

NATIONAL FIRE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND
FOREST HEALTH

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

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OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE NATIONAL FIRE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

**Thursday, March 8, 2001
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Committee on Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:58 a.m., in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Scott McInnis [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Mr. MCINNIS. As our audience can see, our membership is not here yet. The reason I am going to start, Governor, frankly, is as a courtesy to you. We have a vote expected in about three minutes, which means I will have to leave in about 15 minutes. I want to get your testimony. And it is also my understanding that members that are not too pleased with today's procedure will file a number of stalling motions over on the House Floor, so we will have a series of votes.

Under those circumstances, Governor, I would like to have you testify when more members of the panel are here. But if we do that, I am afraid that you probably will not get an opportunity to testify. So I am going to skip over initially here any kind of opening statement on my behalf and on behalf of the ranking Committee member.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McInnis follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Scott McInnis, Chairman, Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

It is appropriate that the Subcommittee's first hearing this Congress is on the subject of the National Fire Plan. No single program has a greater potential to transform our nation's forests and the way they are managed. The National Fire Plan is the culmination of years of scientific analysis, General Accounting Office studies and Congressional hearings, and is a direct response to the fundamental fact that fuel conditions on our federal lands are the worst they have ever been, dramatically demonstrated by last year's fires. But what was really unusual about the 2000 fire season wasn't that seven million acres burned, but that the average size and intensity of individual fires were much larger and hotter than they have been historically. These super-hot fires not only destroy habitat for fish, wildlife and, of course, people, but they also put firefighters at extreme risk. I personally witnessed such tragic consequences to brave young firefighters on the Storm King fire in Colorado eight years ago.

So it is for these just reasons that Congress appropriated an additional \$1.8 billion for the fire plan for FY 2001, and for these same reasons it will remain crucial that we continue to maintain full funding for these activities. But continued funding

will depend on the success of the fire plan, and success will be measured by accomplishments in the field, with tangible results such as the number of acres treated for hazardous fuels removal or the number of new, highly trained and well-equipped firefighters. Failure to implement the plan successfully will also result in tangible, but adverse, results: billions more spent for fire fighting, millions of acres of destroyed habitat, billions lost in property damage and, most certainly, the tragic loss of lives.

This isn't to say that the agencies alone are responsible for implementing the fire plan; much of that responsibility falls with Congress, requiring thoughtful bipartisan effort and support. So I look forward to working with all my colleagues and the agencies on this immense effort. This, then, is the purpose of this hearing: to review the National Fire Plan, to measure its accomplishments to date, to review what yet needs to be done, paying careful attention to all barriers and impediments, and to determine what role this Committee and Congress can play in its successful implementation.

Mr. McINNIS. Governor, welcome to our Committee. We appreciate it. I will let you proceed with your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JUDY MARTZ, GOVERNOR,
STATE OF MONTANA**

Governor MARTZ. Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, for the record, I am Governor Judy Martz. I am here today representing the Big Sky State of Montana. It is an honor to be here today to testify on behalf of my State and the Western Governors' Association regarding the National Fire Plan. I want to thank the Chairman for his interest in an issue that is critical and of great importance to those of us in the West, and that is forest health.

Please consider the testimony in its entirety that I have given to you, and let me begin by saying that those of us in Montana are pleased with the prospects of the National Fire Plan. For the first time in nearly a decade, the National Fire Plan offers a ray of hope for our Nation's forests.

While the smoke has cleared from one of the most devastating fires in our history, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to minimize future devastating fires. Already in Montana, at this time we fear that the potential exists for another significant fire season. I will not refer to the charts again that I have placed here today, but I did want you to see just some of the devastating headlines and what was happening in Montana. And as I just looked at those headlines, it brought me back to the fire season last year, and there is something very devastating that happened.

This picture I think everyone in this room is familiar with of the elk down in the fire, as the elk were displaced by the fire. This happened to a lot of our wildlife, but thankfully someone caught the picture, and you have all seen it. Now, having been made into a pin, it is a constant reminder of the displacement of the wildlife.

Drought continues in Montana, and the consequences of an extended drought impose an even greater fire danger for this coming year.

In the interior West, the wildfires of 2000 burned nearly 7 million acres. Of the nearly 7 million acres, 900,000 acres in Montana were reduced to ash. Three hundred homes were destroyed, and nearly 6,000 were threatened. We had over 20 communities evacuated as a result of an out-of-control wildfire.

While we cannot prevent drought, lightning strikes, heat, or wind, we can prevent some of the devastating impacts that result from mismanagement and inaction.

We must manage our national forests. "Hands-off" is not management. We have successfully excluded fire from our landscape for the past 90 years. And while the Forest Service was quick to respond to fire starts across our Nation, an action plan for forest management sat on the shelf. Entire watersheds and landscapes have grown dense with small trees and brush, creating unnatural and unhealthy conditions ripe for catastrophic fires. In fact, the General Accounting Office in a report requested by this Subcommittee identified nearly 40 million acres of national forest land at risk of catastrophic fire within the interior West. Last summer, we burned in Montana less than 10 percent of the acreage identified by the GAO.

Instead of focusing on how much timber we harvest, we need now to focus on how much we leave on the land. Instead of focusing on acres harvested and board feet processed, we need to focus on the overall health of the forest ecosystem.

Some of our forests have grown dense and have accumulated large amounts of hazardous fuels, making it nearly impossible to prescribe burn. In cases such as this, man needs to mimic the purpose of fire by cleaning or clearing overgrown and over accumulated fuels. Only after successful restoration can we introduce fire in its natural form.

The National Fire Plan offers a full range of forest management tools, from prescribed burns to mechanical treatment. State and local governments are active participants.

The Forest Service will follow nine operating principles guiding their work to implement the National Fire Plan, and I am encouraged by those principles, frankly, that are outlined and look forward to working with the Forest Service on implementing those principles in Montana.

Last summer's fires affected private and State lands as well. In Montana, we saw over 14,000 acres of State forest burn. Recognizing that the value of burnt, dead timber decreases rapidly with time, our Department of Natural Resources, the DNRC, moved in an environmentally sound and fiscally responsible manner. DNRC quickly evaluated the affected resources in accordance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, similar to NEPA, and prepared a plan to treat the area's most severely impacted by fires. Today, the State has completed 90 percent of the treatment plan on 5,400 acres of State land. This treatment plan has rehabilitated many of the burned acres and generated \$3.7 million for our public education system. The harvests were also conducted while adhering to the letter of the State Forest Land Management Plan, which is to manage for biodiversity and forest health, in effect, similar to the USFS ecosystem management philosophy.

To date, the United States Forest Service in Montana has not removed any timber affected by the fires of last summer, and I ask why.

Additionally, the treatment plan addressed rehabilitation measures that included soil stabilization measures, stream bank stabilization, and reseeding wherever it is necessary. This summer,

the State will begin the process to evaluate and address necessary treatment of the areas less impacted by the fires.

My point is simple. If the State of Montana can move in a timely, environmentally sound, and fiscally responsible manner with limited resources, should we not expect our Federal neighbors to do the same? We need them to do the same.

I would like to present the balance of my testimony now on behalf of the 21 members of the Western Governors' Association, of which I recently became a member.

Since last summer's fires, States have been working collaboratively with Federal agencies and other stakeholders to develop a national 10-year strategy to reduce the risk of wildfires. The Governors of the Western Governors' Association requested this strategy, and Congress concurred on the need for a long-term approach in the Fiscal Year 2001 Interior Appropriations report. A draft of that strategy for public and congressional comment is appended to my testimony. We are aiming to complete it by May 1st. I encourage Congress to remain vigilant in improving the health of our Nation's forests. We must be dedicated to a long-term strategy that addresses the health of our forests and reduces the risks to our population. And we must fully fund the National Fire Plan. The goals set by the National Fire Plan are crucial to minimizing threat to lives and to property in our entire region.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Governor Martz follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Judy Martz, Governor, State of Montana

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Judy Martz and I am the Governor of the great state of Montana. It is an honor to be here today to testify on behalf of my state and the Western Governors' Association regarding the national fire plan. I want to thank the Chairman for his interest in an issue of critical importance to those of us in the west; the health of our forests.

Let me begin by saying that those of us in Montana are very excited about the prospects of the National Fire Plan. For the first time in nearly a decade, we view the National Fire Plan as a ray of hope for our nation's forests. And the reason we are hopeful lies in the opportunity to work together with our federal partners on solving issues that we witnessed last summer. Devastating and catastrophic fires swept across vast acres of Montana and the west last summer. We need to do everything possible to avoid that scenario from repeating itself again.

While the smoke has cleared from one of the most devastating fires in our history, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to minimize future devastating fires. Already in Montana, we fear the potential exists for a repeat performance of last year's fires. Drought has hit Montana hard, and the consequences of an extended drought have serious impacts to our natural environment.

In the interior west, the wildfires of 2000 burned nearly 7 million acres. Of the nearly 7 million acres, Montana witnessed over 900,000 acres reduced to ash. The State of Montana watched in horror as over 300 homes were destroyed, and nearly 6000 were threatened. We had over 20 communities evacuated as a result of an out-of-control wildfire.

The Big Sky State fell under a brown hue of smoke. From August 5th to September 8th, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality issued a total of 21 "very unhealthy" advisories and 19 "hazardous" advisories for communities in the northwest part of the state. Visibility hung around 1 mile or less for most of the summer. A state proud of its "clean and healthful" environment had fallen to air quality levels worse than Los Angeles. Environmental groups long opposed to active management fell silent amidst the smoke, chaos and personal trauma of last year's fires.

While we cannot prevent drought, lightning strikes or hot windy days, we can prevent some of the devastating impacts that result from mismanagement and inaction.

In particular, we must manage our national forests. "Hands-off" is not management. We have successfully excluded fire from our landscape for the past 90 years. And while the forest service was quick to respond to fire starts across our nation, they were slowly drifting away from active management of those lands. The result, entire watersheds and landscapes have grown dense with small trees and brush, creating unnatural and unhealthy conditions ripe for catastrophic fires. In fact, the General Accounting Office in a report requested by this subcommittee, identified nearly 40 million acres of national forest land at risk of catastrophic fire within the interior west. Last summer, we burned less than 10% of the acreage identified by the GAO.

Unless we move aggressively, with a unified plan and strategy, we can expect many more summers like last. While spring has not eased into the intermountain west yet, the impacts from last summer's fires remain to be seen. Impacts to water quality, wildlife habitat, endangered species, erosion and regeneration will play itself out with the coming spring run-off and summer rains.

As a nation, we need to move away from the confrontational gridlock we have experienced in the past. I have long maintained that there is no constituency for dirty air and dirty water. We all want a clean environment. But a clean environment does not happen by accident. It happens with measured purpose. And the National Fire Plan is a move in the direction of a cleaner and healthier environment.

By focusing on the health of our forests, we can achieve many of the objectives important to all Americans. Instead of focusing on how much timber we harvest, we need to focus on how much we leave on the land. Instead of focusing on acres harvested or board feet processed, we need to focus on the overall health of the forest ecosystem. We need to manage our forests for an end result; and that end result must be a healthy forest.

Charles Keegan, Director of Forest Industry and Manufacturing Research and Research and Carl Fiedler, Research Associate Professor, School of Forestry, both of the University of Montana, Missoula, have long advocated for healthy forests through active management of our nation's forests.

In a nutshell, Chuck and Carl recommend active management to bring our forests back to a more natural and healthy condition. This management technique involves clearing under-story and over-story of overly crowded trees, and prescribed burning where appropriate. And the key word here is appropriate. Some of our forests have grown dense and have accumulated large amounts of hazardous fuels, making it nearly impossible to prescribe burn. In cases such as this, man needs to mimic the purpose of fire by clearing overgrown and over-accumulated fuels. Only after successful restoration can we introduce fire in its natural form.

The National Fire Plan endeavors to offer a full range of forest management tools, from prescribed burns to mechanical treatment. And by including state and local governments and the affected public to participate in management decisions, we have an honest opportunity to positively affect the health of our nation's forests.

The National Fire Plan moves us in the direction of sustainable and healthy forests. The Forest Service will follow nine Operating Principles guiding their work to implement the National Fire Plan. I am encouraged by the principles outlined and look forward to working with the Forest Service on implementing those principles in Montana.

Responsible agencies must use expedited procedures to implement this plan. I understand the agencies have the available procedures to expedite this plan, and if not, then Congress must act prudently and expeditiously itself to provide legislative language that allows expedited procedures.

We can and we must move in an expeditious manner to address forest management. Last summer's fires affected private and state lands as well. In Montana, we saw over 14,000 acres of state forest burn. Recognizing that the value of burnt, dead timber decreases rapidly with time, our Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) moved in an environmentally sound and fiscally responsible manner. DNRC quickly evaluated the affected resources in accordance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act (similar to NEPA) and prepared a plan to treat the areas most severely impacted by the fires. Today, the state has completed 90% of the treatment plan on 5400 acres of state land. This treatment plan has rehabilitated many of the burned acres and generated \$3.7 million to the school trust that will be used for our public education system. The harvests were also conducted while adhering to the letter of the State Forest Land Management Plan, which is to manage for biodiversity and forest health, in effect similar to the USFS ecosystem management philosophy.

To date, the United State Forest Service in Montana has not removed any timber affected by the fires of last summer.

Additionally, the treatment plan addressed rehabilitation measures that included soil stabilization measures, stream bank stabilization and reseeding where necessary. This summer, the State will begin the process to evaluate and address necessary treatment of the areas less impacted by the fires.

My point is simple. If the State of Montana can move in a timely, environmentally sound and fiscally responsible manner with limited resources, should we not expect our federal neighbors to do the same?

I would like to present the balance of my testimony on behalf of the 21 members of the Western Governors' Association of which I recently became a member.

Since last summer's fires, states have been working collaboratively with federal agencies and other stakeholders to develop a national 10-year strategy to reduce the risk of wildfires. Western governors requested this strategy and the Congress concurred on the need for this long-term approach in the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations report. A draft of the strategy for public and Congressional comment is appended to my testimony. We are aiming to complete it by May 1. Once completed, we believe this document will demonstrate that a broad range of interests are in agreement on the need, resource levels and approach to addressing this issue.

And I would like to take this opportunity to encourage Congress to remain vigilant in improving the health of our nation's forests. We must be dedicated to a long-term strategy that addresses the health of our forests and reduces the risks to our population. We must, and I repeat must, fully fund the National Fire Plan. The goals set by the National Fire Plan are crucial to minimizing threat to lives and property. We must remain committed for the long run.

We were lucky last year. With the grace of God and a mobilization of forces like we have never before seen, lives were saved and property was protected. Unless we seriously commit to addressing the risks posed by unnatural and unhealthy forests, we will not always be able to say we were so lucky.

Mr. MCINNIS. Thank you, Governor.

Governor, the panel appreciates the effort that you made to travel clear across the country to make your presentation. Later in the meeting, we intend to have the Forest Service. I am pretty positive about some of the steps that they have taken.

There are a couple of comments that stand out in your comments that you have made, in particular your comment that "hands-off" is not management. You label it directly. That is exactly correct. You also said that, to date, the United States Forest Service in Montana has not removed any timber affected by the fires of last summer, and I think what is of interest, Governor, is you compare it to what your State Department of Forest Service has done in comparison. It is clear that one agency is able to move on a much more rapid basis than the other agency.

Considering the fire potential that we have out there, it is important that we move on an expedited basis, not a careless basis, not a reckless basis, but an expedited basis. And I think that we are heading in that direction.

I think your point that the State of Montana can move on that—and you have set a good example for us—is the kind of thing we need to hear back here.

Governor, as you will remember, at the beginning of the meeting we waived opening remarks because of the fact we wanted to get your testimony in, and I want to allow as much questioning as possible. In view of that, I will waive the remainder of my time and yield to the ranking member for a couple comments, and, members, we will go to the 5-minute question rule. I yield my time to the ranking member and welcome the ranking member.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I really will not have too much of a comment here. Should we move to some questions here? Is that appropriate?

Mr. MCINNIS. That would be appropriate.

Mr. INSLEE. Great. Thanks again, Governor. This is twice in two days. You are doing yeo-woman's service, so we appreciate it.

Governor MARTZ. Thank you.

Mr. INSLEE. I just want to ask you a real broad question, if I can, and feel free to philosophize or rhapsodize at your pleasure. And I will go right to the heart of a controversy that we will be talking about, something that can be a controversy on this issue, and that is, the need in certain instances to remove fuel from the forest which in certain instances needs to be done because our previous fire suppression policy has allowed tremendous growth to some degree in fuel.

But in doing so, many of our constituents have concerns that any fuel suppression program could end up as a masquerade for, in fact, an increase in commercial harvest. That was really motivated not so much by fuel suppression but, rather, simply the increased harvest levels where the law, the ESA, and various other restrictions may not allow it.

I would just like your thoughts on how you think we can structure or should consider structuring a program to avoid that second possibility of disguised commercial harvesting, if you will, under the guise of fuel suppression while still, you know, reaching that goal. And feel free to give us your thoughts even if you haven't thought all the way through it.

Governor MARTZ. Thank you very much, Congressman. I really believe that within my heart I think what we are trying to do is talk about healthy forests. And if we consider that and keep the argument of timber harvests as being jobs related or creating jobs for the industry out of this, we will look truly at creating a healthier forest. And that is what we have been saying for years in Montana.

The fuels are laying there. They are laying dead. Trees can't even grow to the size they should grow. Thinning is better for forests. We are finding that out for sure. And I really think that for the ecosystem the argument is that we really need to do—we need to leave some of that dead and burnt timber. But how do we do that in an environmentally and ecologically safe way? And I think that has got—we need to continually take the harvesting or the removal out of the picture, but start to look and really concentrate and focus in on the reasons we want to do this. And the reason we want to do it in Montana is to have a healthy forest.

