

WILDLAND FIRE PREPAREDNESS

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES UNITED STATES SENATE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

TO REVIEW THE OUTLOOK FOR THIS YEAR'S WILDLAND FIRE SEASON
AS WELL AS TO ASSESS THE FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGEN-
CIES' STATE OF READINESS AND PREPAREDNESS FOR THE WILDLAND
FIRE SEASON

MAY 7, 2002



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CONTENTS

STATEMENTS

	Page
Bingaman, Hon. Jeff, U.S. Senator from New Mexico	1
Burns, Hon. Conrad, U.S. Senator from Montana	8
Cantwell, Hon. Maria, U.S. Senator from Washington	29
Craig, Hon. Larry E., U.S. Senator from Idaho	28
Domenici, Hon. Pete V., U.S. Senator from New Mexico	10
Holtrop, Joel, Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry, U.S. Forest Service; accompanied by Jerry Williams, Director, Fire and Aviation Management, USFS; Tim Hartzell, Director, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination, Department of the Interior; and William Maxon, Executive Director, Southwest Strategy Coordination Council	12
Johnson, Hon. Tim, U.S. Senator from South Dakota	7
Kyl, Hon. Jon, U.S. Senator from Arizona	32
Murkowski, Hon. Frank H., U.S. Senator from Alaska	20
Smith, Hon. Gordon H., U.S. Senator from Oregon	35
Thomas, Hon. Craig, U.S. Senator from Wyoming	10
Wyden, Hon. Ron, U.S. Senator from Oregon	9

APPENDIX

Responses to additional questions	41
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WILDLAND FIRE PREPAREDNESS

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2002

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m. in room SD-366, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jeff Bingaman, chairman, presiding.

STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF BINGAMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW MEXICO

The CHAIRMAN. Let me call the hearing to order. Before I start in on the short statement that I have prepared and then defer to my colleague here for his statement related to the subject of this hearing, let me just say a couple of words about this issue that is prominently featured in today's news, and that is the FERC released yesterday some important information on price manipulation in Western electricity markets by Enron. Those documents provided by the new management at Enron are part of the FERC investigation that resulted from this committee's hearing on January 29. That hearing focused on the effect of Enron's collapse on energy markets. At that time Chairman Wood agreed to begin an investigation at the request of Senators Feinstein, Wyden, and Cantwell.

As we digest this information, I am going to be consulting with my colleagues on the appropriate next steps that Congress and particularly this committee should take to ensure that the price manipulation and lack of transparency in energy markets is effectively exposed and remedied. We obviously do not want to interfere with the ongoing investigation of FERC, but we will try to ensure that as we move forward in conference on our larger energy bill we remain alert to problems in the effective functioning of these markets. We may need to have an additional hearing here in this committee on this general subject as we proceed.

This morning the committee will hear from the Forest Service and from the Department of the Interior regarding the outlook for this year's wildland fire season, as well as the agencies' state of readiness and preparedness for the fires that have already begun in many parts of the West.

I want to thank all the witnesses for coming this morning. I especially want to recognize Bill Maxon. He is with the Fish and Wildlife Service. He is the executive director of the Southwest Strategy in Albuquerque. It provides an important forum for Fed-

eral agencies trying to coordinate and cooperate with each other on tribal, State, and local government issues in the Southwest.

Unfortunately for some of the committee members, this fire season is well under way in their States. This certainly includes my State of New Mexico, where the Peñasco fire in the southern part of New Mexico forced several residents to evacuate as it burned more than 15,000 acres. Yesterday we had a new fire break out near Pecos, New Mexico. That has now grown to nearly a thousand acres.

Many of my constituents, as well as the diverse array of interest groups, all make the same point to me, that over the long haul in order to decrease the number of catastrophic wildland fires we need to restore our national forests and public lands through hazardous fuels reduction and other measures. Obviously, the costs involved in this restoration are significant, but over the long term it is much less expensive to do this than it is to fight the fires. Restoring our lands is the preferred alternative for the environment as well because important species' habitats burn right along with the forests during these extremely hot fires that we have seen.

Given this principle, it is unclear during the past two budget cycles why we have not had the administration requesting the funds that were contemplated under the national fire plan. We need to sustain the commitment to this national fire plan over a long period of time. I know Senators on both sides of the aisle have made that point repeatedly. This means at a minimum sustaining fiscal year 2001 funding levels for all components of the National Fire Plan.

