

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

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### Witness Testimony

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STATEMENT OF  
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Before the  
Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

Concerning the Committee of Scientists Report  
March 16, 1999

Madam Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some views of the American Forest & Paper

Association on the report prepared by the Committee of Scientists. I am Bob Bierer, Director of Forest Management for the Association. I am presenting my testimony today on behalf of AF&PA's member companies, associations, and allied groups. AF&PA members include forest land owners, manufacturers of solid wood products, and producers of pulp and paper products. The U.S. forest products industry has sales of over \$195 billion annually and employs 1.6 million people, 1.2% of the entire U.S. work force. Many of our members are totally or partially dependent on timber from the national forests and other federal lands.

As you know, the Committee of Scientists was appointed by USDA Secretary Dan Glickman to evaluate the Forest Service land and resource management planning process and provide recommendations for new planning regulations. Because our Association has an intense interest in the agency's land management planning process, we have followed the Committee's progress and deliberations closely, through its series of public meetings and conference calls over a 15 month period starting in December of 1997. We submitted background information for their consideration as well as written comments regarding the current Forest Service Planning process,

At their meetings, the Committee heard that the Forest Service has spent many millions of dollars and thousands of employee person-years, and conducted countless meetings and public comment periods to develop the current forest plans for each national forest, but to what end? The agency is not committed to implementing the forest plans (no forest plan is being fully implemented), the public is even more polarized than ever, virtually every forest plan is appealed and litigated, local communities and businesses cannot rely on the outputs they expect from the forest plans, and the cost of forest planning and project planning to implement the forest plans continues to sky-rocket.

Although the Committee's final report has not yet been distributed to the public, we have several concerns I would like to share with you based on our review of report drafts.

**First, the final report has not undergone any, scientific peer review, or public review.** At one of the Committee's early meetings, USDA Under Secretary Jim Lyons expressed his belief that the report should undergo a scientific peer review. In its haste to finish the report, however, the Committee has opted to forego any outside review of the report. Why? Both a scientific peer review and a public review of the report are essential before the Forest Service issues new draft planning regulations. The Committee is recommending a new theoretical "viability" regulation that is operationally untested. Other qualified, credentialed scientists probably have differing views regarding species "viability" and other changes recommended in the report.

**Second, the report recommends what is clearly, a new mission for the Forest Service that is in conflict with much of its statutory mission.** It stresses a sharp shift towards ecosystem preservation with ecological sustainability, being paramount, ignoring the Forest Service's statutory mandate of multiple-use management. As one Committee member has noted, this focus on the preeminence of ecological sustainability, coupled with the new stringent viability regulations recommended in the report, would have the effect of operating the National Forests as biological reserves.

Furthermore, the Committee uses a definition of sustainability that is different from the one being used in international negotiations by the US Government and other countries. Internationally, sustainable forest management gives equal consideration to social, economic, and ecological values. This definition was just endorsed at a national conference last week in Reno, where over 150 school administrators and elected county officials passed a resolution that sustainable forest management must include ecological, economic, and social factors equally.

This chance goes well beyond the Secretary's charge to the Committee "to provide scientific and technical advise to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief of the Forest Service on improvements that can be made in the National Forest System Land and Resource Management planning process" and that this be done "within the established framework of environmental laws and within the statutory mission of the Forest Service.

**Third, most fundamental flaws in the current forest planning process will not be corrected with the changes suggested in the report.** Forest plan implementation, for example, is frequently, disrupted by administrative fiat, the most recent example being the recent roads moratorium. These top-down directives from Washington render the forest plans useless, undermining the ability, of local managers and communities to manage forests based on local conditions and overriding years of local negotiations and compromise that went into the development of current forest plans. No wonder that local residents feel betrayed and frustrated and forest plans have no credibility.

The report acknowledges but does little to address the problem of endless appeals that has plagued the forest plans and the planning process. It ignores other available, successful models, such as pre-decisional appeal process used by the Bureau of Land Management.

Meaningful forest plan implementation will remain impossible without basic reform to force the budget and planning processes to operate in concert. Plans without corresponding budgets cannot be implemented! We are also very concerned about the disconnect between the strategic planning being conducted for the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), annual budgeting, and forest planning.

I would like to close with a quote from a recent editorial by Former Chief Jack Thomas. "We have learned, and continue to learn, a great deal about our forests. We know that the heavy hand of one-size-fits-all

government regulation does not land lightly or evenly. We know our crazy quilt of laws and policies often prevent management practices from working properly. And we know it is the stakeholders--people who stand to win or lose--who seem best situated to guide the decision-making to preserve their forests and protect lives and property." We fear, Madame Chairman, that the Committee's report has badly missed the mark!

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