Our fires last year, as you know, were so large. We had the best firefighters in the world there. And to sit in the same room with them and hear them say these are too hot, we cannot put them out, flames flashing over 300 feet in the air, and there was no way because of the hot box that sat underneath them.

Now we are faced with different problems—erosions, watersheds, those kinds of things. So for a healthy forest, we must take away the equation. The equation, yes, is going to bring some timber harvests, and we must be diligent to get that out of there. But the first and main concern and the argument that we need to keep focused on is a healthy forest.

Mr. INSLEE. Let me ask you, you said something to the effect of wanting to remove the issue of harvest from this debate. I want to

make sure I understand you. I have many constituents who basically are looking for a level of trust in a decision-making process. What they want to have is trust that a decision to remove any fiber or timber from the forests under this program, in fact, would be done for a fire suppression purpose rather than for a purpose of, although it may be laudable at times, job creation, profit creation, commercial harvest.

Could you suggest to us ways in fashioning this program which would help build that trust in the public? And let me just give you an example of some things that I have heard tossed about as far as ideas. I have heard tossed about having a maximum diameter of tree that can be removed. I have heard it tossed about that you limit actual commercial use or sale of the timber. I have heard ideas tossed about that would, in effect, artificially restrict the removal of the timber for commercial purposes.

What could you suggest to us that would give confidence to the public on how we would structure such a program in that regard?

Governor MARTZ. First of all, you can't fool yourself. There will be jobs in this, and there will be tree harvest. There has to be, or else all of the dead, burnt, standing timber right now is going to be diseased, and each of those trees, depending on what kind of tree they are, is a very limited time before they are diseased. Now, we can't have a diseased forest either because then as new growth comes in, we start to build another tinder box. So you do have to do removal.

When we did our State lands, Congressman, we had to designate how many of those trees and what diameter they are to be left standing. So in the prognosis of how you go forward, you do it by prescribing what you want to have standing in that.

We have through the Western Governors' Association what we believe—concentrating on what we want to see, we have a list of goals and outcomes, and this is just in draft form. So as soon as it is in its final form, we will get this to you. We have several recommendations on the outcomes and what we believe we need to do.

But to get confidence in the general public, I think we have to be very honest. There are going to be some jobs in this, but that is not our main focus. Our main focus is to get the dead timber out of there so it doesn't disease, then create another hot box in several years, which it will do. As that undergrowth goes up again, we may have a predicament this summer in Montana that will cause us to not be able to get back into the forest again. If we continue in the drought that we are having right now, we may not be able to get in. If we don't get those trees out early that are dead standing, we may not be able to get into the forest because of the fire danger again.

So I think we just have to be honest with them, for one thing. That is the greatest thing.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you.

Governor MARTZ. You are welcome.

Mr. MCINNIS. Governor, I might point out, before I yield to the next member, that I agree with the gentleman from Washington in regards to that we don't want to use this fire policy as a guise to sneak in commercial logging.

Governor MARTZ. Right.

Mr. MCINNIS. On the other hand, Governor, we don't want to use this as a tool or a vehicle to prevent logical, scientific logging. If we have timber in there that we need to harvest for forest health, it is beyond me why we would not go ahead and offer it for commercial sale instead of, I guess, stacking it up somewhere and burning it and so on.

I will yield to the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. DUNCAN. Governor, I was present in 1998 when we had a hearing in which they warned us about these fires and that they were coming, and then again in early 2000 and the GAO report that you mentioned with the warning that there were 40 million acres in the West in immediate danger of catastrophic forest fires. And then we saw those warnings that we received as early as 1998 come true, and I remember reading one article that there had been \$10 billion worth of damage from this roughly 7 million acres that you mentioned burned.

If I had gone out there and set fire with some matches, or whatever, to even a few acres, I probably would have been put in jail. And yet these policies that we followed resulted—the policies that I think we followed because of radical or extremist environmentalists who seemingly don't want us to cut a single tree any place. Somehow, though, they have almost brainwashed the children in this country because I think if I went to any school in Knoxville, Tennessee, and told them I was opposed to cutting a single tree in the national forests, I would probably get applause.

Somehow people seem to have the idea that the national forests are national parks, and nobody is advocating going in and logging in the national parks. And I don't know—I agree with the Chairman on most things, but I am not opposed to commercial logging. People have to think that if we don't have some commercial logging in a few places in this country, people aren't going to be able to build affordable houses or furniture or have toilet paper or books or whatever.

How do we get the message out that to have healthy forests we need to cut some trees, and to have low prices for all these products that we want, we have got to cut some trees? And if people stop all logging, you are going to drive up prices and you are going to destroy jobs. How do we get this message out? Because we seem to be, I think, losing in some ways on this.

Governor MARTZ. And I am not sure that I can answer how we get it out. We try very hard in Montana. We have what is called best management practices that they use in the forests where they are only able to cut so many trees in a certain area, they can't cut within so many feet of the watershed. There are very strict guidelines on how they do cut.

For us to pretend that we don't want to have the jobs, that is ludicrous. We need the jobs. The health of the forest depends on those people bringing it out in a scientifically conscientious manner. But when we talk about that, it almost seems like we are shifting the focus to the jobs it creates, when we really need to concentrate. In a sense, we did put the fire—we did start those fires. In 1998, we came up with a plan where we knew better, and we didn't really do it. Now we know better because we are seeing the ramifications of that, and we need to do it.

I think education, continually educating, if we can—if you go see a cut, it doesn't look pretty when it is being done. When they harvest it, it doesn't look pretty because you have the stumps. But you go back a year later, and the new growth, and you will see new seedlings coming up, that is pretty. And it is usable. Cattle can graze there, and they don't hurt the ecosystem. They can't graze there probably the first year, especially after a prescribed burn, but they can go on there and graze within the next two years and you have a healthy forest again.

So I think education is key to what we are doing in sync with the process that we are using to have a better managed forest.

Mr. DUNCAN. I remember reading in the Knoxville News Sentinel that in 1950, 39 percent of Tennessee was in forest land, and by 1990 it was up to 45 percent, and today about half of Tennessee's 27 million acres is in forest lands. And then I read in the Christian Science Monitor where just about every Eastern State, the amount of forest land has gone up significantly over the last 50 years, yet very few people realize that.

I mentioned yesterday in this hearing that Congress passed in the mid-1980's this law that was hailed by the environmentalists that we wouldn't cut more than 80 percent of the new growth in our national forests, yet today we are cutting less than one-seventh of our new growth. And what I think it is, some of these groups can't raise money unless they keep raising the bar and scaring people and convincing people that we are raping the environment and doing all of these horrible things, when really we have made great, huge strides and, in fact, we are not even cutting enough trees to keep these forest fires from happening.

Governor MARTZ. I could not agree more.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you very much.

Mr. MCINNIS. Governor, those buzzes you heard obviously were an indication of a vote. We will be getting a couple more. It appears to me we probably will only have time for one more set of questions.

I would request that the remaining panel members who will not have an opportunity to ask those questions to you be allowed to submit those questions in writing to your staff for response back.

Governor MARTZ. Absolutely.

Mr. MCINNIS. We also appreciate the courtesy of you coming. After this next set of questions, I do not anticipate that we will be back here for probably half an hour. I would ask the other people to stay, certainly the second panel. Your testimony is very important. We intend to continue the hearing, but at that point I understand you need to keep with your schedule, Governor. So let's wrap it up. As you will see, Colorado pretty well dominates this Committee, and that is by choice. But the fine Congressman from the State of Colorado, Mr. Udall.

Mr. UDALL OF COLORADO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Governor. It is important that you are here today to share with us your perspectives on Montana's approach to this.

The Colorado delegation last year in the person of Congressman Hefley, who is chairing another Subcommittee of this large full Committee, and myself introduced a bill that would have applied to the lands in Colorado in the so-called Red Zone. That is the

urban-wildland interface. And that is where we have had the most pressure on our forests and, in fact, where we had a couple of the catastrophic fires last year. And our emphasis has been on focusing there to educate the people who live in those areas, but also to do the kind of fuel reduction and forest health work that would save lives, save property, and save people from the heartaches that come when these fires get out of control.

Is it your sense that—I am not trying to lead you on this, but ask if this would be the kind of policy that we first implement with these monies and with this large-scale program that we now have before us?

Governor MARTZ. It is, and could I just tell you some of these recommendations from the Western Governors, and I think they will line up with what you are thinking. We believe that we must reduce the risk and consequences of catastrophic wildfires and increase public and firefighter safety, to improve conditions of fire-adapted ecosystems to make them more resilient, to promote local action by increasing public understanding and providing the tools to enhance local responsibility. We need to maintain and enhance community health, economic and social well-being, increase resources for protection capabilities. We need to provide the restoration and rehabilitation of fire-damaged lands and to enhance collaboration, coordination among all levels of government and stakeholders for joint planning, decision-making, and implementation.

And I think there is something further that needs to be entered into the discussion at some time, is when people build in these areas where the trees are right up to their houses, maybe local planning or planning on Federal and State land, they have to have their own buffer zone, put that in before they can build, of some many feet before timber can be right on top of the house. I think something has to be looked at in that way, too, because we spend millions of dollars fighting fire over one home. And is that fair to every taxpayer? I don't know.

Mr. UDALL OF COLORADO. Thank you for that response. I want to associate myself with my colleague from Washington, Mr. Inslee, when he discussed the concerns that some of us share that we don't put the cart before the horse and that in the end this approach is about making our forests healthy.

I would tell you, when you talk to the environmental community, who I think is very well intentioned and understands that forests are part of our economic base in the West, that we sell our views and our recreation as well as the commodities that we bring off the public lands, that when you say forest health to those communities, they think that means clear-cutting. When you say sustainable forests, which is what the environmental community tends to use as their approach, the commodity interests and other economic interests think that means lock up the forests and nobody ever has any access. And I think we have got to work to find some additional common ground here, understanding that in the end we all want the same thing, which is healthy forests that can provide for our families in recreational amenities and the views and the experiences we all enjoy in the West and the out-of-doors, but also, where appropriate, that allow for access to those wood products.

I also think we have an enormous opportunity—and you mentioned leaving some of this material in the forest because it is needed for the forests to regenerate themselves. But with the emerging energy crisis, we had a hearing yesterday, and there is a whole industry emerging around biofuels, and a lot of this small-diameter material can be used with the emerging technologies to produce ethanol. It is a cellulosic ethanol. And I hope that we will look at that as a potential feedstock for ethanol production so that we become more independent and we don't have the national security issues that are tied to our dependence on foreign oil.

I am not giving you much chance to comment, but the last question I would ask you is: In our bill, Mr. Hefley's and my bill, we included a 12-inch diameter limit. Now, some people think that is too big. Some people think that is too small. But we felt it was important to begin with a standard and at least put something on the table. I am curious if you have a reaction to that particular size limit for cutting. And, again, this would be in the Red Zone, in this urban-wildland interface.

Governor MARTZ. We have designated in Montana certain—it may be 9, it may go to 12, but you have to leave so many of those standing. I mean, it doesn't mean that you leave every one of them that are 12 inches in diameter standing. It would mean you leave so many in a certain area for a healthy forest.

We call it best management practices, and you are calling it something else, but we are talking about the same thing, managing it in a viable way that is good for the ecosystem, is good for the ground, is good for everything that is around it.

I want to go back to the ethanol use. We are considering everything in the way of ethanol use in the State of Montana to the extent that we are looking at building an ethanol plant there right now. The legislature is looking at a couple of bills. And so that is something that we are seriously considering.

Mr. UDALL OF COLORADO. We would like to work with you through the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Caucus in the House, which has about 180 members from both parties and is very interested in ethanol maybe being a transition fuel to what I think eventually may be a fuel cell economy over the next 50 to 100 years.

Governor MARTZ. Right. In fact, the next State car I have will use both ethanol and—it is a good start.

Mr. UDALL OF COLORADO. Excellent.

Mr. MCINNIS. Governor, again, we are going to have to conclude our testimony temporarily. There are a couple of things that I would point out.

First of all, I do want to make note that there is some danger in getting into specific measurement of diameters. I mean, you may have a species that is not natural to the forest which exceeds 12 inches, and all of a sudden you have got a Federal bureaucracy, and I think our bureaucracy has pretty clearly demonstrated in lack of movement, as compared to your State Forest Service—which, by the way, in my opinion are closer to the soil than the Federal agency is.

I wish that we could continue this meeting because I am sure you would be interested in the follow-up panel, Mr. Laverty and

Mr. Hartzell. We are going to hire 4,000 new firefighters. I think our communication with your State, with all the States on these fires will be enhanced. I think some very positive news will be held in the rest of the hearing.

I understand that you need to go. We certainly need to go vote. I appreciate the courtesy, and safe travels home.

Governor MARTZ. Thank you very much.

Mr. MCINNIS. The Committee will reconvene after the vote.

[Recess.]

Mr. MCINNIS. If everyone could be seated; also, just as a reminder, no cellular phones in the room, please.

As the Committee knows, we have been delayed by a vote. I think, however, we can wrap up the second panel. I would ask members to submit their opening statements for the record. I also have a statement to submit for the record from Congressman Rehberg.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Udall of Colorado follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable Mark Udall, a Representative in Congress
from the State of Colorado**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for scheduling this hearing today. I don't think you could have chosen a more timely subject for the start of your tenure as chairman of the Subcommittee.

And, as you know, Mr. Chairman, it is also a subject of particular interest to me—and to everyone back home in Colorado as well as other western States.

Across Colorado—and across the west—rapid population growth means that more and more communities are pressing against and into our forest lands, enlarging the so-called “urban interface” that in Colorado is also known as the “red zone”—the area where forest fires present the greatest dangers to people's lives and homes.

The danger of forest fires in such areas is certainly not new. But last year's combination of a Presidential election and very damaging forest fires—including those in Colorado and Montana as well as the disaster in New Mexico resulted in important new developments, including the legislation whose implementation we are reviewing here today.

That legislation, which set up the National Fire Plan, resembles in important ways a bill that our colleague, Representative Hefley, and I introduced earlier in the year and that was also cosponsored by Representatives DeGette and Tancredo.

However, our bill would have applied only to Colorado's “red zone”—and it also had some other important provisions that were not included in the legislation setting up the national fire plan.

For one thing, our bill emphasized public involvement by providing for setting up a committee—representing a broad spectrum of interests—to establish priorities for use of funds.

And, our bill specifically provided that fuel-reduction projects would have to meet some essential guidelines.

For example, the bill specified that projects could not be performed in Congressionally-designated wilderness areas, that roadless areas would have to be protected, that the projects must comply with all state and federal environmental laws and regulations, and, most notably, that projects could include removal only of trees up to 12 inches in diameter.

That last requirement—a cutting limit based on tree size drew many comments from people holding differing views about the use of mechanical thinning to reduce fire risks.

Some people do not support allowing removal of trees that big, or perhaps of trees of any size. Others see the 12-inch limit—or perhaps any specific limit—as both arbitrary and too restrictive.

I respect the sincerity of those raising those objections. However, I think that our bill struck an appropriate balance and represented a legitimate starting point for legislative action.

The bill recognized that where the risk of catastrophic wildfires comes from overly-dense vegetation, it is because of the build-up of small-sized materials, including trees smaller than 12 inches in diameter.

It was also shaped by an understanding that cutting larger trees often can lead to more severe fires, for a variety of reasons, and can also have other adverse effects.

The limit in our bill also reflected the fact that cutting larger trees is controversial—especially when the larger trees may have commercial value.

It is simple fact that some will see the inclusion of larger trees as evidence that a project ostensibly aimed at reducing the risk of fire is really intended to be a commercial undertaking, by the Forest Service and by industry.

This could lead to challenges that would unnecessarily complicate necessary projects that were otherwise not controversial.

In short, both on the scientific merits and for reasons of public acceptability, I thought—and I still think—that there should be limits on the scope of these projects, of the kind that would have been set by our bill.

That is why last year, after enactment of the legislation setting up the national fire plan, I initiated a letter—ultimately also signed by 25 other Members of the House—to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior urging that the fire plan be implemented under appropriate safeguards and conditions.

I now have received a response from Michael Rains, the Deputy Chief of the Forest Service for State and Private Forestry. The response states that the Agriculture Department shares the concerns expressed in our letter and outlines how those concerns will be addressed in the implementation of the national fire plan.

I ask unanimous consent that both of these letters be included in the record of today's hearing.

Mr. Chairman, in Colorado's "red zone" and other areas covered by the national fire plan, there are very real risks to people, property and the environment—some of them resulting from past fire-management policies.

But it is very important that the need to respond to those real risks is not misused as a convenient rationale for projects that do not meet proper standards.

I think it is essential that fire-plan projects reflect public involvement, are based on sound science, and are completely consistent with applicable environmental laws.

In fact, it is precisely to help assure that fire-plan projects meet those requirements that last month I joined in cosponsoring a bill to clarify that funds appropriated to implement the fire plan can be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. That will enable those agencies to review projects to assure that they will comply with the Endangered Species Act. I think we should act promptly on that legislation, to forestall problems and to keep the fire plan both on track and on a sound legal and environmental footing.

With that being said, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Simpson follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable Michael K. Simpson, a Representative in
Congress from the State of Idaho**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for conducting this oversight hearing on the implementation of the National Fire Plan. As you know, I have the dubious distinction of representing a district that had one of the largest fires in the United States during the 2000 fire season: the Clear Creek fire in the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The Clear Creek fire covered an area of over 200,000 acres, outside of Salmon, Idaho. However, it is but one of many that burned throughout Idaho and the Western United States.