Recently the Western Governors Association sent a letter to Congress urging full funding for the National Fire Plan at the fiscal 2001 funding levels. Unfortunately, the important programs that are part of that plan, including economic action programs, community and private land fire assistance, and burned area restoration and rehabilitation, have been proposed for drastic cuts. In some instances they have actually been zeroed out in the administration request.

I am troubled that this 2003 budget eliminates the economic action program entirely. I think we need to understand the thinking of the administration on that. It is troubling that the Forest Service, after borrowing millions of dollars from its hazardous fuels reduction account to pay for emergency firefighting, is as I understand it not returning the funds to that account after being reimbursed by Congress for the emergency firefighting expenses. We need to explore that.

I think some agencies disagree with the concept of prioritizing hazardous fuels reduction in the wildland-urban interface. They are disregarding clear congressional direction because in fiscal year 2000 Congress intentionally focused the additional hazardous fuels reduction funds on the wildland-urban interface because the General Accounting Office and other studies found that the agencies did not consider protecting communities their number one priority for the hazardous fuels reduction program.

Again, we need to be sure we understand the administration's view on this, because it is still my view that the protection of communities needs to be given top priority.

Overall, I would say it is unclear to me why the Forest Service fiscal year 2003 budget requests \$39 million less for fire preparedness as compared to last year's enacted level. This has been a bipartisan concern of this committee and members of this committee for several years. I think it is clearly a major concern right now because of the drought that we are facing through much of the West. I can see on the map which I know the witnesses are getting ready to refer to the drought conditions that we are faced with throughout the Southwest and many other parts of the country.

I hope we can get good information from the administration about how to proceed and hope we can find ways to proceed jointly.

Let me defer to whichever of my colleagues would like to make an opening statement and then we will go to the witnesses.

[A prepared statement from Senator Johnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. TIM JOHNSON, U.S. SENATOR
FROM SOUTH DAKOTA

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing to assess the Federal land management agencies state of readiness and preparedness for the wildland fire season. With the outbreak of a 400 acre wildfire that has caused the evacuation of over 2,400 people twenty-five miles west of Denver, Colorado, today's hearing is a critically important examination of the National Fire Plan. I appreciate the willingness of officials from the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination, as well as officials from the State and Private Forestry and Fire and Aviation Management agencies within the U.S. Forest Service to take the time to be with us this morning. I am keenly interested in hearing from the Forest Service and the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination on the progress made to enhance interagency cooperation and improve coordination and resource utilization by Federal and state land management agencies.

As you may know, Mr. Chairman, the vast majority of the 1.2 million acre Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) sits squarely in South Dakota. The BHNF is a biologically distinct ecosystem that is supported by a diversity of plant and animal communities. With 300,000 acres of private and state lands sprinkled throughout the Black Hills, the Forest Service has traditionally administrated BHNF for multiple uses, including timber, grazing, watershed, and wildlife conservation. The management plan of the BHNF along with significant human development has created a wildland-urban interface where fire suppression goes hand in glove with public safety and forest health.

The BHNF has experienced three severe forest fires in the last two years. These three fires burned over 100,000 acres of land combined. The Forest Service is now engaged in the critical work of ensuring that these lands are effectively rehabilitated. Specifically, the Forest Service must remove hazardous trees, seed burned areas with grasses, prevent an invasion of noxious weeds, and fence aspen shoots.

The Black Hills is a unique area with rugged gulches and stands of ponderosa pine melting into a prairie ecosystem. Unlike large tracks of uninhibited forest land, the Black Hills is also a major commercial hub with 100,000 people scattered along communities in the shadow of the Hills. The threat of wildland fire encroaching on municipal watersheds, communities, and personal property poses a real risk. To the communities of the Hills, effective fire suppression techniques and forest stewardship is the key to ensuring public safety, protecting private property, and sustaining ecological diversity.

With a patchwork of state, tribal, and federal lands, improving coordination is crucial to maximizing resources and facilitating the exchange of information to curtail needless and costly delays. The Forest Service manages 192 million acres and has budgetary authority over a ballooning fire suppression account. I am interested in hearing from today's witnesses on the steps taken toward improving the coordination and communication of resources and information of the National Fire Plan.

