

December 4, 2013

ATTN: Federal Lands Interim Committee  
C/O Legislative Services Office  
Research and Legislation  
P.O. Box 83720  
Boise, Idaho 83720-0054

Honorable Chairpersons Winder and Denny:

Thank you for allowing me comment on the issues associated with the management of federal lands and the potential shift of management of some of these lands to the State of Idaho. Having spent more than 30 years as an employee of the U.S. Forest Service I am quite familiar with federal land management, in particular forest timber management. I have a B.S. in Forest Management from Washington State University, worked as a certified silviculturist and timber management resource specialist, provided management supervision and oversight to the timber, soils, fisheries, wildlife and range management programs on the Payette National Forest and am providing professional service on natural resources management issues to Adams County.

When I retired from the Forest Service in January of 1998 one of my goals was to “try and get the Forest Service back to actually performing forest vegetation management”. My effort was to try and apply appropriate outside influence to manage the forests growing on the National Forests. As an employee, even with significant responsibility, it was difficult to get active forest management accomplished without ever ending administrative appeals and litigation. The existing laws and rules have several problems with being convoluted, subject to much interpretation and activist judiciary writing new law rather than interpreting the law as written. It is obvious to me that the environmental community with a multi-million dollar lobby holds way to much sway in our nation’s capital. The “sue and settle” process was denying legitimate, science based and experience based management to proceed. That process continues to this day. The environmental community would rather see forest burned by wildfire than have resources extracted and used from federal lands. Well meaning legislation by Congress to solve concerns has through lobbyist influence on rulemaking occasionally exacerbated the problems.

Negotiated settlements with environmental groups to solve problems about where and how to manage forests have been less than successful. The reason is simple, as soon as one round of negotiation is settled players in the environmental group change and they simply move in a slightly different direction but always toward a common end goal. An example involves the South Fork of the Salmon River, both the Forest Service and timber industry was very interested in timber management in that large drainage. After endless administrative and legal maneuvering the sides met during Forest Plan development. Timber industry agreed to give up the push to have the Forest Service manage the timber in the South Fork if the environmental groups would recognize the need to manage without substantial encumbrance the large volume of timber resources in the drainages

of the Payette, Weiser and Little Salmon River drainages. The environmental groups agreed to that. However, not one year after that they were again appealing and litigating nearly every timber project. As the composition of the Forest Service staff has changed and the emphasis service-wide is changing to restoration forestry the desire to manage a timber resource is lost in favor of the Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The emphasis is toward only harvesting when it enhances wildlife habitat. Any timber production as a resource production obligation to the areas economy is mostly overlooked.

Having joined the Payette Forest Coalition, a diverse group with representation from a number of special interest groups, I am seeing a strong push for control of the forest management by environmental groups in the coalition. Although only a few of these environmental groups actually participate in the coalition's consensus driven management recommendations to the Forest Service. Instead they wait in the wings and negotiate toward their position even though the consensus recommendation considered their concerns. They also solve their concern through the typical "sue and settle" routine. Of course the Forest Service does not require any form of monetary risk for this routine, but the Equal Access to Justice Act actually encourage litigation because litigants can recover all costs even with a partial victory.

Unfortunately unlike Idaho State's managed forest lands the constituencies represented see the federal lands as their own beneficiary or a natural resources entitlement. Somebody else is expected to be paying for their playground. The groups are extremely selfish. Unfortunately if the State of Idaho had to deal with the laws, rules and existing judicial ruling currently in play on the federal lands, especially for the National Forests I doubt they could operate any better than the Forest Service is currently. However, the incentives to implement the management would be different, the federal group seems to be paid regardless of accomplishments.

Rules for management of federal lands by the State of Idaho could be handled well if in fact the expectation for those lands was to be for profitably, science based and with a group of professionals acting as a board of directors for administration of management on these lands. The lands could be developed to illustrate that forests can be managed for different purposes and inherently achieve a host of other resource goals and objectives. The program would have to have a variety of landscapes (several thousand acres) to provide and illustrate the principals. The management effort would have to be contemplative with goals and objectives established and evaluated. Obviously considerations for such things as habitat and other requirements for rare or threatened species of plants or animals would require consideration but not without equal consideration of other resources and their long and short term needs.

Resource protection would fall to that same group and would require the availability of resource, including monetary funds to carry out these actions. Wood burns, therefore fires can be expected, but management to ameliorate that effect can be undertaken. The goal however is harvest of forest resources to help provide for other management goals or objectives including fire prevention.

Any group providing advice toward management of federal as well as state lands should be a diverse group that provides consensus driven resource collaboration. This is a group that reacts locally to deal with local citizens and governments concerns, but interacts at a state level setting goals and objectives, while evaluating the practices for goal achievement. Much of the effort must be a bottom up driven program based on land capability.

To be successful the program must assure that concerns at all levels are heard and dealt with quickly. That also means that those that complain and want change have to put some "skin in the game". Without requiring some level of monetary or personal expenditure of time to seek resolution to a perceived problem the State management would have the same problem as federal agencies. Most of the changes in rules or policy have little evaluation of the host of often unintended consequences. Requiring those sorts of evaluation would also be part of the advisory group process.

The whole process of change will be difficult but currently most of the federal land management process is broken, bent or badly mended. It needs a serious repair and not another congressional band-aid. I am very glad that some one is evaluating some real proposals for change especially since it dramatically influences Idaho's rural economy.

Thank you again for you considering my comments.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ron C. Hamilton".

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