I was able to spend a couple of days on the Clear Creek fire and saw first-hand the devastation catastrophic forest fires cause. It is unfortunate that it took a fire season like the one we had last year in order for the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to produce the National Fire Plan. However, I am pleased that the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior responded with a comprehensive plan and strategy for dealing with heavy fuel loads, and restoration and rehabilitation of lands already stricken by catastrophic fires. Moreover, I was pleased that the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior worked with the Western Governors' Association to draft report language ensuring cooperation and consultation between governors and the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior.

We need to restore our forests. They are in an unhealthy state as evidenced by the 2000 fire season. The Forest Service and the General Accounting Office estimate that more than 72 million acres are at risk of uncharacteristic wildfire. We must restore our forests to a more healthy and natural state that includes managed

prescribed burns and thinning. We may not agree on every aspect of achieving that natural state, but we can find common areas where we can agree that fuels reduction is better than the alternative—catastrophic forest fires.

The old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is very appropriate. A well-funded fuels reduction program will pay significant dividends in the reduction of fire fighting and restoration costs over time. I am hopeful that the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior will continue to aggressively implement the National Fire Plan. In addition, I trust that the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior will continue to work together with state and local officials to improve forest health.

I am committed to working with state and local officials, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Department of the Interior to address any barriers that might stand in the way of successfully treating our forests. In addition, I am committed to working for continued funding for a long-term forest health initiative.

Once again, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for holding this hearing. I am hopeful that the information presented here will bring us one step closer to healing our forests.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rehberg follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Dennis Rehberg, a Representative in Congress from the State of Montana

I would like to thank Chairman McInnis for the opportunity to participate in this hearing about the National Fire Plan. This is a very timely issue, as we must prepare now for the fire season to come while we continue to deal with the effects of the wildfires of last summer. The national fire plan is an important thing for the state of Montana in our efforts to rehabilitate affected communities and National Forest lands.

I am concerned that though the fire management plan contains many projects and programs that will be invaluable to the future of fire management, the President's Budget does not provide for continuing funding. In Montana we know that the risk for catastrophic fire is not over. Less than ten percent of the 3.5 million acres the GAO identified as at risk for catastrophic fire burned during the summer of 2000. And again this year, snowpack levels are below normal. If forecasts are correct, we are looking at another fire season that is worse than normal—perhaps even worse than last year.

Another thing we face today in Montana is the presence of dead and dying trees as a result of fire on our national forest lands. State, tribal and private foresters have removed salvageable timber from their lands and I look forward to working with the Forest Service to expedite action on National Forest lands. It is important that we are able to get people on the ground to remove dead and dying stands while they are still salvageable.

In addition to the devastation catastrophic wildfires leave in their wake, experts agree that such fires will prevent the Forest Service from meeting its mission requirement to sustain the national forests' multiple use because fires damage soils, habitat, and watershed functions for many generations or even permanently.

I am pleased to see the Forest Service working to devise a cohesive strategy to address barriers to reducing excessive fuels on national forest lands, deal with the potential threats to people and property wildfires produce, and to provide affected communities with the assistance they need to rehabilitate.

[The prepared statement of The Honorable Tom Udall follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Tom Udall, a Representative in Congress from the State of New Mexico

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for affording me the opportunity to comment on some of the issues presented as a result of last summer's extraordinary wildland fire season.

The National Fire Plan identifies a strategy to deal with ecosystem health issues in a manner that protects our communities and their citizens. It is a good start to a complex problem: A problem that exists because we have ignored the critical role

fire plays in shaping the ecosystem. Now we have an opportunity to begin to undo what 100 years of fire suppression, overgrazing, and poor logging practices have done.

The National Fire Plan addresses several key elements that will safely and effectively manage our wildlands for future generations: 1) To adequately prepare our Federal, Tribal, State, and local governments for fighting wildland fire when they need to; 2) To restore landscapes damaged by last season's wildland fires; 3) To invest in projects to reduce fire risk; 4) To work with communities to ensure adequate protection through community assistance programs and; 5) To provide Congress with accountable results of these goals.

Although wildland management agencies have long identified a need to address the risk of wildland fire, the Fire Plan is not a one-time effort. Congress should be committed to the program for the long haul and maintain adequate funding for 10 to 15 years. We should not measure the Fire Plan's success from start to finish in only 1 year. This process will take time.

The intent was not to set up agencies and local governments for failure, nor expect them to solve the problems in 1 year. Rather, Congress needs to provide funding and oversight to our Federal land management agencies and Tribal governments to achieve key elements identified in the National Fire Plan.

To be successful and to comply with congressional intent, Federal agencies, the Tribal, state, county and local governments, along with contractors, service providers, and the public need to collaborate and work in cohesive partnership. Of the major concerns I have toward implementation of this Plan, this one has major importance because of the planning and management that led up to the escaped prescribed burn in Los Alamos last year. We must ensure all groups and agencies are communicating and are in agreement with these efforts.

Another concern is that we must work to ensure adequate funding is made available for the long term. Although the President's Fiscal Year 2002 budget maintains funding levels for preparedness and other programs, it lacks adequate support for fire facility maintenance, fire science research, and community assistance. The backlog of fire facility maintenance exists throughout the country and this funding is inadequate to take care of the backlog. The research component will guide the development of the National Fire Plan and must be adequately funded. We need to support our states and local communities through community assistance funding to ensure they can make their communities safe through FIREWISE and other treatment methods. I believe it is important that adequate funding is made available for the long-term strategy. The current proposed budget does not do that.

In the past, land management agencies have proposed and implemented fuels treatment and risk reduction projects in areas that are non-controversial, inexpensive, and easy to do. Now is the time to look at the communities, watersheds, and species that are at risk from high intensity wildland fire. These areas tend to have the higher fuel volumes, higher resistance to fire suppression efforts, and threaten to burn homes or other valuable resources. Consequently, it will require more collaborative planning and higher costs to safely and effectively reduce risks of wildland fire.

The process may include commercial timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, chipping, piling, or prescribed fire, or a combination of all. Let's keep our focus on sound land management practices.

In conclusion, the National Fire Plan is a step in the right direction. However, the agencies must apply the best land management practices, be fiscally responsible, and demonstrate that their efforts are paying off. Finally, I want to recognize all the agencies and partners who are working together to make the National Fire plan a success. Their long tireless hours and their dedication to make this Plan a success is commendable.

Mr. McINNIS. With that, we will call up the second panel. Mr. Hartzell, thank you for attending today. Lyle, thank you for coming out. I am familiar with both of you. I appreciate the effort.

I am very excited to hear your testimony. We had a visit the other day, for the rest of the people in the room, which I thought was very interesting. I think we are focusing on fire control. Whether we discuss biomass or whether we discuss the hiring of new firefighters, communication, of course, is the key. As the two gentlemen know, I was on Storm King Mountain when Storm King Mountain blew up. That was not a result of bad forest health. That

was a result of poor communication, unfortunate weather, dry conditions, and the lightning storm.

So, needless to say, not all efforts in fighting forest fires necessarily pertain to the management of that particular forest. Communication is critical. And we had a good discussion the other day—I hope that one of the two gentlemen will mention that—on coordination of firefighting. That was a major contributing factor to the fatalities that we suffered on the mountain during that fire.

So, with that, I will turn to the ranking member very quickly for comment, and then we will turn it over to our two witnesses.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. My comments are brief. It is my belief that we face the prospect of a fire storm in the West this summer. It is my belief that the current budgetary projections will leave us grievously short of resources to deal with this. And if that occurs, it probably will not be the two witnesses' fault in this regard. It will be the U.S. Congress' and the White House. I am going to look forward to your helping us figure out what decisions need to be made on a budgetary basis to allow you to do your job to keep this natural disaster from occurring in the West this summer.

Mr. MCINNIS. With concurrence from the ranking member or without objection from the ranking member, I am going to waive the 5-minute rule, because I think both of your presentations, number one, are absolutely critical and, two, based on what I have seen, will take longer than 5 minutes.

Lyle, do you want to start off?

**STATEMENT OF LYLE LAVERTY, NATIONAL FIRE PLAN
COORDINATOR, FOREST SERVICE, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Mr. LAVERTY. Mr. Chairman, it is truly an honor to be here and have a chance to share with you this morning actions that we are taking regarding implementation of the National Fire Plan. I am here today, along with Tim Hartzell, to bring you up to date on what has been accomplished thus far and, perhaps more importantly, what we will be doing this summer to implement the provisions of the National Fire Plan.

As the Governor really eloquently addressed, the fire season of 2000 certainly captured the attention of the American people on the need to find ways of protecting life and property and at the same time minimizing losses to natural resources.

On September 8th, the Secretaries issued a report entitled "Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment," and that report, which has been referred to as the National Fire Plan, contains a series of recommendations to reduce the impacts of wildland fires on rural communities and ensure that we do, in fact, have sufficient firefighting resources in the future.

Mr. Chairman, the implementation of this National Fire Plan is well underway, and we have made significant progress to date. Cooperation between the Federal agencies, the Governors, in collaborations with the tribes and local communities probably is beginning to set a new standard and new model of how Government can work, in fact, responding to the needs of the people of this great country. We clearly recognize there are many challenges to

complete this significant increased workload that has been designed as part of this plan.

Long term, it is going to take many, many years of a continued commitment and investment of resources to effectively reduce the impacts of wildland fire on rural communities. And if there is a theme that we will share with you over and over again, it is that this is a long-term journey; 1 or 2 or 3 years will not do it. And we need to be able to ensure that we are in this for the long term, but at the same time that we are responsible with the resources that are given.

Even though it is early in the year, we have made really a good start in some major areas of accomplishment. We have, in fact, treated over 80,000 acres of some of the areas that were damaged during the 2000 fire season. We have restored 713 miles of roads, we have treated about 245 miles of trail, and we are doing those emergency actions to protect those resources.

We have already reduced fuels on over 400,000 acres of the national forests of the 1.8 million acres that we plan to treat this year. We have been involved collectively in terms of hiring the resources to staff the fire organizations, and we have hired over 815 permanent firefighters, and we expect to hire another 1,900 additional firefighters before April 30th.

In addition, we plan to acquire new engines, new fire engines. We are going to bring new equipment under contract and begin to staff the organization to be responsive to what we know is the potential for another fire season.

We have already started the process of providing funding and training and equipment to over 4,000 volunteers just on the Forest Service side. We published a list of the communities that are at risk, which was prepared by the National Governors and the tribes to begin to start the discussion on how can we begin to more effectively target and focus our fuels reduction projects on those communities that are at greatest risk.

We have initiated action on over 63 research projects, which are what I would consider to be the intellectual mutual fund in terms of how are we going to begin to acquire new knowledge about the effects of fire and these actions on resources in this country.

We have developed the framework that the Governor referenced in terms of a draft of a national 10-year comprehensive strategy with the States and the tribes as full partners—full partners—in the implementation of the National Fire Plan. Very, very significant.

Our success to date, beginning with the definition of the wildland-urban interface communities, the hiring of firefighters, and the ongoing rehabilitation and restoration of burned areas, fire-wise education work, is evidence of the strong start. We are committed to increasing the Nation's firefighting capability and to protect communities and restore resources. But it is going to take longer than a year.

After my partner, Tim Hartzell, presents his remarks, we are going to take a few minutes to expand on the key points and add some additional specifics and then answer any questions that you or any of the members of the Committee might have.

Thank you again for the opportunity just to share with you some great results that we will pick up on a little bit more.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Lavery follows:]

Statement of Lyle Lavery, Associate Deputy Chief and National Fire Plan Coordinator, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about the implementation of the National Fire Plan. I am Lyle Lavery, Associate Deputy Chief and National Fire Plan Coordinator of the Forest Service. I am here today to bring you up to date on what has been accomplished thus far and what we plan to do next.

The severe fire season of 2000 captured the attention of the American people on the need to find ways to protect life and property and minimize losses of natural resources. On September 8, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior issued a report entitled, "Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment. The report, referred to as the National Fire Plan, contains recommendations to reduce the impacts of wildland fires on rural communities and ensure sufficient firefighting resources in the future.

Mr. Chairman, implementation of the National Fire Plan is well underway and significant progress has been made. However, we recognize that there are many challenges to complete the significantly increased workload. Long-term, it is going to take many years and a continued commitment in resources to effectively reduce the impacts of wildland fire on rural communities.

Even though it is early in the year, we have made a good start with the following:

- Treated over 80,000 acres, 713 miles of roads and 245 miles of trails to restore and rehabilitate areas damaged during the 2000 fire season.
- Reduced hazardous fuel on over 400,000 acres of the 1.8 million acres we plan to treat this year.
- Hired over 850 new permanent fire personnel and expect to have another 1900 (650 permanent, 1250 temporary) hired by April 30, 2001 along with planning to acquire 412 fire engines and the services of an additional 47 contracted helicopters to provide the highest practical level of firefighting capability.
- Initiated assistance for training and equipment for 4000 volunteer fire departments.
- Published a preliminary list of communities at risk prepared by the States and Tribes to ensure that we increase the focus of our future efforts on reducing fire risk in the areas adjacent to these communities.
- Started 63 research projects to increase scientific knowledge in support of the National Fire Plan.
- Initiated discussions on a framework and draft of the national ten-year comprehensive strategy for the National Fire Plan.

Before I talk more about our accomplishments and our planned actions let me explain how conditions on our forests and rangelands developed the level of uncharacteristic fire risk that exists today.

BACKGROUND

Fire conditions

Decades of excluding fire from our forests and past management practices have drastically changed the ecological condition of western forests and rangelands and dramatically affected fire behavior. A century ago, when low intensity, high frequency fires were commonplace, many forests were less dense and had larger, more fire-resistant trees. Over time, the composition of our forests has changed from more fire-resistant tree species to species non-resistant to fire such as grand fir, Douglas-fir, and subalpine fir.

Fire ecologists point out the paradox of fire suppression: the more effective we become at fire suppression, the more fuels accumulate and ultimately create conditions for the occurrence of more intense fires. As it became Federal practice to extinguish fires aggressively in the west, firefighting budgets rose dramatically and firefighting tactics and equipment became increasingly more sophisticated and effective. In the early 1930s the annual acreage burned by wildfires in the lower 48 states was about 40 million acres a year. In the 1970s because of our effective fire suppression the annual acreage burned by wildfires in the lower 48 states dropped to about five million acres. In the 1990's, the annual average acreage burned by wildfires was less than 4 million acres.

In addition to changes in tree species and ecological conditions of forests and grasslands more communities are at risk of wildfire than in earlier years. During the last two decades dramatic increases in the population in the West has resulted in housing developments in fire-prone areas, often adjacent to Federal land. This area where human development meets or intermingles with undeveloped wildland is called the "wildland-urban interface."

Reversing the effects of a century of aggressive fire suppression and past management practices will take time and money targeted to high priority areas to protect people, communities, readily accessible municipal watersheds, and habitat for threatened and endangered species. Although not all areas will need to be treated, the Forest Service and the General Accounting Office have estimated that there are around 60 million acres at risk of uncharacteristic wildfire in the interior West and more than 72 million acres nationwide. Many of these acres are not in the wildland-urban interface and include acres distant from habitation.

The Forest Service and its interagency partners have increased their efforts to reduce risks associated with the buildup of brush, shrubs, small trees and other fuels in forest and rangelands through a variety of approaches, including controlled burns, the physical removal of undergrowth, and the prevention and eradication of invasive plants. In 1994 the Forest Service treated approximately 385,000 acres across the United States to reduce hazardous fuels. In 2000 we treated over 750,000 acres almost double our earlier efforts.

Addressing fire conditions: The key points of the National Fire Plan

To address these changed conditions the recommendations in "Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment" and actions implementing the National Fire Plan focus on five key points:

- **Firefighting.** Be adequately prepared to fight wildland fire.
- **Rehabilitation and Restoration.** Restore landscapes and rebuild communities damaged by the wildfires of 2000.
- **Hazardous Fuel Reduction.** Invest in projects to reduce fire risk.
- **Community Assistance.** Work directly with communities to ensure adequate protection.
- **Accountability.** Be accountable and establish adequate oversight, coordination, program development, and monitoring for performance.

The report also recommended substantial increases in funding for the land management agencies to address the five key points.

In response to the recommendations in the Report, Congress and the Administration increased funding for agency firefighting, fuels reduction, and other fire-related programs. We appreciate the quick and decisive actions of Congress and the Administration to fully fund the fire budgets for both the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior. (See Appendix A.)

The Conference Report for P.L. 106-291 contains explicit direction for the implementation of the National Fire Plan. The Appropriations conferees directed the agencies to work closely with State and local communities to maximize benefits to the environment and to local communities. They directed the agencies to seek the advice of the State Governors and local and tribal government representatives in setting priorities for fuels treatments, burned area rehabilitation and public outreach and education. The Appropriations conferees also directed the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to work together to formulate complementary budget requests and to carry out the other tasks, including developing criteria for rehabilitation projects, developing a list of all communities within the vicinity of Federal lands at high risk from fire, and working collaboratively with the State Governors to develop a 10-year comprehensive strategy. (See Appendix B.)

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE NATIONAL FIRE PLAN

Implementation of the National Fire Plan is well underway. Since the very beginning we have worked collaboratively with Department of the Interior agencies, the Governors, State Foresters, tribal governments and county officials.

Our implementation efforts focus on addressing the five key points of the National Fire Plan. The status of our actions include the following:

Firefighting readiness

We are focusing on increasing firefighting capability and capacity for initial attack, extended attack, and large fire support. We believe our efforts will keep a number of small fires from becoming large, better protect natural resources, reduce threat to adjacent communities, and reduce the cost of large fire suppression.

