

Good morning, Senator Crapo and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Sue Kupillas and I am Executive Director for a non-profit organization, Communities for Healthy Forests (CHF), based in Roseburg, Oregon. Communities for Healthy Forests mission is: "To realize the prompt restoration and recovery of the conifer forest in the aftermath of fire and other catastrophic events ensuring the presence and vitality of forest lands for future generations."

CHF is an organization of community members, liberal and conservative, republican and democrat, large and small business, including a farmer and school board member, a local judge, the Cow Creek Tribes, Unions and many organizations, who have come together around the common interest of a need to restore forests that have been devastated by catastrophic events. CHF is funded by local business, Unions, the Cow Creek Tribes, and Secure Rural Schools Title III funds.

CHF was founded because this group of community leaders recognized there are serious impediments to restoring forests in a timely manner, causing the number of damaged forest acres to grow annually. Communities for Healthy Forests is proud to support the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act (FERRA) because the key principle underlying FERRA is the need to move quickly to restore forests, key watersheds and wildlife habitats. Under current federal law, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management face an almost insurmountable amount of analysis, red tape, and bureaucratic steps following a catastrophic event. Unfortunately, some opportunistic groups use this important environmental review process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as an avenue to delay projects through appeals and litigation until we are beyond the point of realistic and cost-effective rehabilitation and reforestation. Delay achieves their objective of no management, even if all their lawsuits are ultimately dismissed. This analysis paralysis is actually harming our ability to protect and restore our National Forests.

While federal forests suffer crippling delay in their process, tribal, state, and private forest land managers move forward with recovery and reforestation projects much sooner following these events. One recent example from Washington State is the School Fire, which was caused by a downed power line. It burned 52,000 acres on Federal (Forest Service), State, and Private land in Eastern Washington this past August. 27,000 acres of the fire area was managed by the Forest Service, 12,000 acres were managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) inside the William T. Wooten Wildlife Area, and 1,000 acres was managed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources. As we approach the one-year anniversary of the start of the School Fire, the Forest Service continues to slog through environmental review and never-ending NEPA analysis, while the state agencies are well underway with recovery and rehabilitation activities. Of the total acres managed by the State agencies, approximately 3,500 were forested and operations are almost complete to recover and reforest 2,700 acres (77% of total state managed forested area).

On November 14th, 2005, approximately 3 months after the start of the School Fire (August 5th, 2005), WDFW held a public auction for the harvest operations. The state required 100% helicopter logging and still received \$91/ thousand board feet for the resource. Since then, over 20 million board feet has been salvaged, which is expected to generate over \$2.6 million for

important forest restoration activities and the state school trust fund. With initial proceeds from the recovery activities, over 16,000 seedlings were already planted on state lands this spring. State managers plan to undertake the replanting of 375,000 conifer seedlings, 225,000 wildlife browse species, and other restoration projects for fish and wildlife habitat and facilities improvements, including the replacement of elk fencing lost in the fire. WDFW works within a State Environmental Policy Act very similar to NEPA and is well on the way to restoring this Wildlife area. Meanwhile, the dead and dying timber on federal land is rotting with no chance to provide jobs or return value to underwrite the costs of restoring the federal lands.

One of the best examples of successful forest restoration can be found in my home state of Oregon. Beginning in 1933, a series of four catastrophic wildfires burned over 350,000 acres of forest land in northwestern Oregon. This huge expanse became popularly known as the Tillamook Burn. The people of the State of Oregon approved a measure to initiate a massive restoration effort to recover economic value from the burned timber, protect watersheds from erosion, and reforest the barren landscape by seeding and planting young seedlings. As a result of these efforts, on July 18, 1973, what was formerly known as the Tillamook Burn became the Tillamook State Forest.

Since then, the forest has returned over \$2 billion in the form of revenue for county governments and needed rural jobs through forest management activities. Most importantly, the forests now provide immeasurable benefits in terms of fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, and open spaces for the enjoyment of all Oregonians. Today's vibrant Tillamook Forest is a testament to the benefits of taking swift action to successfully restore and rehabilitate a forest ravaged by catastrophic wildfire. The values this forest provides are now cherished by many, so much so that environmental activists recently ran an unsuccessful ballot measure to restrict forest management activities on half the forest. Mr. Chairman, this is just one example, and there are many others included in my testimony, that serve as real world proof of the benefits of taking swift action following catastrophic events.

