

Testimony of the Honorable F. Lee Grose
Commissioner, Lewis County, WA

concerning

State Forest Management: A Model for Promoting Healthy
Forests, Rural Schools and Jobs

on behalf of

Washington State Association of Counties
Washington Board of Natural Resources, and the
Evergreen Forest Counties Group

before

The Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation

of

The Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives

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Statement
By F. Lee Grose, Commissioner
Lewis County, Washington
Before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental
Regulation

Good Morning, Chairman Bishop, Ranking member Grijalva and members of the committee. My name is Lee Grose and I am a County Commissioner from Lewis County, Washington. Last year I was grateful to be elected by my peers from across Washington State as a member of the Board of Natural Resources which oversees the trust land responsibility of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

I own a small tree farm in the midst of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in the heart of the Cascade Mountains where conifers grow like weeds. I live here to fully appreciate my “little piece of heaven” as a colleague termed my property. Over the last 10 years, I have personally done three different phases of harvest from a selective cut to a pre-commercial thinning project to a damage harvest from a wind storm. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the timber counties of Washington State and their trust relationship with the Department of Natural Resources.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for the administration of roughly 2.1 million acres of working forests.

DNR has administrative responsibility over these lands and provides for a fiscally responsible continued yield program of sustainable tree harvests.

In 2011, state trust lands yielded a harvest of 560 million board feet (MMBF) of timber which generated \$220,000,000 in revenue from 2.1 million acres of land managed on behalf of the trusts.

By contrast, National Forest lands in Washington yielded 129 million board feet (MMBF) generating revenue of only \$638,000 on 9.3 million Acres or one fifth of what the state produced on a quarter of the land base.

Stated differently, the state produces 500% more actual timber revenue on less than one quarter of the land base of that held by the U.S. Forest Service. Again, 9.3 million acres of federal land compared to 2.1 million acres of state land.

This comparison is even more striking when you look at the relative dollars generated per board foot; that is \$308 per MBF on state land vs. \$5.00 per MBF on Forest Service Land.

The U.S. Forest Service is woefully behind the state in both timber produced and dollars generated. Any thought that current federal land management practices could provide levels of harvest which would provide revenue to support local governments or schools and universities is

fully. The Forest Service would do well to follow the state's lead in order to help sustain local economies particularly in our rural communities and provide revenues for Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding by the Congress. Congress, by legislation, should require the Forest Service to follow the state of Washington's management model.

For example, the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, in an extremely conservative estimate, allows for a harvest of around of 300 MMBF per year of timber even though it has been scientifically verified that the actual growth in the forest is well over one billion board feet per year. Yet, the Northwest Forest Plan provides for a harvest level goal on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (1,348,000 total acres of forest land) of only 50 MMBF. As of 2010, actual cuts by the Forest Service in the Gifford Pinchot were only 22 MMBF harvested and that includes non-traceable firewood permits, and the Forest Service doesn't even know whether those permits were ever used or the wood removed.

This bears repeating:

- This Gifford Pinchot National Forest is capable of producing 300 MMBF of timber per year;
- The Northwest Forest Plan goal is to cut 50 MMBF every year (or one sixth of what the forest actually grows);
- We are actually only cutting 22 MMBF including firewood;
- _The Forest Service says it would like to increase cuts to 30 MMBF;
- Look at the lost potential of this National Forest!

--All of this is symptomatic of a national embarrassment when compared to what the state of Washington DNR is actually accomplishing.

Here's the most damning statistic of all:

The entire U.S. National Forest system consists of 193,000,000 acres and in 2011 produced a paltry \$180,000,000. This is less than \$1 per acre of revenue to the Federal Treasury—when potentially these forests across America could produce thousands of dollars per acre for taxpayers.

Last year the Forest Service budget was \$2.3 billion dollars while it cut a measly 2 billion BF of timber. Twenty years ago the Forest Service budget was roughly half of last year's and its' timber sale program produced 14 billion BF of timber.

This 20 year collapse is depriving Congress of the revenues needed to operate and manage the National Forest system. Moreover, it deprives local forest communities of the best source of funds to develop vibrant economic opportunities or at least it deprives Congress of the revenues needed to fund the SRS until the day comes when we once again have active National Forest Management modeled after the successful program which our state operates. It is obvious and it is a national disgrace!