The expanded capacity will be used in a manner consistent with our knowledge and experience of the causes of fire risks. The agency will be guided by fire management plans that we intend to have updated and completed by the end of 2001.

To date the Forest Service has hired over 850 new permanent fire personnel and plan to hire a total of over 2,750 (1500 permanent, 1250 temporary) to provide the highest practical level of protection efficiency. This will include twelve new hotshot crews for a national total of 74 crews. We plan to acquire an additional 412 fire engines and have contracts for an additional 47 helicopters for a total of 106 helicopters and 40 fixed-wing aircraft. In addition we will have another 500 aircraft available through "call when needed" contracts. We are also in the process of awarding the retardant contract for 2001–2003 to ensure adequate supplies.

In addition, we will construct several new fire facilities and increase the level of maintenance on existing fire facilities to support initial attack. This construction includes projects such as a new airtanker base and national fire cache in Silver City, New Mexico, new hotshot crew housing in Ft. Collins, Colorado, and a new helitack base in Price Valley, Idaho.

The agency is also investing in applied research to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and safety of the national firefighting effort. In addition to the progress made in the Forest Service research and development program, the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) has been increased. This additional applied research and development will assess fire behavior and fire restoration techniques during and immediately after fire events; upgrade aircraft-based tools for monitoring fire behavior; increase understanding about post-fire conditions, fire effects, and the effectiveness of past land management treatments; and establish protocols for evaluating rehabilitation measures. The Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior have also established a stakeholder advisory committee to advise the JFSP Governing Board. The committee plans to hold its first meeting in April.

Rehabilitation and restoration

We are focusing rehabilitation efforts on restoring watershed function, including protection of basic soil, water resources, biological communities, and prevention of invasive species in priority watersheds. Healthy, diverse ecosystems are resilient and less likely to produce uncharacteristically intense fires when they burn.

Burned area emergency rehabilitation (BAER) teams mobilized after the 2006 fire season. Plans were developed and approved for over \$40.8 million of emergency stabilization for 235 projects on moderately and severely burned National Forest System lands. Most of the emergency treatments were completed before winter, including 62,000 acres of grass seeding, 3,606 acres of mulching, 17,886 acres of intensive log and wattle erosion barriers, and drainage improvements on 713 miles of roads and 245 miles of trail. For example:

- In Idaho, 650 acres were seeded, 242 acres intensively mulched, and erosion control barriers installed on 3,157 acres on the Trail Creek fire on the Boise NF.
- In Montana, drainage was improved on 410 miles of road and 4,732 acres of intensive erosion control barriers were installed on the Skalkaho-Valley fire on the Bitterroot NF.
- In California, 890 acres were seeded and 200 acres intensively mulched on the Manter fire on the Sequoia NF.
- In New Mexico, 13,500 acres were seeded, 3,070 acres intensively mulched, and 5,170 acres of erosion control barriers installed for the Cerro Grande fire on the Santa Fe NF.
- In Colorado, 1,000 acres of mulch and erosion barriers are being installed on the Bobcat burn.

The remaining acres will be treated as soon as the land is accessible this spring.

In addition, long-term rehabilitation and restoration on over 400 projects is currently underway. These activities will include reforestation, replacement or repair of minor facilities, treatment of invasive species (including noxious weeds) resulting from fire, survey and monitor impacts to wilderness, survey and rehabilitate impacted heritage resources, reconstruct fencing, restore critical habitat and restore impacted trails.

We are also conducting additional research in rehabilitation and restoration methods. One example is research at Rocky Mountain Research Station quantifying the soil and water quality consequences of catastrophic fire, using the Cerro Grande and other southwestern fires as study sites.

Hazardous fuel reduction

We are focusing hazardous fuels reduction projects in communities at risk, readily accessible municipal watersheds, threatened and endangered species habitat, and

other important local areas, where conditions favor uncharacteristically intense fires. We will remove excessive vegetation and dead fuels through thinning, prescribed fire, and other treatment methods.

Following Congressional direction we asked State, local and tribal governments, and interested parties to identify urban wildland interface communities within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior published a preliminary list in the *Federal Register* on January 4, 2001. The States and Tribes each developed criteria for selecting communities that resulted in some States listing numerous communities and others listing only a few. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior have asked the Governors and the National Association of State Foresters to help the Federal Agencies to work with Tribes, States, local governments, and other interested parties to develop a national list based on uniform criteria.

We have completed hazardous fuel reduction on over 400,000 acres of the 1.8 million acres that are planned for treatment this fiscal year. Many of these projects focus on wildland-urban interface areas. In the future, we intend to focus the majority of this work on wildland-urban interface areas where hazardous fuel conditions exist near communities.

In addition to work on Federal lands, we will also provide technical and financial support to State and local fire departments to implement 329 projects to improve conditions on wildland-urban interface areas on non-federal lands. The States will also be implementing projects in impacted areas using the Community and Private Land Fire Assistance funding.

Research is also focusing on hazardous fuels projects. An example is work to characterize and map vegetation and fuels from remote sensed data to locate urban interface areas exposed to high fire potential. These methods will be helpful in prioritizing investments in fuels treatment.

Our success in accomplishing hazardous fuel reduction objectives will be largely dependent on focusing our treatments in the areas of greatest need. Our goal is to do this efficiently and with the least amount of controversy, getting the most amount of high-priority work done. Protecting communities and restoring forests represents the sort of win-win solution that will allow us to build a strong constituency for ecologically sensible active management.

Community assistance

We are assisting State and local partners by providing funding assistance to rural and volunteer fire departments and through programs such as FIREWISE to educate homeowners to take actions to reduce fire risk to homes and private property.

We plan to expand community assistance to rural volunteer fire departments to increase local firefighting capacity. Rural and volunteer fire departments provide the front line of defense, or initial attack, for up to 90 percent of communities. Strong readiness capability at the State and local levels goes hand-in-hand with optimal efficiency at the Federal level. We will increase our assistance for training and equipment to 4,000 volunteer fire departments in high-risk areas.

The Forest Service has been working with the State and private landowners, the National Fire Protection Association, and local firefighting organizations to help ensure that home protection capabilities are improved and to educate homeowners in fire-sensitive ecosystems about the consequences of wildfires. Also homeowners are being taught techniques in community planning, homebuilding, and landscaping to protect themselves and their property. Efforts include FIREWISE and other high priority prevention and mitigation education programs, as well as fuels reduction, defensible space development, and community hazard mitigation on non-federal lands.

We expect implementation of the National Fire Plan can create over 8,000 new jobs in rural areas and provide economic opportunities for rural forest dependent communities.

We are also beginning research to test the effectiveness of different models of collaboration, education, and community actions and to compare different local regulatory and incentive-based policies for encouraging residents to adopt FIREWISE practices. These new efforts will provide useful insights and guidelines for implementing effective community-level programs for wildfire protection.

Accountability

The agency is working to establish adequate oversight, coordination, program development, and monitoring for National Fire Plan performance to ensure accountability.

A key component in ensuring accountability is tracking funding and accomplishments. In keeping with Congressional reporting requirements, the Forest Service is

finalizing a database to track projects funded by Title IV funds. It will include project accomplishments and funding for work in hazardous fuels reduction, rehabilitation, and community assistance. Once it is fully operational—which is planned for the end of this month—we will be able to report, for example, numbers and types of rehabilitation work being done in a particular national forest, congressional district, or state.

Of course, the Forest Service must be accountable for all funding. In Fiscal Year 2000, obligations in the Wildland Fire Management Appropriation totaled \$1.5 billion, exceeding available funds by \$274 million. An anti-deficiency report was sent to President Clinton and members of Congress as required by law. This violation was caused by delays in entering suppression costs into the agency financial system. The agency is conducting an intensive Anti-Deficiency Act violation review to more fully determine the specific causes and implement procedures to prevent a recurrence.

Another recent development associated with the implementation of the National Fire Plan is the “Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.” The Review and Update was completed in January 2001 in response to a request from the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior. The working team concluded that the 1995 Federal Fire Policy is generally sound, but that some changes and additions are needed to address issues such as fire planning, program management and oversight, and program evaluation.

If you refer to the list of Reporting Requirements in Appendix B, you will see the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior have accomplished several other important tasks and reported to Congress in a timely manner. These include a report on criteria for rehabilitation projects; a report on the need for revised or expedited environmental compliance procedures; and a financial plan and an action plan showing how agencies will spend the emergency funds.

NEXT STEPS

The following are the next immediate actions to be taken by the Forest Service to continue implementation of the National Fire Plan:

- Complete the fuels management projects underway and continue planning for 2002 focusing fuels treatments in urban interface communities where they are most likely to reduce risk effectively.
- Continue work on a long-term strategy for the National Fire Plan (2002–2010) in collaboration with Governors and other stakeholders.
- Complete the hiring of new fire personnel to produce an extremely high level of firefighting capability.
- Complete analysis of fire risk and integrate with other resource information to prioritize treatment areas.

We will continue to provide timely information to Congress and other interested parties about the National Fire Plan.

SUMMARY

Mr. Chairman, my staff and I will continue to work closely with the Department of the Interior Team to work with communities to restore and maintain healthy ecosystems and to minimize the losses from future wildfires on National Forest System lands, other Federal, State, Tribal, and privately-owned lands. Our successes to date—beginning to define the wildland-urban interface communities, hiring firefighters for the 2001 fire season, and ongoing rehabilitation, restoration, FIREWISE education work—is evidence of the strong start. However, our continued success will depend on what happens this field season.

We are committed to increasing the Nation’s firefighting capability and ability to protect communities and restore resources, but it will take longer than one year.

This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the Members of the Subcommittee might have.

**Appendix A. National Fire Plan Funding, USDA Forest Service
FY 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, P.L. 106-291**

Programs	Amount	Description of Activities to be Accomplished
Title II Preparedness and Firefighting		
Fire Preparedness:	174,761,000	Bring fire readiness up to optimal level of efficiency.
Fire Workforce Development and Maintenance	16,963,000	Develop and maintain adequate workforce for fire management.
New Technology Development, including the JFSP	15,965,000	Develop new fire management technology and emphasize the continued implementation of the Joint Fire Science Program.
Subtotal, Preparedness	207,689,000	
Emergency Fire Contingency	275,393,000	Provide necessary funds for fire suppression activities and restore unmet FY 2000 expenditures.
Subtotal, Title II	483,082,000	
Title IV Emergency Contingency Funds		
Suppression	178,606,000	Provide necessary funds for fire suppression activities.
Hazardous Fuel Reduction:	88,280,000	Reduce hazardous fuel accumulation on 1.8 million acres in high-risk areas, primarily on Federal lands.
Analysis, monitoring, and planning for NEPA	11,500,000	Conduct planning, analysis, and monitoring for National Environmental Policy Act requirements.
Community Forestry Restoration in New Mexico	4,989,000	
Quincy Library Group	14,967,000	Implement the Quincy Library Group Plan.
Subtotal, Hazardous Fuel Reduction	119,736,000	
Cooperative Programs:		
Cooperative Fire Protection:		
State Fire Assistance:		
Preparedness	10,832,000	Improve state fire readiness to complement Federal capability.
Firewise	3,200,000	Provide fire prevention education to improve community and homeowner readiness to prepare for wildland fires.
Hazard Mitigation and Prevention	28,868,000	Reduce hazardous fuel accumulation on 395,000 acres in high-risk areas and develop defensible space for improved fire protection.
Kenai Peninsula Borough	7,483,000	Improve forest health and fire protection capability as outlined in the spruce bark beetle task force action plan.
Subtotal, State Fire Assistance	50,383,000	
Volunteer Fire Assistance	8,262,000	Equip and train 4,000 rural volunteer fire departments to improve the fire protection readiness capability of local communities.
Subtotal, Cooperative Fire Protection	58,645,000	
Forest Health Management (invasive species)	11,974,000	Reduce the spread of invasive species due to fires.
Economic Action Programs	12,472,000	Expand and develop markets for woods products resulting from fuel removal.
Community and Private Land Fire Assistance:		
Fence Reconstruction	8,980,000	Reconstruct fire damaged fences in the Western States.
Hazard Mitigation	5,987,000	Reduce hazardous fuel accumulation in high-risk areas and develop defensible space for improved fire protection.
Multi-resource Stewardship Planning	6,985,000	Finance multi-resource stewardship planning to ensure effective fire protection treatments in the wildland-urban interface.
Economic Action Programs Pilot Projects	7,982,000	Initiate pilot projects for improved utilization of removed fuel, including biomass conversion.
Community Planning for Fire Protection	4,989,000	Support community planning to develop and maintain protection capabilities in high-risk areas in the wildland-urban interface.
Subtotal, Community and Private Land Fire Assistance	34,923,000	
Subtotal, Cooperative Programs	118,014,000	
Rehabilitation and Restoration	141,688,000	Restore and rehabilitate burned areas.
Research and Development	15,965,000	Conduct research on fuels management treatments and their effects on fire behavior and damage.
Facilities:		
Reconstruction and Repair of Air Tanker Bases	11,973,000	Reconstruct and repair of air tanker bases.
Reconstruction and Repair of Fire Facilities	31,930,000	Reconstruct and repair of fire facilities.
Subtotal, Facilities	43,903,000	
Subtotal, Title IV	617,912,000	
Total	\$1,100,994,000	

Appendix B. Congressional Reporting Requirements

Date	Department Agency	Congressional Reporting Requirements	Product	Status
11/13/00	USFS	Within 30 days publish FS Cohesive Strategy in Federal Register	Publish Cohesive Strategy	Complete 11/09/00
12/01/00	DoI/USDA	Report to the Appropriations Committee on criteria for rehabilitation projects to be funded from this appropriation	Report on Rehabilitation Project Criteria	Complete 11/29/00
12/11/00	DoI/USDA/CEQ	Evaluate the need for revised or expedited environmental compliance procedures including preparation of documentation required by NEPA	Report on Compliance with Laws Requiring Clearance	Complete 12/11/00
12/11/00	DoI/USDA	Publish, within 60 days, a list of all communities within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at "high risk" from wildfire, including communities around which treatments are on-going; and around which the Secretaries are preparing to begin treatments in 2001	Listing of Communities in high-risk areas	Complete; 1/04/01
12/31/00	DoI/USDA	The managers are concerned that nearly three years have passed without establishment of the Stakeholder Advisory Group, a group of technical experts to advise the Joint Fire Science Program Governing Board. The managers direct the Secretaries to establish the group.	Establish Science Stakeholder Advisory Committee. (FACA approval needed)	Complete 1/18/01
01/01/01	DoI/USDA	Prior to issuance of the record of decision for the Interior Columbia River Basin Ecosystem Management Project, report to Congress on: the fire's effects on the project area, and the significance of the President's fire report on the project area (Gen. Provision #332).	ICBEMP Fire Report	Underway
01/09/01	DoI/USDA	Within 90 days, deliver a financial plan showing how the agencies intend to spend all of the funds included under Title IV.	Financial Plan	Complete 1/19/01
01/09/01	DoI/USDA	Within 90 days deliver an action plan describing proposed accomplishments by funding; estimates of the number of personnel to be hired; description of equipment to be purchased and/or leased; description of services to be contracted; description of research projects funded by unit; estimate of acres to be treated by treatment type; estimate of treatments in the WUI; and, the estimate of rural communities assisted by state.	Action Plan	Complete 1/19/01
02/01/01	DoI/USDA	Show planned and actual funding and accomplishments for stabilization and rehabilitation activities in the 2002 budget request.	2002 Budget Justification	Underway
05/01/01	DoI/USDA	Publish in the Fed. Reg. A list of all communities at "high risk" from wildfire for which treatments will not have been implemented during 2001; identify reason why; and, recommend any additional fund or authority needs.	Report to Congress on High Risk Communities; Impediments to Success	Underway
05/01/01	DoI/USDA	Secretaries are to engage Governors in a collaborative structure to cooperatively develop a coordinated, national 10-year comprehensive strategy. States are to be full partners in the planning, decision-making and implementation of the plan.	Collaborative structure, strategy with states	Underway
12/31/01	DoI/USDA	With 90 days following the end of FY01, provide a report on: an update financial report showing final expenditures; an updated action report showing final accomplishments	Performance Report	To be completed

Charts and Pictures

for
“The Implementation of the National Fire Plan”

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Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives
March 8, 2001

National Fire Plan



5 Key Points:

- Firefighting
- Rehabilitation/Restoration
- Hazardous Fuels Reduction
- Community Assistance
- Accountability

