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NAVAJO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
NAVAJO COUNTY, AZ

AMENDMENT TO THE BIPARTISAN SPORTSMEN'S ACT OF 2014 (S. 2363)

JULY 15, 2014

Mr. Chairman, and Committee members, thank you for the invitation to address you today. For the record, my name is David Porter Tenney, and I am a member of the Board of Supervisors in Navajo County, which is located in northeastern Arizona.

I will begin by stating that the use of forest industry is the key ingredient for managing our forests. Fire suppression cannot, and should not be the primary focus. We spend way too much time and money on putting out burning trees instead of cutting them and putting them to good use. Cutting trees saves our forests, it saves our watersheds, it saves our communities, it improves our economy, it creates jobs and it saves money. Thinning the forest is smart. It is responsible and it produces measureable results. I have reviewed the Amendment to the Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act of 2014 introduced by Senators McCain, Flake and Barrasso and I believe they have identified both the problem and the solution.

The management of natural resources has become critically important to rural areas across the Country. The 468,000 acre Rodeo-Chediski Fire of 2002 burned in my county and nearly destroyed my home; and the 538,000 acre Wallow Fire of 2011 burned in two of my neighboring counties. The footprints left by these two fires could comfortably hold the cities of Phoenix, Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles and the cost to fight and recover from the fires was over \$230,000,000. The fires destroyed more than 4 billion board feet of timber, and destroyed over 400 homes.

Our combined mistakes in forest management have changed rural counties like mine, and I am tired of watching my State burn. Starting with the legislation introduced by Senators McCain, Flake and Barrasso – we must make a significant departure from the present way of dealing with landscape wildfire.

Let me give you one recent example that illustrates why. The San Juan Fire started on June 26, 2014, on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and entered the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest soon after detection. The cause is unknown and under investigation, but the fire has now been contained at approximately 7,000 acres. The San Juan Fire cost \$6,500,000 to fight. That is a cost of \$932.00 an acre to burn trees. If we were to spend that same \$6,500,000 on NEPA and forest treatment, the Apache-Sitgreaves could get 50,000 acres cut and put money into the Treasury. 50,000 acres of treated forest is better than 7,000 acres of nothing. Especially when our region of Arizona has multiple saw mills predicting a shortfall of timber supply this fall. Let me reiterate that. We could spend, on average, \$128.00 per acre in preparing, studying and selling acres for treatment in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest or

spend hundreds more per acre in suppression and no production. That is not the right plan, but it illustrates the problem across the Country.

Areas where thinning and prescribed fire treatments had been implemented under the White Mountain Stewardship Contract modified the San Juan Fire's behavior so that suppression resources were able to successfully engage the fire. Fire behavior in the treated areas were significantly reduced with maximum rates of spread of 1-2 mph, maximum flame lengths of 8-12 feet, and spotting distances of 150-200 feet. In most instances, the treated areas burned at about 1-2 feet high and will produce a beautiful and clean forest. In untreated areas the spread was twice as fast, had flame lengths 10X as high and spotting of half a mile. Certain portions of the fire's spread were entirely stopped by the forest thinning, and allowed firefighters to quickly and safely contain the fire by utilizing hand-lines, dozer-lines, and burning out along the road system in these treated areas, however, it was not enough to prevent two spotted owl packs from being destroyed.

Mr. Chairman, and Committee members, to a large extent, the rural communities of the Nation were founded on, and exist from, the use of the abundant natural resources that surrounded them. We know that thinning in the forest works, it saves money – it makes money, and yet we currently have a system in place that misuses the taxpayer's dollars - and gives no chance of improving the situation.

Right now, there is a system in place which is called "fire borrowing". In the Forest Service, a local Forest Supervisor and their staff typically get their budget sometime in April or May of a given year. That is about eight months into the fiscal year. They then have about two months to initiate contracts and other hazardous fuel treatment work before significant portions of their budget get pulled out by the Washington Office for fire suppression across the Country.

After the fire season, if there is anything left, the funds that were taken are then redistributed. I don't call this situation "fire borrowing" I call it "fire plundering," because we know that the local Forest Supervisor and their staff rarely get back what was "borrowed". Usually, when you borrow something you give back more than you take. We call that interest. But right now, I can't find any interest that is served if we don't apply the sound managerial and fiscal policy that is being proposed with this amendment.

I support Senators McCain, Flake and Barrasso and the legislation they have proposed. Requiring that the equivalent of at least half of the cost of suppression go to treatment will dramatically cut down on the cost of suppression in the future. We have proof that treatment works. The solution to catastrophic wildfire is getting industry back into the forest to thin the trees in an ecologically and socially sustainable way. This amendment leads us down that path.

Mr. Chairman, and Committee members, as a county supervisor who has seen and experienced the consequences of a forest that is not permitted to be properly managed, I implore you to move this amendment forward.

Thank you for this opportunity. I would be happy to stand for any questions.