I am not proposing that we harvest the equivalent amounts but were the national forests managed in the same manner as we do with the state forests, the yield would potentially be even greater since the state is so much more efficient than the Forest Service.

Forest harvests by the Department of Natural Resources under the direction of the Board of Natural Resources comply with the the same environmental laws under which the federal forests operate. The Department is signatory to a 70 year all species Habitat Conservation Plan with the federal agencies providing for “incidental take.” The resource is managed with best practices again with the goal of meeting their fiduciary responsibilities while maintaining a sustainable harvest yield. In some cases, as now with the Marbled Murrelet, the DNR has stood beside the federal agencies in litigation. We appreciate this partnership and fully expect it to continue well in to the future.

In addition to the harvest responsibility, the DNR also is cognizant of their obligation to replace what has been harvested. They have thus implemented an aggressive replanting scheme which insures further that the sustainable harvest goals that have been established will continue well in to the future. We continue to think of our timber as a renewable cash crop.

The issue of timber harvests cannot be considered without speaking about old growth timber. The once thought threat of harvest of old growth has long since been virtually forgotten for several reasons. First, no one wants to go through the ensuing inevitable litigation that would occur if harvesting old growth was even considered. Second, there are few mills in the Northwest that could even cut trees of that size; most have a 24” to 32” maximum diameter size limitation. Third, there is an ample supply of timber in the 40 to 60 year old range that is readily available for harvest which provides the mills that are left with just the right size of logs. In short, there is really no desire to harvest old growth as was once the case. The DNR uses a definition of “very large diameter (60-90 inches or larger), structurally unique trees” and uses that to provide for retention to meet the requirements of the Habitat Conservation Plan.

While definitions of what constitutes old growth vary greatly, historically many have believed that a good mark was 250 years old. Regardless of the age, the fact is that the lack of active management has undisputedly led to a mono-culture forest structure and we are not replicating the historic multi-culture forests of cedar, Sitka spruce and other varieties which make for a healthy, vibrant forest. We’re not doing any management of this kind on federal lands and they are not only a fire hazard, but a national embarrassment.

Those of us who are sensitive to the environmental concerns of harvesting timber from the federal lands should know that timber producers share this ethic. I live where I live because of my love for the out of doors and trees in general.

Environmentally speaking, trees reach a peak of carbon sequestration at an age of approximately 60-80 years. This is especially important with the emphasis on global warming and CO2 emissions since trees are a major absorptive medium for carbon sequestration. Younger, healthier forests will provide us with more CO2 sequestration than older, mature forests. We need to strive to make our forests healthier with a health benefit to all.

Until the last few years, it is my understanding that the Forest Service has used roughly one-half of its' budget for fire suppression. While the fire suppression was removed from the Forest Service budget in the FLAME Act, it was subsequently restored as part of the Forest Service budget during the Budget Control Act. Fire suppression was allocated \$1.9 billion in the budget and then received another \$400 million from other programs.

The DNR also budgets fire suppression and this is one area that is funded by the state general fund. In 2011, \$22 million was allocated in this area. Just one 18 acre fire on the Gifford Pinchot Forest last year exceeded \$10 million in suppression costs which was mainly monitoring to make sure the fire didn't spread too far. There is a totally different philosophy between the two when it comes to this subject. The DNR, again in its' fiduciary role, uses what I would call active suppression to eliminate the fire. The Forest Service uses a "let it burn" philosophy. It is particularly bothersome that the DNR seems to spend less under their philosophy than does the Forest Service.

The administration of the trusts under the Washington Board of Natural Resources has proven to be an effective business model. Through this model, between 75% and 79% of the total funds generated are returned to the various trusts; the balance being used for the administration of the program. With budgets being what they are in the current economic climate, this revenue has been extremely important to those entities who receive money from this source. The potential to use this model on the federal forest landscape is, I believe, very real and would make the forests financially viable for future generations while providing for multiple uses as envisioned by President Roosevelt. And while many of those uses have changed as our technology and leisure time activities have evolved, the desire to harvest our timber crop is just as vibrant today.

A new model could provide a reliable revenue source to various entities which now receive federal funds in the form of Secure Rural Schools payments. Finally, let me restate my main point which is that following the state model would cut administrative costs, yield more timber and provide badly needed additional revenue to the federal budget at a time we need it the most.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today.