

House Small Business Committee

Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Business Development

“Sustainable Forestry’s Role in Climate Solutions”
Hearing

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Hagedorn and esteemed committee members of the subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Business Development, I appear before you today on behalf of the American Loggers Council, a nonprofit timber industry trade association representing 30 states, to address the role that the forest industry performs in supporting sustainable forestry and the contribution that healthy managed forests provide in addressing climate issues.

Put simply, loggers ensure healthy forests. As a Minnesota DNR Commissioner told a prior Governor:

***“Governor, the Minnesota DNR doesn’t manage the forests
the loggers do it for us.”***

LOGGERS – THE SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY TOOL

Public and private land managers cannot accomplish their healthy forest objectives without loggers. Healthy forests depend upon a healthy, stable, and sustainable timber industry. You can have both, but you cannot have one, healthy forests, without the other – loggers.

It will require a fine balance of land management, logging and transportation infrastructure, and forest product mills. A disruption or loss of any segment of this supply chain will create an irreparable breakdown in the interdependent balance. If timber availability is not consistent and dependable, mills will not

locate where there is not reliable resource availability. This has recently been experienced in South Dakota, where a mill closed after 50 years because the US Forest Service indicated that they would not be offering the volume of timber necessary to continue operations. When the mills close, the logging infrastructure and capacity collapses. Unfortunately, as in this situation when the U.S. Forest Service decides that it is time to increase forest management activity, the logging and mill industry infrastructure will not exist. It will not be possible at that time to reestablish harvesting investments or end use mills, so the U.S. Forest Service will not be able to “manage” their forests which will ultimately die or burn.

This was experienced with the lodgepole pine beetles in Colorado. Mountainsides were covered with brown dead timber. When the officials realized the potential for catastrophic wildfires that the dead timber represented and wanted to remove it, they became aware that they no longer had the logging, transportation, or mill infrastructure in Colorado necessary because of decades of opposition to active logging and forest management.

Teddy Roosevelt, the “Conservation President” gave a speech to the Society of American Foresters in 1903 where he said;

First and foremost, you can never afford to forget for one moment what is the object of the forest policy. Primarily that object is not to preserve forests because they are beautiful—though that is good in itself—not to preserve them because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness—though that too is good in itself—but the primary object of the forest policy as of the land policy of the United States, is the making of prosperous homes, is part of the traditional policy of home-making of our country. Every other consideration comes as secondary. The whole effort of the government in dealing with the forests must be directed to this end, keeping in view the fact that it is not only necessary to start the homes as prosperous, but to keep them so. That is the way the forests have need to be kept.

You must remember that the forest which contributes nothing to the wealth, progress, or safety of the country is of no interest to the government, and it should be of little to the forester. Your attention should be directed not to the preservation of the forests as an end in itself, but as the means for preserving and

increasing the prosperity of the Nation. Forestry is the preservation of forests by wise use.

The most striking and encouraging fact in the forest situation is that lumbermen are realizing that practical lumbering and practical forestry are allies and not enemies, and that the future of each depends upon the other.

Sustainable forestry, as stated by President Roosevelt over 100 years ago requires management, including “wise use”. Today’s loggers (lumbermen) and forest managers (forestry) share a mutual objective and are dependent upon one another. Because without the timber and forest products industry sustainable forestry is not possible. President Roosevelt understood that 100 years ago, we need to return to that understanding today.

LOGGING INDUSTRY CHALLENGES, THREATS AND NEEDS

The logging industry represents small business jobs in rural America. Although the timber resource continues to increase, the logging industry continues to decrease. This is the result of minimal profit margins, high capital investment requirements, forest products mill closures due to shifting markets (and the COVID pandemic) for traditional forest products such as paper, and workforce development challenges.

For the most part, loggers have seen little to no increase in the delivered price for wood sold to mills in the last ten years. While, during the same period, equipment costs have increased 30%, insurance premiums have increased 20%, and recently fuel prices have increased 50%. When lumber prices skyrocketed this year, most loggers did not see any benefit and in some cases experienced price cuts.

From a workforce development perspective, the timber industry workforce is aging with the median age over 50 years. This workforce is predicted to continue to decline by 14% over the next 8 years. Logging is difficult and dangerous work, but those risks are not reflected in the wages and benefits paid. Logging is not competitive with other comparable industries and younger workers are not entering the logging industry at the rate that older workers are leaving.

One of the greatest challenges is transportation. There is not enough trucking capacity to meet the demand. Additionally, insurance rates in some regions are \$10,000 to \$15,000 per year per truck. Trucking is the weak link in the timber industry supply chain.

The timber industry is stressed and needs assistance to address these challenges and threats. The American Loggers Council has submitted a Briefing Paper as part of our full testimony that addresses these challenges and proposes legislative and policy changes that would provide assistance in resolving some of these issues.

HEALTHY FOREST AND THE CLIMATE

However, this is about more than rural agricultural jobs. Healthy forests are vital to addressing climate change and particularly carbon sequestration. Nothing absorbs and stores more carbon than the forests. That is why the global trillion tree initiative was joined by the United States in recognition of the carbon sequestration role that trees provide.

