

Good morning. I am Jackie McAvoy, Councilmember of the City of Post Falls, Idaho and Board Member of the Idaho Women in Timber. Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for inviting me here today to testify on an issue that is critically important to me, to my fellow Idahoans, and to the people across this country who live in states with significant forest health and fire risk challenges. I am not a scientist or a forester, but I am an Idahoan who is concerned about the health of the forests within the boundaries of my state. In that capacity, I am honored to be here to express my full support for HR 1904, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Idaho, the beautiful state that I call home, is covered by over 22 million acres of forestland. Seventy-three percent of Idaho's timberlands are in the national forest system. Timber harvest activities in my state have declined eighty percent since 1990, resulting in extremely poor forest health conditions on many of Idaho's national forests. For example, national forests in Idaho are thirty-five percent more dense than other forest ownerships in the state. This increased density leads to increased competition for water, sunlight and nutrients making these forests more susceptible to insect and disease outbreaks and increased fire risk. Almost twice the number of trees die on national forests in Idaho than on other forest ownerships, and that buildup of dead trees increases the fuel load in the forest, and with it the potential for severe wildfire. And finally, lethal fire potential - or fires that kill whole forests - has tripled on federal lands in Idaho and Montana.

Today, the focus is on Arizona. Tomorrow we'll read about Spokane, WA, or Lake Tahoe, CA or Carson City, NV, or Idaho City, ID. The list is long. The challenge is huge. Lest we forget the 2002 fire season - almost seven million acres burned; 1,800 homes lost; \$1.97 billion to fight and 20 firefighters dead. Things must change, and they must change now.

Last month I was here in Washington, D.C., along with twenty-five members of Federated Women in Timber. We visited with legislators, federal agencies and others about forest-related issues that concern the rural forested communities in the eleven states that have Women in Timber groups. During our discussions, we raised the very serious insect infestation and fire risk problems that impact the health of our nation's forests. At every meeting we stressed our concern over the very real possibility that catastrophic fires would blaze across the nation before any legislation to speed the forest thinning work that must be done to reduce the threat of insect outbreaks and devastating wildfires could be adopted. That fear has become a reality as we watched the Aspen fire torch more than 11,000 acres and 250 homes near Tucson, Arizona. The severe insect and disease problems in Arizona's dense national forests have provided the perfect conditions for this year's first forest casualties - and yet another sad example of a forest management system that is horribly broken.

I brought with me today some Douglas-fir bark beetles and western pine beetles gathered from national forestland in my state.

These critters are responsible for destroying hundreds of thousands of acres of forestland in Idaho, as they have in other parts of the country - especially the southeast and southwest. I also have with me some bark samples that show the galleries made by these beetles. Beetles chew these galleries all the way around a tree cutting off the tree's ability to take in water and nutrients, which ultimately kills the tree.

An ice storm severely damaged trees on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest in northern Idaho in 1997 generating an explosion of the population of Douglas-fir bark beetles. Scientists say that the beetles are always in the woods but when trees become stressed, the beetles sense it and the population increases, killing thousands of the trees. I have a friend who is a log-scaler at a mill not far from my home. Last week I was talking to her about trees that had been brought to the mill last year -- beetle-killed trees that died in 2001. She told me the logs were so damaged by the beetles that only 50% of the logs were merchantable. She said that if the trees had been harvested sooner after the trees died, they would have been more valuable.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for making a recent trip to visit the pine-beetle infested forests near Elk City, Idaho. I have friends who live in that small community. They have been concerned for years about the health of the Nez Perce National Forest and the fire risk the beetle outbreak brings. Last year Idaho Women in Timber spent one full day touring the forest looking at the tremendous damage done by the western pine beetle. The forest was a sea of dead red trees. The folks who live in Elk City have only one way in and one way out of town. If a wildfire starts in their area, they know their lives are in danger as well as their homes and businesses. It's a fear they live with every day. They know action must be taken soon.

I recently became acquainted with folks who live in the southeastern part of the U.S. We have discussed HR 1904 at length. It is interesting to me that, though our forests are very different, we still have the same concerns regarding the need for forest management. These folks agree that this legislation will allow the Forest Service to address insect problems in a timely manner. They care about this issue. They know that without responsible management on federal lands surrounding private forestlands in the south, a private landowner's effort to maintain a healthy forest that provides habitat for wildlife may be for naught.

Catastrophic fires not only destroy wildlife habitat, watersheds, forest soils, and homes and property, they also create health problems for the communities near the fires. On a weekend last summer my daughter who lives in Wasilla, Alaska was with my grandson at a soccer tournament in Fairbanks. She told me about the officials having to suspend the games because the smoke from a nearby forest fire was so thick the kids couldn't breathe. After the smoke cleared somewhat they were able to continue the tournament but my grandson and his teammates suffered breathing problems for some time after they returned home. She also talked about what should have been a five-hour drive home from Fairbanks. Traffic was slowed and delayed so much because of the smoke from the fires covering the highway that it took several

hours longer than usual.

Last week I attended the annual meeting of the Association of Idaho Cities (AIC). During breaks there was talk about the fires burning in Arizona and the hope that their cities wouldn't have to suffer through another devastating fire season. I heard mayors and councilmembers tell stories about the fear of fires reaching their towns. I heard how smoke filled the air of one city for 51 days causing breathing problems including asthma and pneumonia. Later, during the business meeting we discussed issues of concern to our state and adopted proposals regarding those issues. One of the issues was a motion that the AIC support HR 1904, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. The motion passed by acclamation.

Communities all across the state of Idaho have done a tremendous job preparing themselves to deal with a wildfire. Kootenai County where I live has an emergency fire plan in place. Hundreds of acres have been treated around homes and structures across the county through the FireSmart program, funded with National Fire Plan money. Local people have organized and acted to make sure that they can defend their homes and communities. Now it is the Forest Service's turn. No amount of thinning around a community will protect it if a fire gets rolling in the adjacent dense, dry, stressed forests of the backcountry. Forest density must be addressed wherever it is found B front country and back country. Forests must be treated on a landscape scale. It is simply not enough to cut away shrubs and brush from backyards and replace cedar shakes. If that were enough, all of the homes in Summerhaven, AZ would still be standing. HR 1904 will help give the Forest Service the tools it needs to deal with the problem today, before more wildlife habitat is lost, before more watersheds are torched, and before one more family is homeless. No more partisan politics. Wildfire doesn't care which side of the aisle you are on. Fix the problem. Pass the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer questions.