

The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry meets today to markup H.R. 1904, "The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003." This legislation passed in the other body in May by a bipartisan vote. In the past few weeks, staff of members of the Committee have met and developed a number of changes to the House-passed bill. These agreements have been embodied in a substitute amendment, which I will offer at the appropriate time.

In addition, it is my understanding that agreement has been reached to defer substantial amendment on many of the more controversial aspects of the bill until this bill is debated by the full Senate. . It is my hope and expectation that staff continue to work on these differences during the coming weeks with expectation that additional resolutions can be achieved before the legislation is debated on the floor.

The substitute offered today is a comprehensive approach to improve forest health for both public and private lands. The bill would provide federal land managers with the tools to implement scientifically supported management practices on federal forests, while establishing new conservation programs focused on improving water quality and regenerating declining forest ecosystem types on private lands.

This legislation would reduce the multi-year time and taxpayer costs it takes to complete forest management projects. However, forest management and fuel reduction projects would still be subject to rigorous environmental analysis as well as to administrative challenges and lawsuits under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

The legislation contains a biomass title that would establish grant programs to encourage energy-related utilization of the otherwise valueless material. This title has been expanded to promote research and development to enhance this utilization.

The Watershed Forestry title would provide financial and technical support needed by private forest landowners to better manage their lands in order to protect water quality. The title has been expanded to include a separate section establishing a parallel program for Indian tribes.

The Pest and Remote Sensing titles would authorize funding for the United States Forest Service, land grant institutions, and 1890 institutions to plan, conduct, and promote systematic information gathering on insects that have caused large-scale damage to forest ecosystems

Title V, the Healthy Forests Reserve Program, is a private forestland conservation initiative that would support the restoration of declining forest ecosystem types that are critical to the recovery of threatened, endangered and other sensitive species.

It is important to note that two additional titles have been added to the bill. Title VI would establish a Public Land Corps to provide opportunities to young people for employment and, at the same time, provide a cost-effective and efficient means to implement rehabilitation and enhancement projects in local communities.

Title VII establishes new means to assist in the economic revitalization of forest-resource-

dependent communities through incentives to promote investment in private enterprise.

Hundreds of communities across the nation are in dire need of the assistance and thousands of firefighters are put at risk under the current forest health situation. They are watching our progress closely in hopes that the Senate will pass this legislation and fulfill its commitment to protecting and restoring our nation's forests against the ravages of fire, disease, and insects.

I thank the members of the Committee for their hard work thus far on this legislation and look forward to continuing to work together.