Fireland management is crucial to ensuring the public safety of the communities of my state and preserving the beauty and health of the Black Hills for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who traverse the Hills. Thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and I look forward to exploring these issues further with our witnesses.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CONRAD BURNS, U.S. SENATOR
FROM MONTANA**

Senator BURNS. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I have another appointment here at 10 o'clock that is kind of important and I just want to make a statement and bring it back to real world.

First of all, thank you for this hearing. In light of what has happened in the ag bill that we will go to conference and we will vote on probably tomorrow and how they treated the Forest Service and some of the programs that we have in the Forest Service, it is less than desirable. These hearings are very, very important and very, very timely.

A couple of issues. I do not know, it was last week some time or other, I cannot remember the date, but the *New York Times* had a picture of dirt blowing in Montana. We are going into our fifth year of drought. It showed an old breaking plow that had not been used probably in the last 20 years, an old moldboard plow. Some of you probably know what those are. There may be some in this room that probably do not. But it was about half covered up in dirt, because dirt is starting to move in Montana.

Now, we have conflicting cultures here where now they want to list the prairie dog as endangered and they want him to prosper out through the land, but you have got to remember he eats everything in those towns. There is no cover, there is no plant cover. That dirt is starting to move.

A good friend of mine—and now that dirt is starting to move and we are losing our topsoil in Montana. I would say if you look at our State we are very, very dry in the eastern plains, and of course we have not had a great year of snowpack. It is better than usual. We are getting it. We have more water than we have had in the last 4 years, I would say, but it did not extend eastward onto the plains.

So we will definitely have range fires this year, because it has always been a fire year in Montana the last 5 years. We have made headlines everywhere.

But I wanted to bring that up because—and what has happened in the farm bill, that these hearings are timely and fire control is again going to be a situation in my State of Montana, as it is in the chairman's State, and the devastation that they have encountered down there, and I am very sensitive to that situation down there.

But remember that some of the things that we are doing to prevent fires is absolutely, and also to hold soil, hold topsoil, is running counter to any kind of sound conservation practice as far as agriculture is concerned or what is happening to our land in general.

So I just want to submit a little statement here. Thank you for holding these hearings because they are very important. I am sorry, I just will not be here to listen to the testimony, and I would rather hear them than go where I am going, but I ain't got a lot of choice. So I thank you for that.

But I want everybody to just be aware of some of the conservation practices that we are using now is running counter to what some folks who do not live on the land, do not understand the relationship of sun, soil, and water and good conservation practices.

So I thank you very much for this time, and I thank the witnesses for coming today. It is very, very important.

[The prepared statement of Senator Burns follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CONRAD BURNS, U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing today. This is not the first fire hearing we have all attended and it won't be the last. We have had forest and wildfires in this country every year that I remember, and I expect we'll have them again this year.

We are headed into our fifth year of drought in parts of Montana, and unless things change quickly, it will be another big fire season for us. It seems like every year is a bad fire year in Montana anymore.

While fire can be a healthy part of the life cycle of a forest or range, it can also wreak havoc on the ecosystem if it is too hot, sterilizes the soil, and turns the landscape into something that looks like the surface of the moon.

The hot and dangerously unpredictable fires we often see in forests today happen because there's too much undergrowth, and doghair stands of trees will produce more uncontrollable fires than less dense forests. This isn't good for the ecosystem, the fire-fighters, or the American taxpayer.

And when that fire jumps the fence from the National Forest and heads onto private land, we all feel for those who lose their homes, or their pastures and fences. The uncertainty and hardship fires cause are very damaging to rural America.

A few years back we worked very hard to get enough money together to fund the National Fire Plan, and we'll be working on it from an appropriations standpoint for the next several years. But for all the millions of dollars we have spent, I notice a big piece missing. Where is the prevention? Where is the forest health? I understand there is an effort to remove some underbrush and smaller fuel—but it seems to me these projects are much too small, and focused on the urban interface. We are ignoring the larger issue here if we look at the problem a few acres at a time. We need to improve forest health across the board. We have to remove some of the fuel out there, and you can't do it with a handsaw, you need to do it with a logging truck.

Fires will happen, and we need a way to get on the ground afterward for restoration work. If you paid attention to the debate over the Bitterroot National Forest Restoration Plan, you noticed that the Forest Service was in court over it in January. This was a year and a half after the Bitterroot burned, environmental work had been done, and lawsuits filed.

