

Opening Statement
Chairman Ron Wyden
Improving Federal Forest Management
June 25, 2013

- Today our Committee meets to give long-overdue attention to the issue of managing our federal forests. In my view, too many of our forestry programs are not working for forest-dependent communities, for taxpayers or for the cause of protecting America's natural treasures.
- The fact is, current forestry programs do not provide a stable source of jobs or funding for local communities. Instead of generating revenue, too often federal forest lands have become a burden to our taxpayers. Too often, valuable timber lands are neglected to the point they become tinder boxes for catastrophic fires.
- The status quo is unacceptable. Today the committee begins to look specifically at the cause of forestry reform.
- One of our nation's most creative thinkers on the issue - Norm Johnson of Oregon State University – is here from our home state. He's going to be presenting testimony on behalf of himself and Dr. Jerry Franklin. I think it would be fair to say wherever there is a challenging forestry issue, that's where we are lucky enough to have Dr. Johnson and Dr. Franklin and we are pleased that he could come.
- At town hall meetings that I hold across our state, I am told continually about the frustrations, reduced harvest rates, reductions in hazardous fuels programs, and other active management programs on lands held by the federal government and Bureau of Land Management. I know that a number of senators are here to describe the same experience that they have had.
- Over the past two and a half decades the amount of timber produced off Federal forest lands has declined at an extraordinary rate – from a high of 12 billion board feet per year in the 1980s to 2 to 3 billion board feet per year in the last decade.

- You only need to look at the massive wildfires that are burning – in Colorado, New Mexico and elsewhere - through beetle-infested stands and threatening homes to see the consequences of failed management.
- Meanwhile, our resource-dependent communities are losing jobs and they're losing mills that are critical to restoring forest health.
- As expected, this steep drop in timber production over the last few decades has corresponds with a dramatic drop in the number of the nation's timber mills, with a loss of about half of our mills in the last 2 decades.
- When those mills go away, too often communities lose jobs. And federal forest managers lose customers who buy lumber and wood products that help pay for badly needed restoration.
- It has been said more than once here in this committee that the cut needs to go up. We need to get people back to work in the woods. It is an absolute prerequisite to make sure that we have healthy forests and healthy communities. And it is our view that this can be done in line with common sense, practical application of the environmental laws.
- There are three reoccurring themes hindering forest management operations around the Country. First is a lack of funding to prepare sales, second is environmental analysis and review time for management activities, and third is litigation that stalls much of the work that is important to actually get done.
- In this hearing, we will explore ways to addressed these challenges in the very near future to improve federal forest management and free up resources to get more restoration work done:
- The first item is federal agencies have to do the best possible job of budgeting and planning for forest management. The status quo of spending more and more money fighting wildfires, instead of working to prevent those fires, is just unacceptable.
- In a hearing just a few weeks ago we made it clear that the Office of Management and Budget ought to drop its obstruction of hazardous fuels reduction funding, which is a key element of healthy forest planning.

- Just yesterday I had a spirited discussion with the folks at OMB, the director specifically, so that we create a plan to fix the problems with our current approach to fire budgeting, to stop the pilfering of funding for restoration work and hazardous fuels reductions.
- In this same area, I have concerns about the amount of money that is spent on overhead and administration. What the Forest Service refers to as its “cost pool” charges, pays for just about everything *except* the actual work on the ground that makes a difference. The Forest Service has also identified this as a problem, but according to the Agency’s last budget documents, last year the Forest Service spent 18.2% of their Forest Products and Restoration funding on overhead.
- In contrast, it is our understanding that other agencies in the Department of Interior and USDA spend about 10 percent on overhead for their programs. If the Forest Service cut its overhead just to those levels, an additional 24,000 acres could receive commercial thinning just from the Forest Products and Restoration account savings. If the agency devoted all of the savings generated across the Agency’s programs to commercial thinning – I wouldn’t say that is a realistic target anytime soon - the Forest Service could thin an additional 485,000 acres per year.
- The second area we’re going to look at is how agencies can reduce the up-front cost of planning forestry management projects. The last time it was measured, the Forest Service spent \$356 million alone on the needed environmental review of projects—some 70% of Federal forest management project costs are environmental analysis and document preparation. The question on this point is, is there a way to improve the NEPA process to reduce the frankly staggering costs and planning time, without shortchanging the important environmental protections in the law?
- Finally, once timber sales or management decisions are complete, there ought to be a way to address the prospect that there may be protests, or litigation.
- In my part of the world, folks have seen that collaboration is one way to bring the cut up – just as we’ve seen in Eastern Oregon - while reducing the number of lawsuits.

- I particularly want to commend Chief Tidwell's point for stressing at every opportunity, as the chief has, the value of collaboration because as we've seen in Eastern Oregon, we've had a historic agreement reached in 2009 between industry and conservationists has already yielded significant progress on the ground, with more collaboration and agreement leading to more landscape scale efforts.
- I'm particularly pleased that agency announced a 10-year stewardship contract for the Malheur National Forest, where a collaborative has been working very hard to address forest restoration needs.
- We're going to keep working with the parties on the eastside to advance those efforts, and also look at rest of our state and country.
- Let we wrap up by saying we want to hear about creative approaches to reduce the number of protests to the projects and to get the thoughts of our witnesses with respect to other challenges in Oregon, specifically the O&C lands.
- I'd also like to specifically highlight our challenges in Oregon, starting with the O&C lands.
- The Oregon and California Railroad lands are truly unique, both in their legal status and history, going back to the 1937 O&C Act. The idea was to provide stable revenues and jobs for the communities affected by what is a unique and for all practical purposes a crazy checkerboard of public and private ownership.
- But since the northern spotted owl listing in 1990, timber harvests have plummeted and the Bureau of Land Management hasn't been able to significantly get the volume of harvest up.
- So we are very anxious to hear, particularly from Dr. Johnson, about some of the innovative work that they are doing there, to look at riparian areas, the work done by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and particularly the effort to get more inter-agency coordination.

- Despite that, the sales are still tied up with protests and litigation and a number of obstacles ahead: Endangered Species Act listings, federal survey and manage requirements, that are a much larger burden than certainly were anticipated, and as mentioned earlier, the checkerboard pattern of ownership.
- So I will shortly be jumping in with legislation that builds on work by the Oregon delegation and Governor Kitzhaber, and look forward to hearing from Dr. Norm Johnson and the BLM on this today.
- We've had a number of witnesses make the trek from the West and I appreciate that.
- Now I will turn to my ranking member, Sen. Murkowski for her opening remarks.