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November 20, 2017

The Honorable John Shimkus
Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6115

Chairman Shimkus:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the hearing entitled “Air Quality Impacts of Wildfires: Perspectives of Key Stakeholders” on Wednesday, October 4, 2017. Per your request, please find attached my response to your additional question for the record:

“Over the last three decades, the amount of timber harvested from federal lands has declined significantly while the number and extent of fires on these lands has increased significantly. Is this a coincidence or does thinning of forests actually reduce the risks of wildfires?”

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Knox Marshall
Vice President of Resources
Murphy Company

Enclosure:
Knox Marshall’s Response for the Record

Committee Question for the Record:

Over the last three decades, the amount of timber harvested from federal lands has declined significantly while the number and extent of fires on these lands has increased significantly. Is this a coincidence or does thinning of forests actually reduce the risks of wildfires?

Knox Marshall's Response for the Record:

Over the past 10 years, an average of 6.8 million acres have burned from wildland fires annually.¹ During this period, an average of 202,000 acres have been harvested from National Forest System lands.² While the wildland fire acreage figures include both federal and non-federal lands, it is noteworthy that 34 times as many acres burned as were responsibly harvested from national forests. Policymakers and the American public can draw their own conclusions from this data, yet there is a wide body of scientific research suggesting the thinning of forests is effective in reducing the risks of wildfires.

In fact, according to the U.S. Forest Service's Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Database, 90 percent of fuels reduction projects- whether carried out through logging, thinning or prescribed fire- were effective in reducing wildfire severity.³ Researchers from the University of Montana found that comprehensive treatment prescriptions designed to restore sustainable ecological conditions can move 90 percent of treated acres into a low-hazard condition.⁴

The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service studied the economic benefit in taking proactive forest management activities, using the Mokelumne River watershed in the Sierra Nevada as a representative case. The research suggested that fuel treatments such as forest thinning and controlled burning can save up to three times the cost of future fires, reduce high-severity fire by up to 75 percent, and bring added benefits for people, water, and wildlife. In addition, by reducing the size and severity of fires, the carbon emissions from the fires were decreased by 38 to 77 percent, suggesting that these activities can help protect the carbon stocks sequestered in our forests.⁵

The National Insect and Disease Map, developed through rigorous scientific standards, indicates that 60 to 80 million acres of forests are at risk of insects and disease and are in need of treatment. In 2012, the Science-Based Risk Analysis Report determined that "experience with

¹ National Interagency Fire Center, Statistics, National Fire News Year-to-Date Fires and Acres (nifc.gov)

² Harvest Trends on National Forest System Lands, Historic Harvest Records, 1984 to Present. Forest Service Activity Tracking System (FACTS)

³ USFS, Adaptive Management Services Enterprise Team, Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Database (fs.fed.us/adaptivemanagement)

⁴ C. Keegan, C. Fiedler, T. Morgan. Wildfire in Montana: Potential hazard reduction and economic effects of a strategic treatment program, Forest Products Journal, July/August 2004)

⁵ Buckley, M., N. Beck, P. Bowden, M. E. Miller, B. Hill, C. Luce, W. J. Elliot, N. Enstice, K. Podolak, E. Winford, S. L. Smith, M. Bokach, M. Reichert, D. Edelson, and J. Gaither. 2014.

"Mokelumne watershed avoided cost analysis: Why Sierra fuel treatments make economic sense."

A report prepared for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

fuels treatment projects has demonstrated the value of fuels reduction to reduce wildfire suppression costs and protect land and resources.”⁶

Dr. William Stewart, a University of California-Berkeley forestry specialist, writes that managing forests to reduce fuel loads “provides immediate dividends,” “including fewer fuels mean less-intense wildfire, greater firefighter safety, lesser environmental consequence and fewer greenhouse gas emissions.”⁷ I agree with Dr. Stewart’s assessment, and I urge the United States Congress to take action to increase that pace and scale of thinning and other forest management activities on federal lands.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Environment and to address your additional question for the record.

⁶ 2013-2027 National Insect and Disease Forest Risk Assessment, Forest Health Technology Enterprise Team, U.S. Forest Service, January 2014

⁷ Stewart, W, *The Multiple Benefits of Managed Forests*, University of California-Berkeley, Center For Forestry. , California Forests, Summer 2010