We need to remember that this story doesn't end when the fire goes out. In Montana today you'll find streams full of silt, weakened forests beginning to show the signs of bug kill.

There should be a quick-response mechanism in place to deal with restoration and rehabilitation. Right now, the system is broken—and Montanans are the ones suffering because of it.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses and finding out how we can address these challenges. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Wyden, did you have any statement here?

**STATEMENT OF HON. RON WYDEN, U.S. SENATOR
FROM OREGON**

Senator WYDEN. Just very briefly, Mr. Chairman. First let me thank you for the opening comments you made with respect to the Enron situation. As you know, the west coast is a power grid and so there is a direct connection between what happens in California and in the Pacific Northwest. I am very pleased that you are going to continue to monitor this.

I would hope in particular that this would give a new impetus to the provision that we included in the energy bill to establish a ratepayer advocate at the Department of Justice, because had that provision been in place we might have had a person with the power to blow the whistle early on so as to prevent much of this damage.

I am very pleased with the comments that you have made this morning with respect to Enron.

The only other point that I want to make deals with the matter of wildland fires. As you know, as chair of the Forests and Public Land Management Subcommittee we will be working very closely with you on these issues. My bottom line is there has got to be a way to get fire-prone materials out of the forests, employ people in rural communities at family wage-earning jobs, and maintain environmental integrity. I think we can do this consistent with maintaining full funding for firefighting. We will be working with you closely, Mr. Chairman, on a bipartisan basis, and I thank you for holding this hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Thomas, did you have any statement that you would like to make?

**STATEMENT OF HON. CRAIG THOMAS, U.S. SENATOR
FROM WYOMING**

Senator THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just very briefly, I am pleased too to have this hearing. We need certainly to talk about this issue. I think you have mentioned in the last couple of years, frankly the past administration—it has been a long time since we have done much with fire protection, and that goes beyond the current administration, I can tell you.

The national fire plan—2000, for instance, was the most challenging year we have had for a very long time—8.4 million acres of fire. \$6.6 billion over the last 3 fiscal years allocated for the various fire projects. I guess the key points are firefighting, burning area rehabilitation and restoration, hazardous fuels reduction, community assistance, and accountability. Well, those are good points. I guess we have to talk a little bit about the priorities in terms of those things.

Obviously, we are having a great deal of drought in many areas. I just want to mention that our State in Wyoming has done a good deal on this. They have purchased Blackhawk water buckets, they have transportation equipment, and so on and so on. They are doing quite a few things.

But in any event, I hope that we get our priorities in terms of, I think some of the things we could do in thinning would be very effective if we do it earlier, not when you are faced with a fire. The thinning is not the issue. But that ought to be a longer term priority to try and avoid these fires if we possibly can. Obviously, you cannot avoid them all.

So I am glad we are here and I want to hear the witnesses.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you.

Senator Domenici.

**STATEMENT OF HON. PETE V. DOMENICI, U.S. SENATOR
FROM NEW MEXICO**

Senator DOMENICI. Mr. Chairman, I just want to wholeheartedly thank you for calling this meeting. You know as well as I, in our State we are going to have another drought. We are in the middle of it. Everybody predicts it. We cannot hardly live with the water

we have got in New Mexico when we have a non-drought year, so all kinds of problems are going to come up in our State.

With reference to the forests and BLM land—let us just talk about them together—it is pretty obvious to me that even if we put a lot of money in, as we did last year, you might recall—we put in a big chunk of money on the floor, called it Happy Forests. You helped with it. Each Forest Service and BLM got about \$140 million. Then we had a regular appropriation which we loaded up. I am hopeful that we are going to do better than the President in this area in our appropriations.

But it is amazing. It is hard to see results. When you look at the whole picture, what a deplorable state our forests were in in terms of thickness, in terms of letting trees grow right up along side of buildings—I cannot really find out where all the money is going, where it went. But there is an awful lot of it out there. I assume these two experts will tell us that we are certainly putting more resources in than we ever have.

I think everybody knows what the policies are. I heard you say, Mr. Chairman, as you walked in that you remain concerned about fire damage up alongside of buildings, homes, and other kind of things. Did I hear you right?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Senator DOMENICI. It is a terrible thing, and we are not making a lot of headway. We are making some, but it is very slow. As you know, if you were to take people out to show them you would have to give them pretty good notice in advance to take you somewhere that would really be a good picture of success.

