

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Testimony

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Chairman

Winston County Commission

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In 1998 a severe ice storm struck Winston County, Alabama causing major damage to timber located within the county.

Winston is a rural county located in northwest Alabama with a population of approximately 23,000. Located within its boundaries is 89,000 acres of the 180,000 acre Bankhead National Forest. Of this 89,000 acres, 51,710 acres are not accessible or have limited access for timber harvesting due to the Wild & Scenic River Act, the Wilderness Area, Semi-primitive Area, and Native American Values.

Winston County has 50-57 industries that incorporate some form of timber into their finished product or supply timber for others use. Timber harvested from property in the county is usually pulp wood grade, whereas National Forest Timber is usually high grade saw timber. However, when timber is damaged and not harvested within an appropriate time it detracts from the appearance and use of the forest and limits the benefits to the county.

When natural disasters strike such as: fires, tornadoes, ice storms, insects & disease epidemics, timber harvesting must be expedited in order to prevent further damage. In the period of 1993 to 1998 there were 6 to 8 disasters within the Bankhead National Forest.

In order to harvest damaged timber there can be as much as a 200 day delay due to environmental assessments. Within this time period insects and disease will cause further deterioration of useable timber.

Revenues are continuing to decrease due to delays in harvesting damaged timber, logging being prohibited in a wider area next to stream beds, management research with fish and wildlife and intense study of endangered species such as fresh mussel, flat musk turtle and bats. Endangered species must and can be protected without allowing valuable timber to rot and decay. All contributing factors must be assessed in a timely fashion to allow for the most beneficial outcome.

Our county receives 25% of the proceeds from timber harvesting and recreation in the National Forest. Of this 25% only 4% is from recreation, and 96% is from timber harvesting.

Revenues from the National Forest are divided, 50% for education and 50% for roads & bridges. The road & bridge portion is spent on road repairs, resurfacing, preparing site access for new industries and developing plots for wildlife.

Revenues

1986 \$175,000 1992 \$334,741

1987 187,000 1993 174,000

1988 140,000 1994 128,556

1989 165,004 1995 96,416

1990 195,000 1996 164,000

1991 175,000 1997 98,000

Not only does managed timber harvesting offer financial assistance to the county it also serves to protect our forest from disease and erosion. It helps to keep the forest well manicured and in the most suitable condition for recreational use. Even though some people only see our National Forest as places of recreation, which is important to our county, recreation can never replace the timber industry.

Timber harvesting and recreation in our National Forest play an important role in the lives of the people of Winston County. I have been a life long resident of the county. As a child and young man I spent many hours in the forest mostly for recreational purposes. However, as an adult I see the important role the forest plays in our economy. As a private citizen I observe the impact forest timber has on the lives of family and friends who have been involved in the timber industry for generations. As Chairman of the County Commission, I must continually travel through the forest to observe road conditions. This gives me ample opportunity to observe the condition of our forest and determine the impact it will have on our County. The residents of our county believe the National Forest should be a benefit to the people of the county. It is a great place for recreational purposes, but its resources must be managed to reach the highest potential.

I believe that alternative arrangements for the harvesting of damaged timber must be enacted in order to preserve our forest and the opportunities it presents.

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