Carbon sequestration decreases in woodlands as they age. The following shows carbon sequestration rates by ages, represented by total carbon in above and below ground trees across all forest types in Minnesota:

- 10-year-old forests: 0.60 tons of carbon per acre per year
 - 50-year-old forests: 0.20 tons of carbon per acre per year
 - 100-year-old forests: 0.15 tons of carbon per acre per year
- (Source – Carbon in Minnesota Trees and Woodland, University of Minnesota extension)

We need young, healthy, diverse and growing forests, not overmature timber, dead, diseased, and dying trees and certainly not burning forests.

If we don't agree upon that, then the timber industry will have limited opportunity to contribute to sustainable forestry as part of carbon sequestration and climate solutions.

WILDFIRES

Poor forest management does not create healthy forests, but instead negates the potentially positive benefits that would otherwise be achieved from sustainable forestry practices, and results in severe environmental consequences.

This is evident in the increase in wildfires in the U.S. and around the world. Global wildfire carbon dioxide emissions are at record highs. The Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service of the EU found that burning forests released 1.3 gigatons of carbon dioxide last month alone. The highest since the organization began measurements in 2003. The U.S. was a leading contributor. Scientists are concerned that areas with dense vegetation -including many of our National Forests - are becoming a source rather than a sink of greenhouse gases.

A recent study, that the US Forest Service participated in, acknowledged that a warming climate has extended the wildfire season for obvious reasons. However, the study found that climate change accounts for just 14% of the influence on more destructive wildfires, while noting that live fuel was the largest factor, accounting for 53%.

Major portions of the hazardous fuels are smaller diameter understory that has minimal commercial value or use. However, don't interpret that to suggest that is the only live fuel removal necessary to reduce wildfire incidents. In fact, the number of stems per acre in many of the U.S. Forest Service high danger areas is over 4-5 times the density that silvicultural standards would recognize for healthy forests. Hazardous fuels and density reductions, including commercial harvesting, are necessary to comprehensively address the threat. Limiting the effort to only one segment will not effectively address or resolve the problem.

Utilization of otherwise unmerchantable timber is necessary in order to economically harvest this timber. Fortunately, multiple companies have developed processes to use unmerchantable forest-based feedstock and biomass to produce renewable biofuels that will offset fossil fuels. The only impediment to implementing this technology is the EPA Office of Air and Radiation misinterpretation of the Renewable Fuel Standard, RIN eligible, feedstock definition. Resolving this issue is critical to establishing the necessary markets to utilize this otherwise unmerchantable resource. In many cases it would also

create D3 and D7 Renewable Fuel products that have otherwise been unrealized in meeting the Congressional Intent of the Renewable Fuel Standard.

I've worked on wildfires, in fact my son is a wildland firefighter. Fire science is relatively simple. Fire requires three elements to occur – oxygen, fuel, and an ignition source. Removing oxygen from the environment is not an option for obvious reasons. Quite often the ignition source for wildfires is lightning, which is not controllable. The only manageable variable is the fuel source, and as noted in the previously referenced study, live fuel is the largest contributing factor to increased wildfire severity, size, and frequency. Unless we address the fuel loads in the forests, improving forest health and mitigating wildfires will not succeed.

Last May I had the opportunity to fly over and survey the aftermath of the wildfires in California. A video of the helicopter survey was produced and is included in my full testimony for the Congressional Record. If that video does not initiate an honest science-based dialogue to develop a new national policy on forest management, wildfire mitigation, timber salvage and restoration, nothing will.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable Forestry, practiced and performed by the American timber and forest products industry, is part of the solution in meeting the objectives of climate initiatives. However, it is entirely dependent on the rural jobs that the timber and forest products industries provide.

The American timber and forest products industry is prepared to be a partner in creating rural agricultural jobs that will also provide the tools to address climate issues, reduce wildfires, produce renewable green fuels to offset fossil fuels and “contribute to the prosperity of the nation”.

American Loggers Council Wildfire Survey Concludes A New National Policy And Strategy Is Necessary To Reduce Wildfires

The United States, particularly federal forest management agencies, knows how to reduce the ever increasing, more severe and larger wildfires.



These litigants have weaponized well intended safeguards such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as part of an obstructive and delaying strategy designed to impede forest management.

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The United States, particularly federal forest management agencies, knows how to reduce the ever increasing, more severe and larger wildfires. Other public and private land managers and owners are already doing it with more positive results than the federal efforts. The only difference is their forest management approaches.

The federal land management agencies have professional foresters that recognize the problem and know the solution. Yet their hands are tied by bureaucratic processes and overly burdensome regulations. When they do complete the entire process and attempt to implement the land treatment prescription they face regular litigation to block or stall the land management effort, which results in perpetual delays rendering the objectives

unrealized. These litigants have weaponized well intended safeguards such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as part of an obstructive and delaying strategy designed to impede forest management. These obstructionist tactics directly contribute to unhealthy forests subject to disease, invasive species, mortality and wildfire.

The results are demonstrated in the video below that highlights the aftermath of millions of acres of land and timber destroyed. The United States needs a new wildfire mitigation strategy based on scientifically supported silvicultural practices including; active forest management; salvage; and restoration.

Video Link to Wildfire Survey (copy and paste into browser)

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=MLzGGxYOoFA>