Nonetheless, we have to keep on trying our best. I will tell you and the committee, there is a drought bill in the makings that has been in the making for about 2½ years as a result of the group of experts headed by the Secretary of Agriculture that was appointed under a statute we passed. They have now issued their report and we will have a draft bill. We will hope that a number of members of this committee will join it.

What it does is it permits some early funding on preventive measures when you have a predictable drought, rather than waiting until it happens. It will require that we know a little, that we rely on our Weather Service people maybe more than their expertise justifies. But unless we do something like that, all we do now is we have a drought and we go see the Department of Agriculture and see what kind of programs they have. If they do not have any that fit it, we do not do anything.

But other kinds of disasters that are not like this—but this is a disaster. Our State will be in a disaster position in terms of many of the areas there, just as much as if you were hit by a wind storm or a hurricane or whatever. It eats away at you very gradually. But it surely is there.

So thank you so much. It is good to be here this morning. I wanted to ask you, are you doing your exercise, getting ready for the little tiny marathon we are going to have on the energy bill?

The CHAIRMAN. I thought we just had that.

Senator DOMENICI. Oh, you have not see anything yet.

The CHAIRMAN. I thought we just finished the marathon.

Thank you very much.

Let me introduce our witnesses: Tim Hartzell, who is the Director of the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination at the Department of the Interior, accompanied by Bill Maxon, who is the Executive Director of Southwest Strategy Coordination Office; and also Joel Holtrop, who is the Deputy Chief of the State and Private Forestry in the U.S. Forest Service, accompanied by Jerry Williams, who is Director of Fire and Aviation Management at the Forest Service.

I understand you have a joint statement and you are going to split up the responsibility of testifying. So why do you folks not proceed in whatever order makes sense.

STATEMENT OF JOEL HOLTROP, DEPUTY CHIEF FOR STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY, U.S. FOREST SERVICE; ACCOMPANIED BY JERRY WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR, FIRE AND AVIATION MANAGEMENT, USFS; TIM HARTZELL, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF WILDLAND FIRE COORDINATION, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR; AND WILLIAM MAXON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SOUTHWEST STRATEGY COORDINATION COUNCIL

Mr. HOLTROP. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. As the members of the committee indicated, this is an important issue and we very much appreciate the opportunity to talk about it with you today.

I am Joel Holtrop, the Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry with the Forest Service. As you mentioned, with me I have Tim Hartzell, Director of the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination, Department of Interior; Jerry Williams, Director of Fire and Aviation Management for the Forest Service; and William Maxon, the Executive Director for the Southwest Strategy.

Since the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service work so closely together in fire management and in the implementation of the national fire plan, it is appropriate that we use one statement to review the outlook for the fire situation for this year and the Department's state of record of decision and preparedness for the fire season, and it is appropriate that we are here together to appear before you.

At the outset, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you for the support that you have given to the fire management program and especially to thank you for your support for the brave young men and women of our firefighting resources who do an impressive job under very adverse situations, often adverse situations, and they deserve our thanks, our support, and our admiration.

As we look at the fire situation and the outlook for this fire season, the outlook unfortunately is for a severe fire season, as you have already indicated. As you know, we are already experiencing a number of wildland fires across the Nation. The map that you have up here which describes the drought outlook for the United States is also very helpful in understanding where we are likely to have above-normal fire activity. We have a map for the outlook of fire for the Nation as a whole and it roughly is very similar to the drought outlook map, so we do not even need to use that.

We have dryer than usual conditions and those conditions are going to continue to be something that we will be dealing with as

the summer and fall progresses as well. The outlook for weather conditions are for warmer than normal temperatures in the West and in the Southeast. Rainfall is predicted to be near normal and as a result in the overall 2002 fire season the greatest potential for fires is in southern California, the Southwest, the Great Basin, the Rockies, and the Eastern Seaboard from Florida to Maine.

As we look at the wildland fire preparedness for both the Department of the Interior and Agriculture's Forest Service, one of the things that we want to stress is that firefighter safety is our highest priority. Firefighting is a high risk, high consequence activity. After the unfortunate incident following the Thirty Mile fire last July in which four firefighters lost their lives, we are redoubling our efforts, have redoubled our efforts, to ensure firefighter safety.