Unfortunately, the current management of our federal lands following these events is anything but wise. A majority of these devastated federal forests, key watersheds, and critical wildlife habitat are being left to recover on their own. In many cases, the burned trees will fall to the ground, thereby increasing the risk of more severe wildfires. Without restoration and replanting, forest re-growth may be permanently choked out by fields of brush, or take centuries to develop into forests that support the diversity of plant and wildlife that once called them home. The federal government has literally become paralyzed by never-ending environmental review, procedural hurdles, and special-interest appeals and litigation. In fact, a recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that over a million acres of federal land is in need of reforestation. In my State of Oregon, recent fires on federal lands have burned hundreds of thousands of acres. Names such as the Biscuit, the B&B, the Baked Apple, and Warner Creek have been seared into the public consciousness. Unfortunately, little or no restoration has occurred following these fires because of procedural gridlock. It is clear that our Federal land managers need new tools to recover and restore our forests in a timely manner and FERRA provides those tools.

The need for legislation hits close to home for me, Mr. Chairman. Right in my back yard, is the

2002 Biscuit Fire which burned 499,965 acres. While approximately 178,000 acres are Congressionally withdrawn as Wilderness and not appropriate for recovery, almost 322,000 acres were in need of restoration activities. Of this amount, 312,000 acres remain untreated today due to the effects of delays, appeals, and litigation. Mr. Chairman, after almost four years, less than 10,000 acres has seen any level of reforestation, which is less than 3% of the total Biscuit Fire area. Federal courts have ultimately dismissed all lawsuits on the Biscuit, however, after almost four years, much of the value of dead trees is lost so there is little incentive or money to undertake further restoration activities. These posters are aerial shots of the Biscuit Fire from a helicopter trip I took last September. Just two weeks ago, coming back from a raft trip I drove through the Biscuit Fire area and it looks much the same. Dead standing trees for miles with some patches of green in the ravines the fire missed. I fear that this will be case for many decades, depriving our children and our children's children of the healthy green forest we once knew. (for further information visit USFS/Rogue-Siskiyou web site)

Our current federal laws and policies not only have negative environmental effects on the future of our forests, watersheds, and wildlife, but they are having a very real impact on the federal taxpayer. In many areas, the lack of inaction increases the risk of beetle infestation and wildfires, increasing future management and suppression costs to be borne by the federal taxpayer. This trend, along with our inability to treat federal forests before these catastrophic events, has led to spiraling wildfire suppression costs that have turned the Forest Service into a fire fighting agency. The inability of federal land managers to respond quickly to these events increases the costs of restoring our federal lands as well. For example, the 1994 Hull Mountain Fire in Jackson County, Oregon burned 8,700 acres. Private lands impacted by the fire were restored at a cost of \$400 per acre and now have 30 foot trees. On the other hand, BLM lands, which saw a significant delay in reforestation activities, cost over \$1,600 per acre to replant and is still dominated by brush. On the private lands, the value of the dead timber pays for the cost of reforestation many times over, while reforestation costs on federal lands were largely funded from the U.S. Treasury.

Another vivid picture can be witnessed at Mt. St. Helens, which I visited in June of this year, where private lands were restored and federal lands were not. Weyerhaeuser's private industrial land was salvaged and replanted following the 1980 eruption and harvesting and thinning of those trees is now taking place. I saw thirty and forty foot trees on the private land while the 110,00 acres of public land, now a National Monument, is still a moonscape with a few flowering bushes. The dead trees were left to rot and without seed trees, may never return to a forest condition.

The 28,000 acre Timbered Rock Fire site included 9,000 acres of private industrial forest land. The private lands were salvaged, replanted, and streams were restored. Healthy fish runs have returned to the streams. On the BLM lands, an injunction prevented harvest and restoration. Just four years later, you can see the contrast in stages of recovery. Again, the private lands will be a beautiful forest again, while federal lands become brush fields. Before a lawsuit stopped the project, the BLM recovery plan included a research component with six objectives, including evaluation of mixed-species reforestation, to identify and characterize temporal patterns of vegetation structural development and species diversity, to assess temporal dynamics of fuels loading and fire risk, and to determine impacts of snag retention on survival

and growth of planted trees.