Firefighting



Department of
The Interior

Forest Service

Positions, FY 2000 5,087 7,691

Positions Added, FY 2001 1,738 2,792

Total Positions, FY 2001 6,825 10,483

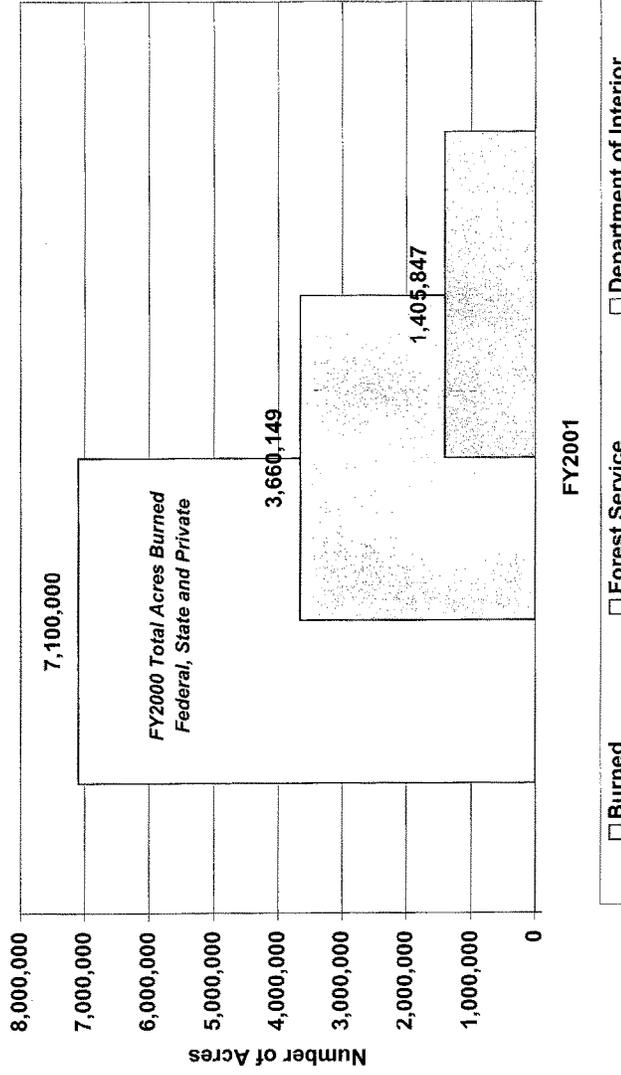
Rehabilitation/Restoration



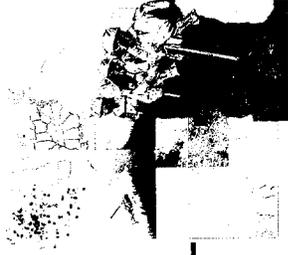
Department of
The Interior Forest Service

FY 2001
Planned Treatment Acres 1,405,847 3,660,149

Rehabilitation and Restoration Acreage



Hazardous Fuel Reduction



Department of
The Interior Forest Service

Treatment Acres, FY2000:	502,767	772,375
Treatment Acres, FY2001:	1,387,085	1,800,000
<small>(estimates)</small>		
Cost Share		
Non-Federal Acres, FY2001:		400,000

Bitterroot Valley Photo Point
Montana

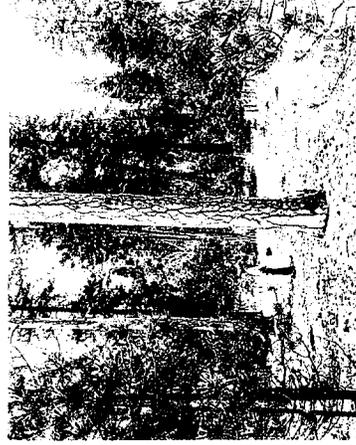
1871



1982



Lick Creek
Bitterroot National Forest, Montana
1909 - 1989



Community Assistance



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	Department of The Interior	Forest Service
Rural / Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	830	4000
Total		4,830

Accountability



- Financial/Action Plan
- Accomplishment Tracking
- Performance Standards
- Program Reviews

Mr. MCINNIS. Thank you.
Mr. Hartzell?

**STATEMENT OF TIM HARTZELL, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF
WILDLAND AND FIRE COORDINATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
THE INTERIOR**

Mr. HARTZELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Tim Hartzell, and I am the Director of the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination in the Department of Interior. I really appreciate this opportunity to address the Committee concerning a natural resource effort that is, frankly, historic in its scope and unprecedented in both its innovation and collaboration, that is, implementation of the National Fire Plan.

I am pleased to report to you that the Department of Interior firefighting agencies have already made significant and substantial progress in responding to the mandate and opportunity that Congress has given us in the appropriation language for Fiscal Year 2001 to minimize the occurrence of another fire season such as 2000, to lessen the danger to communities at risk, and to restore ecosystems and the natural role of fire, to protect our critical natural resources, and, most important, to keep our firefighters and public safe.

We are pleased to speak to you about this historic initiative that is truly a new approach to solving resource management problems. The key to our initial success has been in our openness and our desire to work with States, local governments, and others as full and equal partners in identifying and finding solutions to problems. I certainly hope that this is a clear message that you hear throughout our testimony.

At this time I would like to forego the balance of my submitted testimony so that my colleague and I can focus on the critical actions that we have completed to date under the National Fire Plan and talk to you about future actions and opportunities under the plan.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hartzell follows:]

**Statement of Tim Hartzell, Director, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination,
U.S. Department of the Interior**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee concerning a natural resource effort that is historic in its scope and presents a unique challenge, implementation of the National Fire Plan. My name is Tim Hartzell and I am the Director of the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination for the Department of the Interior. I am pleased to report that the Department of the Interior firefighting agencies have made substantial progress in responding to the mandate that Congress gave us in the appropriation language for FY 2001 to minimize the severity of another fire season such as we had in 2000, lessen the dangers to communities at risk, restore ecosystems and the natural role of fire, protect our critical natural resources, and most important, keep our firefighters and the public safe.

Background

The 2000 fire season was long, stubborn, volatile and widespread. The fire season started on January 1st, when a small blaze ignited near Ft. Myers, Florida, and lasted well into the fall. As late as December, more than 14,000 acres burned east of San Diego, California, destroying fourteen structures.

In total, almost 93,000 wildland fires burned close to 7.4 million acres. While neither the number of fires nor the number of acres approached all-time records, the

conditions, fire behavior and potential for an even more explosive season were perhaps unparalleled in the last fifty years. The intensity of the fires was the result of two primary factors: a severe drought, accompanied by a series of storms that produced millions of lightning strikes and windy conditions, and the long-term effects of more than a century of aggressively suppressing all wildfires, which has led to an unnatural buildup of brush and small trees in our forests and on our rangelands.

The 2000 fire season also caught the attention of the public. In early August, President Clinton visited a battalion of soldiers from Ft. Hood, Texas, pressed into duty as firefighters on the Burgdorf Junction Fire, near McCall, Idaho. During that trip, President Clinton asked the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to develop recommendations on how to reduce the impacts of fire on rural communities and ensure sufficient firefighting resources for the future. On September 8th, the Secretaries responded with a report entitled, "Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment: A Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000," also known as the "National Fire Plan."

The National Fire Plan recommended that the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior seek an increased appropriation for fire management, and do several things:

- Continue to make all necessary firefighting resources available.
- Restore landscapes and rebuild communities.
- Invest in projects to reduce fire risk.
- Work directly with communities.
- Be accountable.

We are grateful that Congress took quick and decisive action once the report was issued. As a result, the wildland fire budgets for both the Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture were substantially increased for FY 2001.

At present, we are concentrating our efforts in the Department of the Interior on three main areas: tire preparedness, fire operations, and assistance to rural fire districts. Later in my statement, I will detail some of the steps that have been taken and will be taken in the coming months to address these three critical areas.

Accomplishments to date

The FY 2001 appropriation provided an injection of critically needed support and funding for wildland fire and resource management. Although the agencies have managed wildland fire in the past as efficiently and safely as possible, the FY 2001 appropriation provided a much needed boost to ensure that adequate resources are available in the face of today's significant fire and resource management issues, such as rangeland and forest health, the increasing size and intensity of wildland fire that is resulting from much of the land's unhealthy state, and the ever-expanding wildland-urban interface. Late in 2000, the Department of the Interior and the USDA Forest Service began implementation of the National Fire Plan by detailing support, direction and funding for wildland firefighting agencies to better manage fire and resources on the land. An interagency steering group convened with representatives and leads from each Federal wildland firefighting agency, including DOI's Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and USDA's Forest Service. Each of these agencies developed an agency-specific National Fire Plan implementation strategy to provide field personnel with procedural guidance.

The National Fire Plan is founded on a long history of cooperation among firefighting agencies. Its long-term success depends on cooperation and collaboration among Federal agency partners, Tribal, State, county and local governments, contractors and other service providers, and users of Federally-owned land. As soon as agencies received the FY 2001 budget, National Fire Plan leads from the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior met with such partners as the National Association of State Foresters, the Western Governor's Association, and the National Association of Counties, to discuss the ramifications of the FY 2001 appropriations.

Within weeks of the passage of the FY 2001 Appropriations Act, requests for pertinent data and status reports were sent to the field to determine staffing, rural fire district, and planning needs, and to determine which hazardous fuels treatment projects are ready for implementation in FY 2001 and which remain in the planning stages. Deferred maintenance and capital improvement projects were prioritized and allocated, and project tracking systems were developed. Weekly interagency and agency meetings, satellite broadcasts and information bulletins help coordinate efforts and disseminate information throughout the agencies.

In January 2001, the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service issued the "Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy."

This report came in response to a request from the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior. The National Fire Plan is built upon the foundation and framework of the Review and Update. The Review was conducted by 14 Federal agencies and the National Association of State Foresters, who concluded:

- The 1995 Fire Policy is still sound, but additional emphasis is recommended on science, outreach and education, restoration, and program evaluation.
- The fire hazard situation is worse than predicted in 1995.
- The scope of the Urban Wildland fuels hazard problem is even more complex and extensive than predicted in 1995.
- Additional research is needed on the effectiveness of different fuels treatment options, and post-fire rehabilitation activities.
- Additional collaboration and integration of all Federal agencies with land management responsibility as well as non-Federal agencies is needed.

The National Fire Plan addresses these concerns by:

- Increasing fuels hazard treatment activities for DOI to a planned target of 1.4 million acres of Federal land in FY 2001. This represents an increase from an average of 800,000 acres of fuels treatment activities.
- Increasing on-the-ground fuels hazard reduction work in FY 2001 around a greater number of vulnerable communities, and by developing a collaborative partnership with the State Foresters and others to design a long-term fuels treatment strategy in the Urban Wildland interface.
- Increasing research in: (a) the economic and environmental consequences of fuels treatment alternatives in a variety of fuels types across the country; (b) the effectiveness of post fire rehabilitation techniques including the control of noxious weeds and invasive species.
- Increasing outreach and partnership activities with the Western Governors' Association, the National Association of Counties, Tribes, other Federal partners, and nongovernmental organizations in designing a 10-year strategy to restore health to fire adapted ecosystems and a plan of action to implement the NFP.

Also in January 2001, the Department of the Interior completed an action plan to implement the National Fire Plan. This action plan contains proposed accomplishments for FY 2001 in wildland fire preparedness, operations, and rural fire assistance. It addresses actions needed to implement the National Fire Plan, including:

- Hiring additional personnel and obtaining needed equipment.
- Completing deferred maintenance and construction.
- Enhancing fire science work.
- Planning and implementing hazardous fuels treatments.
- Planning and implementing burned area rehabilitation.
- A financial plan for complying with Title IV of the 2001 Appropriation Act.

We divided our accomplishments under the National Fire Plan into the three key areas: fire preparedness, fire operations, and rural fire district assistance.

Fire preparedness

Wildland fire preparedness provides agencies with the capability to prevent, detect and take prompt, effective initial attack suppression action on wildland fires. Preparedness includes staffing, aircraft and equipment, maintenance and construction, fire science and research, and the associated Federal acquisition practices.

Interior and Forest Service personnel have been working together to create consistency in position classifications. Outreach and recruitment to obtain diverse, well-qualified candidates began in December 2000 to fill firefighter, fire manager and support positions, and for fire and fuels specialists. Many of these positions have been advertised jointly and centrally to eliminate duplication of effort and to streamline the application process.

We are contracting for the use of an additional 16 aircraft, and we purchased equipment, including 40 new heavy engines, 43 light engine upgrades, 14 crew carriers for Hot Shot crews, 7 water tenders, 5 helitack trucks, and 3 dozers and lowboys. Although this equipment has been purchased in 2001, some of it will not be delivered until 2002.

Within the Department of the Interior agencies, 50 fire facilities require maintenance or construction. These projects have been prioritized and the funding has been allocated.

The Joint Fire Science Program, a six agency partnership to address wildland fuels issues, was established in 1998 to fill the gaps in knowledge about wildland fire and fuels. The purpose of the Program is to provide wildland fire and fuels in-

formation and tools to specialists and managers who make wildland fuels management decisions. The information and tools will also help agencies develop sound, scientifically-based land use and activity plans. The Joint Fire Science Program will fund important new research to explore effective methods of mapping and treating fuels. The program will also direct a significant portion of funding to answer questions about important regional or local suppression, fuels management and rehabilitation needs. The Department of the Interior and the Forest Service recently issued a request for proposals for fire science projects. We expect new proposals to focus on the feasibility of developing a locally-based biomass conversion industry. Other proposals will examine carbon storage, soil compaction, water quality, and habitat as they relate to fuels treatments. We have also requested proposals to determine the cumulative effects of fuels manipulation on fire behavior and severity, wildlife populations, and habitat structure. In addition, on January 18, 2001, we established the Joint Fire Science Program Stakeholder Advisory Group under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The purpose of the Group is to advise and assist the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, through the Joint Fire Science Program Governing Board, on priorities and strategies for completing wildland fire and fuels research and implementing research findings.

The National Fire Plan calls for a dramatic increase in the amount of fuels reduction and fuels management work, and much of this work is targeted for completion by independent contractors or through service agreements. In December 2000, an interagency team of contract and fuels specialists met in Boise, Idaho, and developed model contracts and agreements that agencies will use for fuels reduction, rehabilitation and restoration projects, and model grants and cooperative agreements to assist communities and rural fire departments. We created a web site that houses these model contracts so that each field office can access them easily, saving valuable time and effort, and increasing consistency among agencies.

Although fuels management by contract has grown over the last 10 years, there is still a need to foster growth in the number of contractors available. A primary focus of the 2001 appropriation is to facilitate awards to firms that will hire locally. Although the term "local" is undefined, managers and contracting personnel will emphasize the use of sealed bid awards to firms that are in closer proximity to project work and best value awards to firms that commit to specific plans to hire local workers.

The interagency contract and agreement team has developed an outreach plan that will:

- Locate firms that are not currently active in bidding or proposing on Government procurement for fuels management contracts.
- Introduce local independent contractors to the benefits of contracting for this type of work with the Government.
- Encourage continued participation by firms that currently have fuels management contracts.

Fire operations

Wildland fire operations include suppression, burned area rehabilitation and fuels management, including fuels reduction in wildland-urban interface areas that pose a risk to people, property and natural resources. To better facilitate these operations, several steps have been taken:

First, a list of communities most at risk from wildland fire in the wildland-urban interface (discussed in more detail later in this testimony) and hazardous fuels reduction projects within and around those communities has been developed. Work is continuing to refine the criteria and the list of communities at risk.

Second, a cohesive fuels management strategy has been drafted that will provide a broad, national framework for Interior agencies to ensure:

- Effective collaboration among Federal agencies, Tribal, State and local governments and other stakeholders.
- Alignment of all program areas to prevent further degradation, and to work toward the common goal of reducing unnaturally intense wildland fire.
- Integration of fire and resource management within and across all agencies.

Third, on February 7th, Secretary Norton approved the release of \$4 million to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$2 million to the National Marine Fisheries Service, needed to perform consultations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for work identified by DOI. This money will facilitate consultation for critical hazardous fuels treatment projects as implementation of the National Fire Plan progresses.

Finally, both Departments are engaged with the Governors, Tribes, non-governmental organizations and others in an active and open partnership to develop a ten-

year comprehensive strategy to implement collaboratively the National Fire Plan and to begin to effectively and efficiently manage the nation's hazardous fuels situation. This ten-year strategy will unify State, Tribal, and Federal efforts to cooperate across jurisdictions, coordinate activities and maximize capabilities to reduce the impacts of wildfires on communities and the environment.

Rural fire department assistance (RFDA)

The 2001 budget appropriation provided \$10 million to the Department of the Interior for a new program to enhance the wildland fire protection capabilities of rural fire departments (RFD). In December 2000, representatives from each of the Interior agencies met and developed basic selection criteria for the distribution of these grant funds. Grants will be limited to \$20,000 per RFD, and the RFDs that apply will be reviewed for criteria that include:

- Having an agreement in place with the State Forester or an Interior agency.
- Serving a community with a population of less than 10,000, in the wildland-urban interface.
- Using funding only for training, equipment and prevention.
- Sharing a minimum of 10 percent of the total cost.

An Interior work group was formed to develop an interagency agreement/contract which will be used by field offices to facilitate the transfer of funds to rural fire departments. A draft of this document is currently undergoing field review and will be finalized in the next few weeks.

The money for RFDA has been allocated by each Interior Bureau to field offices, and fire managers are working with partners at the local and regional levels to establish priorities and to allocate available funds.

Communities-at-risk

The Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior were asked in the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations Act (Public Law 106-291) to publish jointly in the Federal Register a list of all wildland-urban interface communities that are at high risk from wildfire.

The list was published in the Federal Register on January 4, 2001. Communities on the list were proposed by States, Tribes and local governments. The criteria for listing varied from State-to-State, which explains why some States listed hundreds of communities, while others submitted a much smaller list. The list also identifies communities with ongoing fuels treatment projects and those with projects planned for FY 2001. A total of 37 States participated and more than 4,500 communities were listed. Since then, four more States have submitted their lists, and the total number of communities has grown to more than 6,400. We appreciate the work that went into the list, especially the work performed by the State Foresters and Tribes.

Developing the list of communities was only part of the Federal Register notice published on January 4. The notice also provided a definition of wildland-urban interface, and included suggested criteria for categorizing interface communities and evaluating the risk to those communities. The January 4 list is a starting point. It needs to be refined, possibly narrowed, and focused so that we can set treatment priorities for the coming years. The list of communities far exceeds our hazardous fuel reduction capabilities.

Revising the list is a formidable task. Working closely with the Western Governors' Association, we have developed a process to address this daunting task. Some communities are much more vulnerable to wildland fire than others. Our next task becomes one of identifying, again in collaboration with our Tribal, State and local partners, the communities in the vicinity of Federal lands that are most at risk, which are the places where we will begin hazardous fuels reduction work. The results of this effort will be published in the Federal Register later this spring. The Federal Register Notice will identify the full extent of the high-risk wildland urban interface problem along with communities where hazardous fuels reduction treatments will not be planned, and the reasons why.