At your request, we have been briefing this committee on a regular basis on the efforts that we have been making to improve firefighter safety and training. We have identified managing firefighter fatigue, reinforcing the use of the ten standard firefighter orders, fire orders, and developing training to avoid entrapment by fire, among other things. All of these improvements in training and safety are in place for this fire season and we are committed to doing everything we can to improve firefighter safety.

In 2001, we made a great start toward increasing our preparedness resources, thanks to the national fire plan funding. We hired an additional 5400-plus fire employees, bringing our total Federal wildland fire work force to 17,600 plus employees. We purchased over 400 additional engines, 56 additional dozers, and we contracted for 31 additional helicopters. Our inter-agency hot shot crews, we changed the number, we increased the number of inter-agency hot shot crews between the two Departments from 66 to 87.

Finally, our reliance on the State and local partners; I want to stress that as well. Often our State and local firefighters are the first to respond to our fire incidents. We rely heavily on these crews for support, especially those rural and volunteer fire department crews. With the national fire plan funds, we have been able to improve the initial attack and abilities with protective gear, equipment, and training.

I would like to keep my comments brief and ask Mr. Hartzell to make some summary comments as well and, if it is all right with you, submit our testimony for the record.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Holtrop follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOEL HOLTROP, DEPUTY CHIEF FOR STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY, U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. I am Joel Holtrop, Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry with the Forest Service. With me is Tim Hartzell, Director of the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination at the Department of the Interior; Jerry Williams, Director of Fire and Aviation Management, Forest Service; and William Maxon, a Fish and Wildlife Service employee and Executive Director of the Southwest Strategy. Since the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture work closely together in fire management and in implementing the National Fire Plan, it is appropriate to use one statement to review the outlook for the 2002 wildland fire season and describe our Departments' state of readiness and preparedness for the fire season. At the outset, Mr. Chairman, we want to thank you for your support of the fire management program and, most importantly, for your support of the brave young men and women who make up our firefighting corps. Our firefighters do an impressive job under adverse conditions and they deserve our thanks and admiration.

Today we will talk about the potentially severe fire season now underway, and how the five Federal land-managing agencies and our partners are making preparations. While we prepare to fight fire this season as best we can, fighting wildland fires is only one aspect of the work we must do to protect communities and restore ecosystems.

THE FIRE SITUATION AND OUTLOOK

The outlook is for a severe fire season this year. As you know, we are already experiencing a number of wildland fires across the nation. Since 1999, La Niña, a phenomenon characterized by the abnormally cold temperatures in the tropical Pacific, has plagued much of the country with drier than usual weather. The resulting drought condition in the Southwest, Rockies and East Coast has set the stage for a potentially active fire season in those areas. Since October, areas receiving below normal amounts include Southern California, the Southern Great Basin, Southwest, Rocky Mountains and the Eastern Seaboard. The Northeast experienced the second driest September-to-February period in the last 107 years.

Analyzing fuel and weather conditions across the country, the areas of greatest fire potential today include the Southwest, Colorado, Southern California, and the Southern Great Basin. Also, fire potential is high in Northern Florida, Northwest Minnesota and the Southeast Alaskan Panhandle.

The weather outlook for later this summer and fall calls for generally warmer than normal temperatures in the West and Southeast. Rainfall is predicted to be near normal, except for above normal early rains in the Pacific Northwest along with late summer/early fall dryness throughout the West. As a result, fire potential in the Rockies and Eastern Seaboard states is expected to increase this summer and fall. For the overall 2002 fire season, the greatest potential for fires is in Southern California, the Southwest, Great Basin, Rockies and the Eastern Seaboard from Florida to Maine.

WILDLAND FIRE PREPAREDNESS

Each year the five land-managing agencies of the Departments prepare to prevent, detect, and take prompt, effective initial attack suppression action on wildland fires. In order to do this, we need trained and equipped firefighters and firefighting equipment. We maintain qualified firefighters through training and apprenticeship programs, and we have aggressive recruitment and retention programs. We maintain a number of facilities for firefighter housing and equipment storage.

