

**Opening Statement
Committee Business Meeting
December 19, 2013
Senator Lisa Murkowski**

When it comes to forest management, we all agree on both sides of the aisle, on and off this committee, that the status quo is unacceptable. It's just not working right now. As I see it, the best way to change the status quo is through a nationwide bill that addresses the roadblocks to increasing the pace and scale of forest management including timber harvest. The roadblocks are systemic in nature and not generally place-based or state-specific. They involve issues such as management direction and regulation – for example, the roadless rule -- the National Environmental Policy Act and other environmental laws, forest and resource planning, and litigation. I think that our focus in this committee with respect to forestry should be on a national bill. I want to repeat your commitment, that I'm committed to working with you on that and in that direction. At the same time, where we can defer to state-specific pilots for addressing some of these challenges and enabling experience to develop and science to evolve, we should do so.

I want to start first with your bill Mr. Chairman, S.1301, the Oregon Eastside Forests bill. I thank you and your staff for working to add balance to the bill with respect to several of the key concerns that I have raised. I know that this legislation is an important home-state priority for you. I also understand and share your desire to see the forests in your state managed in a way that recognizes local conditions. I think it is important that we recognize that regardless of where your forests are, forests are different. The forests in West Virginia, which I've had an opportunity to see, are very different than your forests in Oregon and certainly very different than the Tongass. To understand that and recognize that we have these differences is critical to how we advance these policies when it comes to forest management. Your willingness to make the bill a true pilot, to include language making clear that it does not constitute a precedent for national legislation, and to modify the bill as to make it less prescriptive, persuades me to compromise and vote to report the bill. All of that said, I would be remiss if I did not point out that the level of detail and management direction in this bill on issues that are still evolving scientifically, the uncertainty that exists with respect to how this legislation would fit into the preexisting statutory framework, and the lack of resources to implement this bill in today's constrained budget environment all give me great pause. Nevertheless, in deference to you, I think it is reasonable to have your bill, addressing forests in your state, to move forward, notwithstanding the

objections. Suffice to say, we have a great deal more work to do before we will have a bi-partisan approach on forestry more generally. But I look forward to continuing to work with you.