The revised lists of communities at risk in each State will be developed by an interagency team consisting of representatives of the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, State Foresters, and Tribes. Representatives from other Federal agencies such as the Departments of Energy and Defense will be included where appropriate. Others who may be invited to participate include representatives of county government, local fire response organizations, State emergency management offices, and community forestry organizations. A specific process for refining the urban wildland communities list has been developed by the Forest Service, the Department of the Interior, and the National Association of State Foresters. We envision that these teams will continue and will serve the long-term goals of identi-

fyng, prioritizing and implementing fuels treatment projects, to ensure that the long-term needs of communities vulnerable to wildland fire are addressed.

Existing project proposals in these identified urban wildland communities that have approved plans and completed environmental compliance will have the highest priority for fuels treatment, and work is already underway in many of these communities. DOI's projects will cover about 300,000 acres. Additional projects that can be readied for implementation this Fiscal Year will receive the next priority. Finally, for those newly identified projects or projects not ready for implementation, the planning process will be initiated toward future treatments and implementation schedules will be developed.

A cornerstone of the National Fire Plan has been enhancing the communication for preparedness and strategic planning among all partners in the wildland fire management arena. To facilitate this objective, all of the National Fire Plan Coordinators from the Department of the Interior and its bureaus, as well as the Forest Service, and representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, Council on Environmental Quality and others, assembled in Denver on February 21 and 22, 2001, to share concerns and issues, clarify roles and expectations, validate the importance of success, and define a management structure for collaboration at the geographic area level throughout the country. This meeting provided a springboard to unify State, Tribal and Federal efforts to cooperate across jurisdictions, coordinate plans and activities, and collaborate with local governments to implement efficiently and effectively the goals and commitments outlined in the National Fire Plan.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to testify at this hearing. We are grateful that Congress has afforded firefighting agencies an opportunity to reverse the trend of deteriorating health for our forest and rangeland ecosystems. We view the funding for FY 2001 as an investment that will, in the future, help save communities, money, our natural resources, and the lives of firefighters and the public.

Like any long-term investment, it will require patience. It took many decades for fuels build up to reach their current levels. The demands on public land and its resources will only increase in the future. It will take time for all of us, the Federal agencies, our Tribal, State and local partners, rural fire districts, elected officials and others, to ameliorate the volatile and dangerous situation that currently exists in many parts of our country. The Department of the Interior has made a commitment to see this process through to a successful conclusion. We intend to honor this commitment, and we look forward to your continued support.

Thank you, again. I will be happy to answer any questions from the committee.

Mr. HARTZELL. With that, I would like to call your attention to the five key points in the National Fire Plan which we have up on the poster board. Those are firefighting, rehabilitation and restoration, hazardous fuels management, community assistance, and accountability. And we would now like to spend a little bit of time talking to you about each of those key elements of the plan.

The first component that I would like to talk about is firefighting and tell you what we have done from an Interior perspective to date. Firefighting is that component of the National Fire Plan that enables us to be adequately prepared to prevent, detect, and initially attack wildfires. To date, the Department of Interior has been successful in hiring 875 new employees. We have committed \$30 million to reconstructing and repairing over 50 facilities. The facilities are necessary to provide and meet minimum housing standards for crew quarters, adequate storage for our engines, and to provide helitack bases.

In addition, we have ordered a significant amount of equipment, including the contracting of 24 helicopters, requesting 62 engines, 6 bulldozers, a variety of crew transport vehicles, and 8 water tenders.

In addition, I think it is important, Mr. Chairman, since you mentioned Storm King Mountain, that with the additional firefighters that we are hiring, training is going to be a key issue for

us. We will put no firefighter in a position where they have not had adequate training on basic firefighting and behavior, standards for survival, and the importance of communication under duress. We will not place a firefighter in a position without adequate training. Safety is, under the National Fire Plan, job one for both our firefighters and the public.

Mr. LAVERTY. Mr. Chairman, in addition to the components that Tim described in terms of the efforts that are underway in terms of the firefighting efforts, the funding that has been provided by the Congress is incredibly unique. This is probably the first time that I can recall in Forest Service history that we have been funded at this level of suppression forces and preparedness. Not only does that install the firefighting capability in the human resource, but it brings us on board with a lot of the equipment that Tim referred to. In addition to the engines, we are making some investments in a number of air tanker bases across the country that can help us in terms of being prepared. It brings on additional helitack bases so that we can have these resources in place in the right locations to deal with the kinds of field conditions that we have across the country. It is a major, major step forward, and I just cannot tell you how significant that is to both of the agencies.

Recruitment has been a major, major task for us. We have never hired this many people in one block in the Forest Service history that I can recall. And the fact that we are trying to recruit and fill about 5,000 positions is an enormous undertaking, particularly as you look at the state of the economy. In Colorado, you can't go anywhere but you find help-wanted signs, so there are just not a lot of people waiting to come to work for us. So we are really creative in terms of going out and holding job fairs. We have held job fairs, over 35 job fairs across the country, to try to recruit people and identify candidates for these jobs.

Between us, I think we have had in excess of 15,000 applications for these jobs, so this is a major undertaking as we begin to prepare not only for this season but make that equipment in place for the long term.

The other part that Tim addressed is the training and the supervisory capacity in terms of how do we supervise brand-new people. If there is a caution that comes to my mind, it is that we need to make sure that we are making those kinds of investments in the supervisory skills so that we are not going to put these new firefighters in harm's way. It is an enormous undertaking.

Another area is the coordination that is taking place between the agencies that Tim and I have talked about. We are really focusing on how we can most effectively train these new people so that we are not duplicating efforts and we are being as efficient as we can with these funds that have come to us.

Maybe we will go on to the next one, which deals with the restoration and rehabilitation of the burned areas. The second key area of the National Fire Plan addressed and recognized the need to rehabilitate and restore these intensively burned areas from the fires of 2000. You can see that between the two of us we have got probably in excess of four to five million acres that we plan to treat with a variety of techniques. Just as the Governor of Montana spoke about, the restoration and rehab, these activities are well

underway. We responded back to the Congress in January in terms of a framework on how we were going to prioritize projects that came in for rehab and restoration. We submitted that in January, and those criteria have been applied. That was an interagency effort between the Interior Department and the Forest Service.

We are well underway in terms of implementing rehab and restoration projects. Many of those projects started even before the smoke was out on the ground. We started doing much of that emergency work, and that is going to continue on through the summer.

I should tell you that between the two of us, the two Departments, we received about \$250 million in appropriations for rehab and restoration. The projects that came in just from the Forest Service were well in excess of \$260 million. So there is a lot of work out there that needs to be done.

Tim?

Mr. HARTZELL. I think it may be helpful to mention that in the congressional report on rehab, we were asked to indicate what criteria we would use to direct our rehabilitation and stabilization efforts. In summary, they were that our actions would be compatible with existing land use plans; we would take a full and open look at the projects and alternatives to complete them; rehab would be conducted in full cooperation with other partners; and rehab would be restricted to within the perimeter of the burned area.

I would like to mention two important points regarding the rehab program that result from the National Fire Plan. Number one, we now have the flexibility and the opportunity to conduct rehab for up to three years after a wildfire, and during that period we can use these rehabilitation funds for replanting native shrubs, forbs, and grasses, and this is a significant addition and improvement to our rehabilitation program.

Mr. LAVERTY. One of the other areas that I would just tag on to the rehab and restoration recognizes the issue of noxious weeds. And as we deal with noxious weeds and invasive species, this is a long-term commitment. It is more than just simply sending a crew out and monitoring some of these disturbed areas from the fires of 2000. But it is a long-term investment. If we do, in fact, find species coming into these sites, we are into really a war on weeds, and these rehab and restoration plans recognize the importance of monitoring and aggressive action on invasive species.

The bar chart that Mary has up there just kind of gives you a graphic display of the rehab and restoration acreage, and you can see—in fact, as the Governor referenced this morning—that we burned in excess of 7 million acres, and between the two agencies we are treating about close to 5 million acres of that, the remainder being on State and private lands.

This is a huge undertaking, and it cuts across not only just the Federal boundaries but it deals with State and private lands as well.

Mr. HARTZELL. I think at this time we should move on to our next key point, the hazardous fuels program. Under the hazardous fuels program, we have on the Interior side \$195 million that is going to enable us to treat almost 1.4 million acres; 309,000 of those are wildland-urban interface acres, acres around commu-

nities that are vulnerable to wildfire. The remainder of the acres are in priority watersheds.

Our hazardous fuels program concentrates on those actions that we take to reduce fuel loadings and fire behavior potentials such as prescribed fire or mechanical or manual thinning or chemical means or any combination of the above.

Lyle and I have a series of photos that we would like to share with the Committee, one, to give you an understanding of the fuel problem in inter-mountain shrub lands and another to give you a sense of the problem of fuel loading in our forest and timberlands.

Mr. LAVERTY. The two photos that Mary has posted there show really a very graphic representation of what has happened across the interior West in terms of fuel conditions and in terms of structure and composition of the stands. That first photo in 1871 and the same photo back in 1982 just shows the dramatic transformation that has taken place. This could be replicated literally in 100 billion acres across the interior West. I think this is a great example of the kinds of situations that we are talking about. And as we begin to look at that wildland-urban interface in terms of everybody wants to live in the woods, this is the kind of situation that we are beginning to address.

This is just another one. This is a photo series that many of you have seen. This represents the Lick Creek area in the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana. What it shows is the changes in stand structure and composition that takes place over time. The 1909 photo on the upper left there does, in fact, show some treatment on there, but I think what is important is you look at the relative changes in terms of the numbers of stems, the composition that has taken place on that same photo point over the next 80 years. So it is a graphic representation of the kinds of changes that we are talking about, not that that is a pure natural stand on the left side, but it does, in fact, give us a benchmark to measure what has taken place.

Mr. HARTZELL. I would like to spend a little time showing you a fuels problem that we have in shrub lands. This is a photograph of what we call a sagebrush steppe community in the Northern Great Basin. I would tell the Committee this is probably what the early explorer John Fremont saw when he came through the West and he described the sagebrush plains in his writings. The plant community you see right here is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush, and the grass that you see, the very healthy and lush grass you see there is bluebunch wheatgrass.

What this picture shows is "healthy range" or "healthy lands" or a "healthy ecosystem." This is an excellent photograph to demonstrate what healthy rangeland looks like. It has a low density of shrubs that represent a variety of age classes, an abundance of bluebunch wheatgrass, a variety of small forbs and flowers and ground cover, which provides a variety of food for wildlife.

This is an example of what happens when a wildfire occurs in a healthy shrub community. Historically, these sagebrush communities burned in a mosaic fashion with low fire intensities. And what you get, as you can see in the photograph, there are these pockets of unburned or lightly burned vegetation. The pockets of unburned sagebrush and grass provide a seed source for the

burned areas within the perimeter of the fire. Typically, in these healthy sagebrush ranges fire recycled every 50 to 100 years, and it was vital to the renewal of these communities.

The next photo I have got on display for you here typifies much of what we have in many areas of the inter-mountain West. This is a problem that probably is common on somewhere between 100 and 140 million acres of rangelands in the inter-mountain West. What we have when we have these hot fires in cheatgrass, which is the golden grass you see there, forming a dense stand in the formerly open inner spaces between the shrubs that were inhabited by native plants, and this significantly increases the fine fuels.

Now, once cheatgrass dries out, usually in mid-May to mid-June, it is highly flammable and it easily carries a fire throughout the entire shrub community. Cheatgrass in this situation entirely changes the frequency, the intensity, and the behavior of wildfires. As a rancher said in 1928 in an Idaho Statesman article about cheatgrass, "It grows in a day, it ripens in a day, and it blows away in a day."

Let me just say that this site right here represents a site that is salvable, both from a fuels management standpoint and a rehab standpoint.

However, this is a photograph that shows what happens once a sagebrush community is totally invaded by cheatgrass and it reburns. The vegetation here, which used to be the beautiful bluebunch wheatgrass and a mixture of sage and forbs and flowers, has been totally converted to a monoculture of cheatgrass, which is an annual species, but, more importantly, it has been taken over by invasive weeds. We used to think cheatgrass was the bottom of the ecological spiral. No more. Now we have noxious weeds invading cheatgrass.

I think you can all appreciate that this type of situation has negative impacts on rangeland health of the site as well as its value for a variety of multiple uses.

The fire cycle in this photograph, rather than being 50 to 100 years like healthy rangeland, is probably something in the vicinity of every 3 to 10 years. But, most importantly, those fires are considerably more dangerous for our firefighters to fight. An Oregon study found that fires in this type of range system are 500 times more likely to start and burn than in healthy native rangelands.

I have got two photos here I would like to close with that depict the fuel system conditions on our inter-mountain brush lands. This fire right here shows what was very typical throughout much of the Great Basin in 1999. In five days alone in the State of Nevada, there were literally tens of thousands of lightning strikes, and more than 1.5 million acres were consumed in that five-day period. As one veteran engine foreman said when he was dispatched to a fire and topped the ridge, when asked by dispatch, "What is your situation?" He said, "I don't know. Everywhere I look there's fire, and it's roaring."

Fires in this kind of situation are much larger and much more intense than the historical norm.

I would like to leave you with an impression from this last photograph, the aftermath of these fires. Fires in these cheatgrass- and weed-dominated shrub lands burn at an incredible pace. It is not

uncommon for these fires to consume 5,000, 10,000, or even 20,000 acres in a day.

What you see there is a burn that occurred in one day. What is left behind is certainly not encouraging?

Mr. LAVERTY. To respond to these kinds of situations between the two Departments, our plan in the hazardous fuel component is to treat together about 3.2 million acres across the country, and, again, recognizing that this is a national plan, we will be treating lands in the West, as well as maintaining some of the conditions that we have been able to sustain in the East. In addition to the Federal land component, the Congress provided funding that has gone to the State foresters, and in addition to the Federal land treatment, we expect that there will be in the neighborhood of 400,000 acres treated on State and private lands as well. So it really becomes a part of a system rather than just simply a Federal land activity.

Let's go to the last one there, just a reference photo. This is a photo from, I think, Mr. Otter's country, Mr. Simpson's country that shows a little bit graphically what can, in fact, happen in terms of treatments versus burned areas. You can see on both the left- and the right-hand side of that photo burned areas from the season of 2000. The area in the middle was pretreated. There had been some activity, some pre-commercial—I am guessing there were some thinnings, some type of fuel activities, but it did have a prescribed fire in that center area. So we can begin to show anecdotally that we can, in fact, make a difference in terms of what happens with fire behaviors and fire effects in treated stands. Not that there is one prescription for all stands, but the fact that we know—and that really becomes an important part of the investment that Congress is making in the hazardous fuels, is that we have a focus on research in terms of helping us clearly identify and track the effectiveness of these investments over time. Can we, in fact, by good scientific modeling replicate these activities and come back and tell you that this is a good investment?

The other part of the hazardous fuels, I would just share with you that we have been working with the Governors following the direction in the conference report. We published a list in January of communities that were at high risk. We worked with the Governors across the country. We published that list, and there are about 4,500 communities that were identified to be at high risk that are in the vicinity of Federal lands across this United States.

We are currently working with the Governors, with the National Association of State Foresters, and the tribes to refine that list. And as you would expect, we have 48 States in this part of the country that all interpreted the direction one way. We have got 48 different interpretations. So we are working with the Governors and the tribes to refine that list, and our direction is to republish that list in May.

Along with the list of revised communities will be then which of those communities do we actually have projects planned in 2001 and which communities do we have projects planned for 2002. And we are working with the communities, with the States, with the Governors, with counties, to begin to identify where we should be placing—finding the criteria to place those projects in the out-years

so that—recognizing that we don't have enough funds to treat all communities, but we can begin to assess some criteria in terms of ranking on how we are going to make those investments. It is a huge—and I say that recognizing that this is a monumental effort in terms of how we have been able to engage Governors, tribes, counties, and a variety of interest groups in this process. And I really believe that this is a model in terms of how we can show that we can manage America's resources in a fashion that really is responsive to the needs of people.

Mr. HARTZELL. Well, Lyle, before we leave fuels, we ought to talk to the Committee about contracting. The contracting procedures that we have in place are another excellent model or example of how the Federal Government can work together with States and locals in a more efficient manner. The Fiscal Year 2001 appropriation was very specific that we should focus as much of our fuels treatment work through the contracting process as possible. We were concerned that we needed to minimize the duplicative work of agencies independently developing and administering their own contracts.

So back in December of 2000, we called 75 to 90 interagency fuels and contracting specialists together at the National Interagency Fire Center. We invited States and tribes to that meeting. And the purpose of that meeting was to sort out what contracts everybody had in place for doing fuels treatment work and rehabilitation work and find the best of the best, and then use those contracts as models for conducting fuels and rehab work. The concept being we would identify these model contracts, we would refine them as appropriate, we would get them posted up on a website so that no matter what part of the country you were in, whether you were in Florida or Battle Mountain, Nevada, or eastern Oregon or Grand Junction, Colorado, if you needed to do a mechanical thinning, you could go to this website and pull down the appropriate contract and utilize it to complete your work rather than invest precious staff time in redeveloping a contract.

The way we see this working in the model we have in place is that we have established 11 national geographic areas for contracting, and there will be a lead agency and a designated lead contracting officer for each of these areas, and then every agency within that geographic area can order against the lead agency contract.

We believe that this process is going to have several important benefits. One I think I have already alluded to, minimizing the time of everyone developing their individual contracts, but also we think that through this process we are going to be able to create significant opportunities at the local level for jobs in small communities for fuels hazard reduction and rehab work.