Mr. Chairman, we have many practical examples of successful reforestation on private, state, and tribal lands to contrast with little or no reforestation on many of our federal lands. While we have practical experience in reforestation and some research, we still need further research to continue to improve our success with restoration. FERRA has a research component that will do just that by providing guaranteed funding for ongoing research and monitoring from the proceeds from harvesting this valuable resource. There are many examples of federal recovery projects in which research components were planned, such as the Timbered Rock Fire in Oregon, until litigation delayed the project beyond economic viability. This is truly unfortunate, Mr. Chairman.

The restoration of forests issue should not be controversial. Oregonians understand and support restoration, as shown by two polls completed in Oregon during 2005. Davis, Hibbits and Mighall, and The Nelson Report, both excellent, credible polling firms conducted two separate polls on the issue of forest restoration. The July Davis, Hibbits and Mighall poll commissioned by Communities for Healthy Forests, and the October Mark Nelson poll showed very similar results.

In the CHF poll, it was no surprise that Oregonians consider protecting water quality a top priority (99 %). But protecting forests from wildfire was also important (91%). 76% of Oregonians believe (or strongly believe) forest restoration should happen. In the poll, restoration included removing dead trees and replanting seedlings. (The October Nelson poll had the same results.) The poll showed that 74% of people think it takes too long to restore if left untouched. There was little support for leaving burned areas alone, in questions asked in various ways, and 76% of Oregonians believe federal rules should be reviewed to allow restoration activity to happen quickly. The concept of reforestation should not be controversial and isn't to the majority of the public. Unfortunately, a select opportunistic group of activists is bringing this common-sense policy to a standstill.

The bipartisan Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act, sponsored by Congressmen Greg Walden (R-OR) and Brian Baird (D-WA), is intended to give federal land managers the ability to react to catastrophic events affecting our forests. Whether it is wildfire, windstorms or insect and disease outbreaks, the legislation would require rapid assessment of ecological conditions, and promote quick action where appropriate, to assist in recovery. The legislation would generate more than enough funding to protect forests from further degradation and expedite procedures to speed reforestation efforts. While CHF supports FERRA and believes that it is a good piece of legislation, today's hearing in the Senate provides an opportunity to begin incorporating provisions from other legislative proposals that have been introduced in this body dealing with forest restoration.

The effect of a broken system, which prevents us from restoring our forests, is truly disturbing. Delay, is not a neutral choice but one that is causing serious long term damage to our environment and deterioration of millions of acres of our National Forests. In 2002, over 650,000 acres of forest land burned in the State of Oregon. Just as the emergency wasn't over after hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast, the emergency isn't over after the fires are extinguished. We badly need new tools to help our federal forest

managers to respond to these events.

Mr. Chairman, we are praying for cooler weather as we are experiencing triple digit days which places us in danger in another fire season. Douglas County, Oregon has experienced hundreds of lightning strikes in the last two weeks. Those of us who live in communities with burned forests, drive through or fly over miles and miles of burned areas far beyond restoration, are hoping something can be done to prevent this from happening again.

Time is of the essence to pass this much needed legislation. Large-scale catastrophic wildfires have become more common in recent years and are expected to continue until the health of our forests is restored. With approximately 190 million acres of federal land at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, restoration efforts will take many, many years. Rapid assessment of damage, quick action, and reforestation are needed following such events. This legislation will provide the tools to help our federal forest managers do just that and the proceeds from harvest activities will pay for reforestation activities and generate jobs in our local communities. .

I would like to thank Chairman Mike Crapo, and the members of the Subcommittee on Forestry, Conservation and Rural Revitalization for holding this important hearing on the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research act and this critical issue. I believe you have a unique opportunity to build upon FERRA by developing and passing bipartisan, common-sense legislation before the end of the 109th Congress. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and would be happy to answer any questions might have.