risk and keep our national forests healthy. These prescriptions include the removal of trees of all sizes and the regeneration of over mature

stands. The cost of active management is much less than the enormous cost involved in suppression of catastrophic events and the follow up restoration work. The folks that I represent strongly believe that active management based on sound science and implemented through local decision making is critical if the national forests are to become healthy again.

Since 1905, we as a Nation have spent billions of taxpayer dollars to purchase cutover and abused forest and agricultural lands (the lands nobody wanted), to reforest them, and to nurture the young trees into today's pristine national forests of the South and the Lake States. We must not allow insects and disease or wildfire to harvest them. I strongly urge you and the agencies involved to make active management including thinning and regeneration harvests the top priority for these lands.

Let me share with you an example of what is already happening in our national forests. The red oak borer, a one-inch long beetle, has destroyed more than \$1 billion worth of red oak in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas and Missouri since 1999. Red oak borers have killed 50 million trees on 300,000 acres in the Ozark National Forest alone. Nature rather than man is now harvesting these over mature, overstocked hardwood stands. Prior to 1999, these forests supported many species of fauna and flora including rare and endangered ones, helped support strong regional forest based economies, and contributed too many other important forest values. Today, these acres are covered with thousands and thousands of tons of dead heavy fuels and snags along with a rapidly changing ecosystem with a different set of fauna and flora. Gone are the magnificent oak forests that provided an abundance of oak lumber, crossties, and pallets along with huge acorn crops that fed large populations of bear, deer, turkey, and squirrel. The heavy fuels will remain for many years to feed the catastrophic fires of tomorrow! This is not just a problem in the Ozarks it is a problem in almost every State that contains federal forests.

## ECONOMIC IMPACTS

There are economic consequences in addition to the cultural and environmental impacts from agency decisions. As the health of the national forests has declined and timber programs collapsed, forest dependent communities and industries have suffered. According to the Pulp and Paper Resource Council's 2003 statistics 77 mills in the three Lake States (MN, WI, and MI) have closed or made major adjustments adversely affecting employees and the regional economies. In Missouri 11 mills were impacted and in Arkansas 15.

### Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act

Congress and the Administration have worked hard to reduce the impacts from catastrophic events and to improve forest health in our nation's forests. Congress passed the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and the Administration rolled out the Healthy Forest Initiative. The Forest Service revised many of its national forest plans using citizen input and collaboration. Major user groups and opinion leaders generally support these efforts, but a handful of radical groups and individuals who oppose active management continue to appeal and litigate agency decisions. The appeals and litigation are particularly damaging to agency restoration efforts following catastrophic events because of the time factor. FERRA is a critical tool that makes

possible timely decisions and implementation of recovery plans. The folks I represent support this legislation because it allows the agencies to do what is right for the land. Sadly since 2003 when the HFRA bill was signed into law the federal agencies have only accomplished a little over 77,000 acres of this critically important work. That is less than 1% of the 20 million acre authorization that Congress envisioned be accomplished.

Following a catastrophic event, if an agency decision calls for removal of damaged timber as a part of the restoration work, the decision is usually appealed and litigated, and the timber loses its commercial value before the Forest Service can do the paperwork and work through the legal process. The window of opportunity for harvesting usable wood from catastrophic events varies by species and regions of the country. For example, in the South where I live, we have at most a few months to harvest damaged southern pine timber before it becomes blue stained, riddled by insects, and commercially worthless. The situation is similar in the Lake States and the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota although in parts of the west, damaged timber may remain useable for longer periods of time.

The Forest Service spends enormous amounts of money in an effort to "bullet proof" NEPA documents and to defend decisions against appeals and litigation. More than half of the current cost of a timber sale goes for these purposes. A renewable resource - wood is wasted and in the end millions of taxpayer dollars and agency time produces few tangible results. I am very concerned about this lack of results and the waste of tax payer dollars. FERRA will reduce the costs significantly in the areas of NEPA documents, appeals, and litigation. Additional funding may be needed to implement the recovery plans. Restoration of ecosystems damaged by large fires, hurricanes, and insect outbreaks require huge investments.

As an example of what is happening without FERRA - the Missionary Ridge Fire in southwestern Colorado burned about 70,000 acres. The Forest Service spent a year and thousands of dollars completing an EIS to salvage 3% of the burned area. They were stopped in court over procedural questions about surveys for Abert squirrel populations. The Abert Squirrel is a game species that is routinely harvested by hunters in Colorado. Due to the length of time required to prepare the "bullet proof" EIS and the delay caused by appeals and litigation, the timber became worthless and the project was abandoned. The remaining snags and downed timber will provide heavy fuels for many years for catastrophic wildfires in the area.

I have several suggestions that I believe can make FERRA even more effective.

The requirement in Sec. 101 requiring the development of peer reviewed research protocols "For the purpose of conducting ... a catastrophic event recovery project and emergency stabilization treatments" seems to me overkill. While we support the use of effectiveness monitoring and adaptive management to refine processes, Congress must not underestimate the experience and knowledge that the agency has acquired in the last 100 years. After all these are the men and women that restored the "lands nobody wanted" to the point that groups hammer on your doors asking you to designate "old cotton fields" as virgin wilderness.

In Sec. 3, the definition used for the term "Burned Area Emergency Response" seems to contradict the "Burned" portion in the term. The definition reads - "The term "burned area

emergency response" means the process .....used to plan.....actions.....in response to a catastrophic event (emphasis added)." Paragraph (2) defines "The term "catastrophic event" as any natural disaster or any fire, flood, explosion ..." We suggest dropping the word "Burned" and using the term "Area Emergency Response."

Sec. 104 requires the Secretary to make available a list of peer reviewed management standards that may be immediately implemented as a part of a catastrophic event recovery plan. Recently revised forest plans include a comprehensive list of standards (management practices) that are applied to certain lands under certain conditions. Since this list was subjected to public comment, the appeal process, and litigation, I suggest that it be used as a starting point for developing the necessary management standards. This approach would save considerable time and scarce dollars. As the forest plans are revised or updated, these standards can be modified or added to as needed

In the Lake States and the South where private, state, and national forest lands are intermingled, it makes good sense for the Forest Service, communities, and the State Forester to cooperatively develop landscape assessments and to work together on recovery projects and restoration as provided for in Title II of FERRA. This again saves scarce resources and helps keep everyone involved on the same page.

## CONCLUSIONS

In closing, on behalf of the folks that I represent, I again thank you and your colleagues for your fine work on the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act. We urge you to pass it with the suggested modifications as soon as possible.

If you would include both my written and oral testimony in the record of this hearing I would very much appreciate it and I'll be glad to answer your questions.