I think that the Committee can expect our contracting capacity, both internally and externally, to increase over the next few years. Right now I can tell you that this model contracting process is up and operable in three of the 11 geographic areas: the Pacific Northwest, the Northern Rockies, and New Mexico and northern Arizona.

Mr. LAVERTY. In addition to the contracting model which has dramatically changed how we do business together, our expectation is that 50 percent of those contracts will be local awards. This is

a major effort as we look at trying to build capacity for the long term and how we are going to treat these kinds of landscapes so that we can deal with the kinds of outcomes that the Governor addressed this morning.

One of the benefits will be, in fact, that we are going to employ people, but the long term is that we are going to improve forest health conditions across America. This is a major, major part of the fire plan, and huge benefits will come from this.

The next key point is the issue of community assistance, and this one is a fairly broad and encompassing program area because these are in many cases funds that go back to the States and right into the local communities. The item that we have displayed is rural and volunteer fire assistance. And between the Forest Service and the Department of Interior, we will be providing funds and resources to 4,800 volunteer fire departments across America.

For any of you that have been involved in fire departments, most of the funds are done by cake sales, cookie sales, raffles, and those types of things, just to buy fuel for the engines. Well, these funds go to these rural fire departments to provide personal protective gear for the firefighters. It helps them in terms of the acquisition of equipment so that they can be in place to respond.

In most places across America, these are the people that are first responders even to wildland fires. Most of those folks are trained in structural fire. So these funds also provide us the opportunity to work with volunteer fire departments to help them in terms of training so that we can put those in a fire situation that will protect those folks from harm.

Tim?

Mr. HARTZELL. We were delighted in Interior that the appropriation included a new \$10 million appropriation for us to target rural fire departments. The purpose of that \$10 million is for us to enhance safety and strengthen the wildfire protection capability of small rural fire departments that support suppression on adjacent or intermingled Federal lands. Lyle talked about this, alluded to this, that in strengthening the capability of small fire departments, we are also going to increase the overall preparedness or readiness capacity of all partners in wildland fire protection.

Now, the dollars that we got are going to be specifically targeted to these small communities, communities with a population of less than 10,000, and the money is going to be targeted for technical assistance, training, supplies, and for public education. The criteria for small fire departments obtaining this funding are actually just two: one, they have to have an agreement with the State forester or directly with a Department of Interior agency; and, secondly, the rural fire department needs to be able to provide 10 percent of the cost, whether it is dollars or in-kind services, we will provide the remaining 90 percent of the funding.

How these rural fire departments can gain access to this money will be through a standard application that we have just finished developing, and that application must also be coordinated with the State forester. In order to get the money, we have to have an agreement with the fire department outlining each partner's roles, ours and theirs, before the money is transferred. And we also hope

to have the standard agreements that each partner will enter into available on a website.

We are very excited about this. I know we are going to have some big dividends and payoffs here. It is a pilot program, and we are going to be reviewing it and monitoring it carefully through the year, and we will make adjustments as needed.

Mr. LAVERTY. Additionally, on the Forest Service side, there are funds that go straight to the state foresters to work with communities in terms of education. And the Governor addressed that this morning, that this becomes a very integral part of the whole fire plan, is what can landowners do in terms of personal responsibility to treat their landscapes to make them in fact more defensible.

We have hosted a series of what we call Fire Wise Workshops around the country. In fact, a week ago Friday I was in Cedar Ridge, Colorado, with the State Forester's staff, the BLM staff and the Forest Service, we trained about 50 American Red Cross volunteers, that that is what they are going to do, they are going to go out, work with landowners, help them make an assessment of what do they need to do on their own lands to make them more defensible.

In addition, these funds provide a capacity many times for the state foresters to work with landowners to actually do some land treatments. And these are really an important part of the entire system.

The other part of the community assistance that I will just talk about deals with the Economic Action Plan. And in the Economic Action Plan, we are looking at some of the ideas, you know, what can we do with some of the small-diameter material? Can we in fact utilize some of these materials that you have seen graphically today? Can we use that to deal with some of the energy issues that we have in this country today? We believe that there are some opportunities for bioenergy. We have got some proposals. In fact, in California we have received probably responses in terms of 20 to 1 in terms of what we have capacity to fund versus what the proposals are. Many of these are focused on what we can do with small-diameter material and how we can utilize that material to deal with some of the energy needs that we have in the country.

But the last point, and perhaps the most important one for Tim and I, deals with the issue of accountability. And if I could leave you with a term, we are the "junkyard dogs." We are passionate about sharing with you very candidly that we are tracking agencies' performance. We are tracking our accomplishments on the ground so that we can come back to you with full integrity and tell you that this has been a good investment. We are working with GAO to look at can we in fact design monitoring systems to track our performance? We have research in place that I think will help us answer those questions on the real science basis behind these investments that we are making. We have put together a series of performance elements in line officers' performance standards, so that we can actually hold line officers accountable for these accomplishments. And we plan a series of program reviews in the field, and we have invited—the idea of bringing legislative staff along with us to spend time looking at the field in terms of are we asking

the right questions, and really looking at the monitoring to see that these things are in fact meeting your expectations as well as ours.

Congress has made a huge investment, and we believe that with almost \$2 billion of new money, that we need to be as open and transparent as we can in terms of the tracking systems. We have invested in a framework that we can, probably by the end of this month, we will be able to, in real time, give you what has happened in each one of your states and each one of your congressional districts in terms of these projects.

It is a huge step forward. Again, it is becoming a model, I think, in terms of how government can work. Tim?

Mr. HARTZELL. And each of the departments has regular weekly meetings to track the status of the National Fire Plan. Interior people participate in the Forest Service meeting. Forest Service people participate in the Interior meetings, so that we are lock-step and know what each other is doing. At the Interior Department, I can tell you that we have regular weekly meetings, where our four bureau directors report directly to the chief of staff on status and progress of implementing the National Fire Plan. We have safeguards in place to assure that the funds are only disbursed with the appropriate fund and project code, and that each of the individual bureaus involved in this program has assigned a lead and co-lead for implementing the National Fire Plan, and each of those bureaus has developed an implementation strategy document to assure that the five key points in the plan are carried forward.

Also I think we probably need to call the attention to the fact that—I don't know how many, we have delivered numerous reports to the Congress as required in the 2001 Appropriations Act, in addition to a very detailed Financial and Action Plan which we have shared with you, and which we are monitoring diligently, and there are still several more reports to come.

Mr. LAVERTY. Mr. Chairman, I would just tell you thank you for waiving the five-minute rule. We thought we could get through this quicker, but we have got a lot to share with you, but we truly appreciate your time and your interest in the National Fire Plan, and Tim and I would be honored to answer any questions you might have for us.

Mr. MCINNIS. Clearly your testimony in the situation that we face is critical. That is why we have taken the time this morning. I would advise the Committee members, as well as our guests, that the meeting must adjourn at 12 noon. I expect a vote at that point in time anyway.

In light of that, I would like to give an opportunity for members, each of the members, to ask a question. So I would ask the members to keep their questions abbreviated, and to not take your full minutes so that we can get all of the way around. In turn, I would also ask that our witnesses keep your answers very brief in consideration of that.

I will ask three quick questions. If you can give me three quick answers, then I will go to the ranking member.

What was the overall budget for these activities last year? Question No. 1.

Question No. 2: How much was this increased for this fiscal year? Question No. 2.

And Question No. 3: What do you see happening to this level of funding in the next fiscal year?

So if you could quickly respond to those three questions, then I will yield to the ranking member.

Mr. LAVERTY. Let me start quickly on the Forest Service side. In Fiscal Year 2000, all of the programs that dealt with the prior plan, we had about \$1.2 billion. In 2001, the total, including the Title 4, brought us up to about \$2.1, almost \$2.2 billion. So we experienced almost a \$2 billion—or a \$1.1 billion increase on the Forest Service for all of the programs associated with the Fire Plan.

Mr. MCINNIS. So approximately 100 percent increase?

Mr. LAVERTY. Yes, sir.

Mr. MCINNIS. And the next fiscal year?

Mr. LAVERTY. Fiscal Year 2000?

Mr. MCINNIS. 2002 is the one I meant.

Mr. LAVERTY. 2002, we are waiting to see.

Mr. MCINNIS. What is your proposal?

Mr. LAVERTY. We think it is going to be solid. Our proposal is that we would like to see a continuation of what we have in 2001 as the minimum.

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Hartzell?

Mr. HARTZELL. Mr. Chairman, in Fiscal Year 2000 in the Department of Interior, our money for the fire management programs was \$490 million, almost \$491 million. In Fiscal Year 2001, it was nearly \$978 million, a \$486 million increase, nearly a doubling.

Mr. MCINNIS. Another 100 percent. Well, it is clear from a bipartisan point of view that the funding of this is a high priority. The President has made it very clear that it is a high priority for him.

With that, I will yield to the ranking member.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. We had an earthquake in Seattle the other day, and the Federal Government did not predict it, but we are not being critical. Earthquakes are somewhat difficult to predict.

Mr. LAVERTY. It is a different department.

Mr. INSLEE. Right. But it seems to me with the incredible drought in the West we have got up in the State of Washington, as you know, snowpacks, water levels in the 50 to 60 percent level. It seems to me we have very, very clear indications this is going to be a severe fire season. And I am concerned because at least the information I have received—and I am just looking at the proposed budget, as I understand it, from the White House dated February 28th—it actually would reduce the total fire plan spending, as I understand it, for both agencies by \$500 million, which is about a 20 to 25 percent cut.

Now, I understand a lot of that comes from essentially backing out emergency fire contingency which had occurred in previous years. But if you were to assume, as I do, that this year has every prospect of being as severe or more so than in previous years, aren't we looking at a demand that is likely to be as much or greater? And if so, ought we not to be looking for more resources in this budget cycle in advance rather than afterwards?

Now, I understand it is difficult for you fellows in your position to talk about budget issues, but if you can talk about the threat fire-wise, perhaps we can get the sense of your drift.

Mr. LAVERTY. Just to respond, I believe that, you know, part of the action that we will be able to take as agencies with this increased funding that we have in 2001, we will have—historically, we have been funded at about 60 to 70 percent of what we call the most efficient level. This new funding that Congress has provided for us in 2001 will bring on additionally these 5,000 new firefighters plus the additional equipment.

Part of these firefighters, we are going to add 12 new Hot Shot crews. We ran out of crews this summer. If we had had more fires—in fact, in Colorado, we were at the point where we would have had to say we are going to let this one burn and we are going to have to address this. So I think we are going to be in a much better position with increased capacity and capability for firefighting, and we have been talking already about how we can mobilize and move resources around strategically to deal with the different fuel conditions that we have across the country.

So I think we are going to be there in a good position in 2001. I think for 2002, you know, we are optimistic that the President's budget is, in fact, going to help us sustain that preparedness level and make those levels of fuels investment.

Mr. HARTZELL. I concur with my colleague. We will be able to maintain a level of funding that is going to help us reduce fire risk. We are going to have significantly more capacity because of the equipment we are bringing on this fiscal year, the majority of which will be online next year. In addition, we have and will continue to utilize the option of severity funding to pay in advance to bring resources online to deal with serious potential fire hazards such as you mentioned.

Mr. INSLEE. Well, I appreciate your efficiency, but I have to tell you that if we end up in a fire year as we did last year, which I believe we are looking at this year, I can't see how even Superman would wring out 25 percent efficiencies at the Federal budget, and you are looking at \$500 million decreases. So I want to tell you I am concerned about that. I am sure there are others on a bipartisan basis very concerned about that. And we are going to work through this project.

Jumping ahead to a more long-term plan, on a long-term issue, on our issue of fuel reductions, you are engaged in a major effort in that regard, and I think many people understand that our previously shortsighted policy of total fire suppression has, in fact, led to a major build-up in fuel loads. But there is a concern in the public—and I hear this a lot—that, in fact, there will be harvests driven by commercial incentives rather than for good thinning science. And I just wonder if you can tell us what measures have been adopted to date that we can tell the public to give them confidence that this is not being driven by commercial incentives rather than good science in thinning. If you can address that, I have heard some reports that we have dropped some of those requirements, like maximum diameter of harvest as well.

Mr. LAVERTY. Maybe I could just take a start at responding to that question. If you consider—

Mr. MCINNIS. We need to keep it brief. Let me interrupt for just a moment. We need to keep it brief because I do want to give an

opportunity to other members to ask questions. We have got about 10 minutes.

Mr. LAVERTY. If you talk about commercial harvest, commercial harvest is one tool to help us accomplish that, but it should not be the objective. The Governor was perfect this morning. We talk about, you know, what do we need to leave on the landscape. That should be the starting point. And then what do we take off that is the important part of it. But how we take it off, we shouldn't constrain ourselves. We talked about diameter limit. I appreciate the question. But I think we need to let that local prescription based on, you know, what is good science, what do the specialists tell us in terms of what needs to stay there, let that drive the prescription. Don't artificially constrain.

Mr. HARTZELL. I would also add that the prescription needs to be driven by conformance with local land use plans, and it needs to be driven by local collaboration to find the appropriate solution.

Mr. INSLEE. Well, we need to have a little more dialogue on this, and we want to defer. Mr. Chair, if I can put in two letters in the record by Mr. Udall, a unanimous consent request, signed by 26 members requesting environmental standards to be incorporated in any fire plan.

Mr. MCINNIS. No objection.
[The letters follow:]

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2000

The Honorable Dan Glickman,
Secretary of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Bruce Babbitt,
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Glickman and Secretary Babbitt:

As you know, the fiscal 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act provides important funding for work to restore federal lands damaged by large-scale forest fires and to lessen the risk of such fires in the future by reducing accumulations of fuels.

We support these objectives. However, in the past there have been efforts to use the "fuel reduction" label to justify environmentally-unsound timber sales and it is very important that pursuit of restoration and fuel reduction does not weaken sound land management or the protection of the environment. So, we urge you to make sure that these activities will be subject to appropriate safeguards and conditions.

Recent events have shown the importance of a scientifically sound fuels reduction program targeted to protect communities in the wildland/urban interface. However, the relevant language in the Interior appropriations bill does not spell out adequate environmental safeguards to protect wilderness, roadless areas, old growth forests, endangered species habitat, or riparian areas. Wilderness areas should be off-limits to fuels reduction by mechanical means, and appropriate conditions should be imposed to assure that mechanical fuel-reduction projects will not adversely affect old growth forests, roadless areas, endangered species habitat, or riparian areas.

In addition, we believe direction is needed to ensure that fuels reduction projects focus on the fine and surface fuels that create the greatest fire risks. We urge that the agencies be directed to develop ecologically-sound treatment criteria with an emphasis on underbrush and small-diameter trees.

The Interior bill also includes language providing the Administration with an option to develop expedited NEPA procedures within the next 60 days. We are strongly opposed to any weakening of the current NEPA procedures and public involvement in decision-

making for fuels reduction projects. We respectfully urge the Administration to not exercise this authority to expedite NEPA procedures.

We also believe the funding increase for fuels reduction should be carefully targeted to protect communities at risk from wildfire. The need for fuel reduction is greatest in those areas where homes exist within or abut forested areas--the wildland/urban interface or "red zones," and in particular in the areas closest to homes and communities. In many cases that means within 200 feet of homes or communities. We urge the Administration to prioritize emergency fuels reduction funds to support projects to reduce risks in these narrowly defined areas to the maximum extent practicable. In addition, we urge the Administration to support the Firewise program and other cooperative efforts for community protection in the wildland/urban interface.

There is a significant increase in funding for preparedness activities. We urge the Administration to make the completion of fire management plans the top priority for these funds. Currently only 5% of the National Forests have completed fire management plans which were mandated by the Fire Management Policy of 1995.

The Forest Service and BLM undoubtedly will be pressured to expedite fuel-reduction efforts by taking old projects, including timber sales, off the shelf regardless of whether they are environmentally sound fuels reduction projects. We urge that before funds under this program be allocated for any "old projects," the projects first be reevaluated to make sure that they are consistent with the focus on fuels reduction rather than other objectives.

We have noted with some concern that the report to the President in response to this year's fires seems to identify "recovering some of the economic value of forest stands" as one reason for including removal of burned trees in restoration and fuel-reduction efforts. We think that salvage logging based in part on economic considerations should remain separate from fuels reduction.

We are also concerned that funds intended to address hazardous fuels issues in western forests will be diverted to eastern forests which do not have the same ecological needs. For example, conditions in the relatively moist Southern Appalachian forests naturally limit the spread of fire. Fuel reduction bears little relevance to the decline of native forest types, which is a major threat confronting the Southern Appalachians. We urge that emergency fuels reduction funds be used in the Forest Regions that are subject to the greatest risks — principally those in western States.

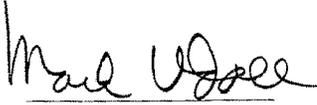
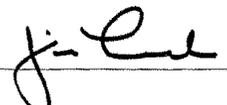
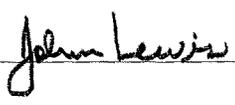
On a related point, the Interior bill authorizes the Forest Service to enter into an additional 25 "end-result" stewardship contracts. The "goods-for-services" authority allows the Forest Service to trade National Forest trees for contracted services and, if not subject to appropriate restrictions, could encourage large-scale logging in conjunction with restoration projects. We urge that in the fuels-reduction program the Forest Service be directed to place priority on use of appropriated funds rather than issuance of additional stewardship contracts under the fuels-reduction program and that all agencies be required to ensure that the protections discussed above are followed in any "goods-for-

services" contracts to assure that these projects remain exclusively focused on fuels reduction purposes.

Finally, we appreciate that the Administration opposed and was able to remove from the Interior bill language to set excessive targets for timber sales. However, the statement of managers in the conference report still urges the Forest Service to prepare for sale 3.6 billion board feet of timber. This would represent a significant increase in timber sales above the current level of 2.1 billion board feet, and this timber targets language is backed up by a significant increase in funding for logging. The bill contains a \$40 million increase in logging subsidies, including \$5 million earmarked specifically for the Tongass National Forest. We are very concerned that this \$40 million in additional logging subsidies could result in unsound timber sales on the National Forests. We urge that instead this unrequested increase in funding be used to mitigate environmental degradation by spending it on forest restoration through road decommissioning and obliteration.

If the fuels-reduction program is to bring real benefit, it must be implemented in a way that avoids the controversies, appeals, and litigation associated with significant increases in logging that degrade water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. We look forward to working with the Administration to avoid such results.

Sincerely,

 _____	 _____
 _____	 _____
 _____	 _____
 _____	 _____

Pete Stark
Toms

Jack Perri

Mush Holt

Ed Blum

Grace J. Napolitano

Frank Gidd

Bob Filner

Nancy Pelosi

Bill Pascrell Jr

Anna C. Gro

Myra W. Wadsworth

John W. Brown

Henry A. Wapman

Fanna S. Elliott

Harold L. Kenna

Ellen O. Tauscher

Michael A. W. Wadsworth

Signers of This Letter

Representative Mark Udall
Representative James Leach -
Representative George Miller -
Representative Cynthia McKinney -
Representative Lloyd Doggett -
Representative John Lewis -
Representative Frank Pallone, Jr. -
Representative Barbara Lee -
Representative Fortney (Pete) Stark -
Representative Grace F. Napolitano -
Representative Edolphus Towns -
Representative Sam Gejdenson -
Representative Sander Levin -
Representative Bob Filner -
Representative Rush Holt -
Representative Earl Blumenauer -
Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. -
Representative Nancy Pelosi -
Representative Anna G. Eshoo -
Representative Maurice Hinchey -
Representative Sherrod Brown -
Representative Henry A. Waxman -
Representative Diana DeGette
Representative Howard L. Berman -
Representative Ellen O. Tauscher -
Representative Michael R. McNulty

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
FOREST SERVICE,
Washington, DC.

Hon. MARK UDALL,
House of Representatives, Rayburn House Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN UDALL: Thank you for your October 20, 2000, letter from you and your colleagues, to former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman regarding the Fiscal Year 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) shares your concerns about the implementation of the fuels reduction program. As directed in the Interior Appropriations Act, funds provided to reduce hazardous fuels will be focused in and around communities at risk. In these areas, protecting life and property from catastrophic wildfire will be the primary objective of the treatments. In complying with existing environmental laws, we will work closely with the local communities to design and implement these treatments. I assure you that environmentally appropriate safeguards will be maintained throughout the planning and implementation efforts to restore lands damaged by recent wildland fires and to mitigate future wildland fire risks through fuel reduction projects.

The USDA Forest Service has developed the Cohesive Strategy, *Protecting People and Sustaining Resources in Fire-Adapted Ecosystems—A Cohesive Strategy*. A suite of Federal laws and regulations guide management of fire-related activities on those lands. They include the Organic Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), among others, that will ensure clean air, clean water, and biodiversity in fire-adapted ecosystems. Long-term sustainability is a consistent theme embodied within these laws. The Forest Service's efforts to reduce hazardous fuels compliment long-term sustainability and will fully comply with these laws and regulations. All Forest Service activities will be in full compliance with procedures established by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementation of NEPA.

The National Fire Plan is in response to *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment, A Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000*, which was submitted on September 8, 2000. The Plan discusses the Forest Service's strategy to remove excessive fuel through vegetative treatments and prescribed fire in order to protect communities at risk, help prevent insect and disease damage, and generally improve overall ecosystem health and sustainability. It also discusses how the Forest Service's locally-led, integrated teams should coordinate environmental reviews and consultations, facilitate and encourage public participation, and monitor and evaluate project implementation.

The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy and Program Review reinforces the Forest Service's efforts to utilize the best available science that incorporates the role of fire in land, resource and fire management planning. Recently, the Agency requested a review of the 1995 Policy. The review found the basic policy sound. The review group made 11 recommendations, which were accepted by the Agency, on ecosystem sustainability, restoration, science, communication, and evaluation. As the Forest Service continues to implement this Policy, planning efforts will ensure that full environmental safeguards, as required by laws and policies, are more than adequate to address all concerns raised in your letter.

Thank you again for your thoughtful letter and expressing your concerns. Identical letters will be sent to your colleagues. I appreciate your continued support for our forest health and restoration program. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 205-1657, if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL T. RAINS,
Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. MCINNIS. I might add that reductions that were just being talked about, it is my understanding those are reductions for 2002. Your firefighting season that is coming up here in a few weeks is not suffering. There is no cut in firefighting operations. Isn't that correct?

Mr. LAVERTY. Correct.

Mr. INSLEE. I think the concern is historically what has happened, there has been a backloading of contingency in the next fiscal year, and what I am suggesting is, if this budget—we shouldn't fool ourselves. If the fires occur this year like they are likely to occur, we are going to be looking at another \$500 million in the next fiscal year to make up your contingency funds. Isn't that a fair statement?

Mr. LAVERTY. Yes. Historically, our 10-year average would be about \$423 million just on the force in terms of suppression costs. Last year we were over \$1 billion.

Mr. INSLEE. Just as one Democratic modest partisan statement, this is the kind of issue we are concerned about in our tax cut vote today as well.

Thank you.

Mr. MCINNIS. I just want to make this clear, because I don't want there to be a set-up situation where a fire occurs and all of a sudden we hear from a slightly partisan point of view that we didn't adequately fund the Forest Service. Let me repeat the question. You have been fully funded for the 2001 firefighting season. Isn't that correct?

Mr. LAVERTY. That is correct.

Mr. MCINNIS. Thank you.

Now, Mr. Simpson?

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Lyle, Tim, welcome to the Committee, and thank you for your testimony. I appreciate, Lyle, you keeping me informed of what is going on with the fire plan and the update of it. I was unaware that commercial harvesting was actually a bad thing, but I know we do do some of that stuff, and it actually can be used to help prevent fires.

But since we have had a slide show today, let me just show you one slide show. This is what we are facing in Idaho. And while you can't predict an earthquake in Seattle, I can guarantee you you can predict one thing. This is going to burn, and it is going to burn very hot. And that is what we had last year on the Kerr Creek fire. And because we have not gone in and done the necessary thinning and so forth that is necessary to reduce the possibility of catastrophic wildfires—and I appreciate what you are doing in that area now and how we are going to be able to treat some of the lands and a few things like that and actually maybe some of them we may actually commercially cut a tree. Who knows? Somebody might want a two-by-four in their house.

But tell me about the consultation process that is going on. Are we having problems with that between different agencies, with NEPA, the NEPA process, and other types of things? As I understand it, talking to some of the local forest managers, we have got more biologists from NFS on the ground trying to have their say in what we are doing in these rehabilitation efforts and so forth. Are we using the categorical exclusions? And even when we have used some of those, I understand that they have complained that we shouldn't have used them and so forth. Could you talk to me a little bit about that?

Mr. LAVERTY. Just a very quick response, Mr. Simpson. We are working right now with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Again, the

funding for 2001 provided funding to the agencies to support the NFS and Fish and Wildlife Service Section 7 consultation. We are working right now to move that money over to Fish and Wildlife Service to do that. The Fish and Wildlife Service is probably going to hire an additional 100 biologists to do this Section 7 consultation work.

The processes are really not a problem for us. It is just a matter of having the staff to complete the process. And I think the Congress recognized that with the funding.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, let me ask just a follow-up. Is there something or anything that Congress needs to do to streamline this process so that we can actually do some of these rehabilitation projects and so forth?

Mr. LAVERTY. Yes. Thank you for asking that question. One of the things that we are working on right now—in fact, Mr. McInnis is giving us some support—is we have a bill that will provide us the legislative mechanism that we can move those funds over to Fish and Wildlife Service. That is a problem for us as an agency. And with that out of the way, we will get that Section 7 consultation work done on most of the 2002 projects. So that will be a great help.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, and thank you for all that you have done on this.

Mr. LAVERTY. Thank you.

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Tancredo?

Mr. TANCREDO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Laverty, good to see you here today, sir. In the political world, in the elected political world, the presence of an individual who has the courage of his commitments and who lives up to them is somewhat rare. In the bureaucratic world, it is even more rare, I think. You are an exception to that rule. You, from my point of view, are an individual who does have the courage of his convictions and has expressed them articulately, not just here today but in my brief history I have had with you, that has been my observation. And I just wanted to essentially thank you very much for being a strong supporter of good forest management, even when that support could get you into trouble.

The question I have for you is: Although I am encouraged by everything you have said in terms of the appropriations that have been made available to the agencies to suppress fire and to fight it, I am concerned about the degree to which you may be facing other obstacles, that is to say, more bureaucratic, more regulatory in nature. And if you could, sir—and if there isn't time today to complete your answer in a definitive way, even if you could submit to us some response on paper, that would be fine—I am interested in the Clean Air Act, NEPA, Endangered Species, roadless area, that sort of thing, where you may have all of the equipment now, you may have all of the firefighters in place, but not be able to do the job because of the regulatory burden.

Mr. LAVERTY. Mr. Tancredo, one of the actions that Tim and I have been working with CEQ is to actually go out and do some field reviews in terms of the work processes that are going on with NEPA. We believe that there are some opportunities just for us to examine closely what we do and how we go about doing that work.

We think there are some efficiencies to be gained there. In fact, Dinah Baird from CEQ has been very open with us about helping us, you know, find those ways that we can actually make NEPA work more effectively for us.

I think those kinds of findings will help us integrate really a tapestry of laws that we all deal with. Between the laws and regulations, we need to figure out how can we make those things work effectively for us. Many times, you know, training is a key tool to help people understand here is what you have to do, and perhaps we are doing many times more than we really need to do. But I think as we go through those kinds of field reviews, we can learn from that and then make those adaptive changes in terms of our work processes to be more effective and efficient in terms of responding to the situation that we have.

Mr. HARTZELL. Congressman, Lyle and I also have an inter-departmental environmental compliance group that has members from both departments and other agencies that meets on a regular basis to look at existing regulations and procedures to make sure that there aren't any roadblocks in the process and to help us be more efficient.

Let me just say that right now, from our perspective, we don't see any problems in meeting our fuels reduction acres because of regulations and environmental compliance. But one area we are interested in is possibly getting categorical exclusion status for rehab projects because they clearly are emergency in nature.

Mr. TANCREDO. Thank you both, gentlemen. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. [Presiding.] Mr. Otter?

Mr. OTTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, surprise.

I have got just a couple of questions, and I know, Lyle and Tim, we have talked an awful lot about this, and I appreciate the time that you have spent with me as the bottom of the political food chain and being a freshman. But you have given me an awful lot of time. But there are a couple of things that I would like to ask you.

Number one, where does the money go if we should actually get a return on a harvest? Where does that money go?

Mr. LAVERTY. On the Forest Service side, those receipts go to the general treasury.

Mr. OTTER. And so couldn't that then be used to help fund future firefighting and also future planning and rehabilitation and your five-point program?

Mr. LAVERTY. It goes into the big mix of the issues that you are dealing with on the Floor today.

Mr. OTTER. Okay. I think that is interesting because it seems to me that if you will recall, historically speaking, the Panhandle, the Clearwater, and Payett practically burned in total in 1914. Right? And then it was replaced by an invasive species or two, one fir and one a white pine. And their life cycle is about 90 years. Is that not right?

Mr. LAVERTY. Ninety to 120 years.

Mr. OTTER. We are on the threshold right now. My point is this: We are at the threshold right now. And if you lock yourself into a management plan that said simply we are going to do this for fire

prevention and we are at that threshold of 90-year life for those trees right now today, wouldn't it be reasonable to go in and clear-cut that if you were only going to go fire prevention? Because they are going to die. And then they are dead, and then they are fuel.

Mr. LAVERTY. I think maybe the short answer is that, depending on the situation, you want to take the right tool for that silvicultural treatment. It may or may not be a clear-cut. I would liken it to if you were a cabinetmaker, you want to have the right tool for that job. And I think the same way is true in terms of coming up with a silvicultural prescription depending on the outcome and the objectives that you are searching for. You want to use the right tool. In some cases it could be a clear-cut.

Mr. OTTER. My point is this: If they were thinned over a management period of time, allowing the trees a larger base per acre, wouldn't they be a lot less likely to have a fire, a devastating fire? A clear burn, let me say?

Mr. LAVERTY. One of the issues—and I think the Lick Creek photo series that we showed indicates the changes that are taking place in those stand structures. When you do, in fact, have that density of stands, that is when you invite insects, you invite various types of disease as well. So keeping those stand conditions in a healthy, functioning capacity, you know, provides benefits not only of general forest health, but I think the whole watershed systems begin to function effectively.

Mr. OTTER. Okay. One final question, if I might, Mr. Chairman. Is there any chance that you can train the Army Corps of Engineers and the EPA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and National Marine Fisheries Service people that are on the ground out there to fight fire?

Mr. LAVERTY. We get a lot of people from Fish and Wildlife Service as crews. We have used—I am not sure if we have used Corps of Engineer people, but we have a lot of interagency teams that bring people from all the agencies together.

Mr. OTTER. So cross-training is possible.

Mr. LAVERTY. Oh, absolutely.

Mr. HARTZELL. There is nothing precluding that. As long as they meet our rigid physical standards and they take the training, they can participate.

Mr. OTTER. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. I think the ranking member has one question he would like to ask.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you. I appreciate it.

I want to tell you a concern I have. The concern is that we are going to repeat some mistakes of the past. Our fire suppression policy has resulted in the accumulation of fuel loads that have resulted in some of these catastrophic fires. I think that is abundantly clear.

My concern is that when we get into some cataclysmic fires, which we may be back in that season again this year, that it will remove us from the long-term goal of getting back to a situation where fire is part of the natural cycle and we accept it as part of the natural cycle and we recognize that fire is necessary for a

healthy ecosystem in the long term. Ponderosa pines developed with fire, and the only reason they are healthy is with fire.

I guess the question is: How do we keep the twin goal of not allowing property damage in the West but realizing a long-term goal which I think should be—and you tell me if it is—of getting to a point where we can accept fire as part of the natural ecosystem and a necessary part of one?

Mr. LAVERTY. Mr. Inslee, I believe that the fire plan, the objectives are very, very consistent with what you described. But our challenge is how do we make those investments to bring that landscape back to that kind of a condition. And because, as we talked earlier, we have excluded fire from these landscapes for such a long time, we are no longer in the position because of the long-term effects of just letting nature take its course.

In Colorado, we have an example of a fire that burned four years ago, and that fire, it cost the Denver Water Board \$12 million to clear the sediment out of the watershed reservoir because of the rain that came after that. It burned with such intensity that we actually changed the structure of the soil. It is going to take literally centuries for that to recover.

The loss is not only in the function of that watershed, but at the same time we have lost the productive capacity of species habitat. And I believe that the goals that we have for the fire plan will allow us to begin making those kinds of treatments where we can keep fire in a more natural role that it plays on many of these landscapes across the interior West. However, that is not a simple answer because we now have this huge influx of people that want to live in this same type of a fire-adapted ecosystem, so the introduction of the human component makes that challenge much, much more difficult.

Mr. HARTZELL. Let me just quickly add that long-term fuels hazard management is the answer. It gives us options. It lowers fire intensity. It gives our firefighters more options when they do initial attack and respond to the fire. And that generally results in fewer resources and lower costs being needed for suppression.

Mr. LAVERTY. I would love to take you out and show you some of the areas where we have done some treatments on the ground, and I think we can show you exactly what happens in terms of changing fire effects in treated stands. And it can be done in such an environmentally sensitive fashion that it really does accomplish, I think, the items that you have shared with us, and I appreciate your comments.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that response and the fact that fire is a natural part of the ecosystem and will always be, and we are never going to put out all fires, nor should we put out all fires. But there are differences between catastrophic fires. We have in Idaho places from the 1910 fire where the soil is still sterile and nothing grows on it because it was so hot that it burned it—how far down was it?

Mr. OTTER. Eighteen inches.

Mr. SIMPSON. Eighteen inches. So, anyway, I appreciate that.

I would like to close this hearing today by taking a look at the weather, as was mentioned by the ranking member. Below normal

precipitation to date throughout much of the Western and South-eastern States indicates that we may be in for a big fire season again this summer. This makes it essential that time is used wisely and efficiently in the near term, preparing for the thousands of newly hired firefighters because if we don't adequately train and equip those people, we are unjustly putting them in life-threatening positions, which, of course, is unacceptable.

In the long term, we are looking at 73 million acres of Forest Service lands that are at high risk of catastrophic fires, more than a third of the national forest system. It will be a daunting task to reduce the hazards on these and other Federal lands, but a task we must accomplish.

So the Subcommittee will continue in its bipartisan effort to scrutinize these and all other aspects of the National Fire Plan as it is implemented. I look forward to working with you as we work on this endeavor to make sure that we can address this issue.

Does the ranking member have a closing statement?

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you very much.

Mr. SIMPSON. I thank the witnesses on the second panel for their insight and the members for their questions. The members of the Subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we ask that you please respond to these in writing. The hearing record will be held open for 10 days for these responses.

I would like to thank Mike Williams of the Subcommittee staff for his excellent work on this hearing.

If there is no further business before the Subcommittee, the Chairman again thanks the members of the Subcommittee and our witnesses. The Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:10 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