Firefighter safety is our highest priority. Firefighting is a high risk, high consequence activity, and the Forest Service and Interior have always had strong firefighter safety and training programs. This year, however, following the ThirtyMile Fire tragedy in July 2001, where four firefighters lost their lives, we have redoubled our efforts. As the Committee requested, the Forest Service has provided regular briefings on our efforts to improve firefighter safety and training. The ThirtyMile tragedy prompted an examination of the programs to identify areas needing improvement. The areas identified include managing firefighter fatigue, reinforcing use of the 10 Standard Fire Orders and the 18 Watch Out situations, and developing training to avoid entrapment by fire. All of these improvements in training and safety are in place for this fire season. We are committed to doing everything we can to improve firefighter safety.

We also purchase and maintain firefighter personal protection gear and engines, other vehicles, and contract for helicopters and airtankers. Preparedness also includes assisting other Federal agencies, Tribes and States with fire training programs, planning assistance, shared equipment use contracts, and support for inter-agency fire coordination centers.

In 2001, we made a great start toward increasing our preparedness resources, thanks to the National Fire Plan funding. The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior treated 2.25 million acres to reduce fuel loads and protect priority communities at risk. We will continue this success in FY 2002 and collectively plan to treat 2.4 million acres. Together, we hired an additional 5,474 fire employees, for a total Federal wildland fire workforce of 17,633. We purchased 406 additional engines, 56 additional dozers, contracted for 31 additional helicopters, and purchased or contracted for many other pieces of equipment and aircraft. Prior to the National Fire Plan, Interior sponsored 14 interagency hotshot crews (IHC) and the Forest Service sponsored 52. With the increase in readiness capability made possible by the National Fire Plan, DOI added eight additional crews. The Forest Service added 13 crews.

In addition to our Federal firefighting crews, we call upon many other firefighting forces for assistance. Our working relationship with our State and local partners has

never been stronger. Often, State and local firefighters are the first to respond to fire incidents. In severe fire seasons, State, Tribal, military, National Guard, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and local firefighters are instrumental in fighting wildland fire. We rely heavily on these crews for support, especially the rural and volunteer fire department crews, which are the first line of initial attack in up to 90% of all wildland fires. With National Fire Plan funds, we were able to improve rural and volunteer fire departments' (RFDs) initial attack abilities with personal protective gear, equipment, and training. In many instances last year, these RFDs purchased equipment with our grant money, and immediately responded to wildland fires on Federal land, utilizing the new equipment or protective gear. The DOI assisted 1,445 RFDs last year by providing almost 10 million dollars in grants.

The Forest Service provided over \$138,000,000 to states, volunteer fire departments, and local communities to assist firefighting activities in 2001. With these grants our State and local government partners purchased fire equipment for local fire departments, developed hazard mitigation plans, treated 76,236 acres of hazardous fuels on private lands, accomplished community fire planning, developed market utilization of small diameter material removed through thinning activities, and conducted fire prevention and fire education training.

Another important point to note is that the five land managing agencies have updated the majority of their fire management plans (FMPs) to be consistent with Federal wildland fire policy, with a goal to have all plans updated in 2004, if not sooner. The Department of the Interior has completed FMPs covering 92% of its land. The FMPs are important because they provide the guidance for fire management officers, line management officers and incident commanders to plan for future fire management decisions, and to make quick decisions when a fire incident occurs, as to the appropriate techniques and tactics for effective wildland fire suppression. Last year, 3.6 million acres of land nationwide burned, compared to 8.4 million acres in 2000. Fewer acres burned last year, even with heavy fuel loads and severe drought in many parts of the country. Although we cannot take all the credit—weather was a significant factor—with the help derived from additional resources and personnel, we were able to keep more than 95% of the fires under 100 acres.

2002 FIRE SEASON READINESS

With the forecast for a severe wildland fire season, each agency began early and continues to bring national fire readiness capacity to its highest level. To date, DOI has 4,845 firefighters and fire support personnel. The Department of Agriculture has approximately 9,000 firefighters as we are still identifying these resources. Our combined goal is to have in place a Federal wildland fire workforce of over 17,800 personnel and 1790 engines by mid June. This is an increase of 6,326 personnel and 377 engines from FY 2000. When we realized the severity of the wildland fire outlook, we began to hire seasonal firefighters early and we are working to place firefighting crews and equipment in locations where they can be mobilized quickly and effectively.

When local areas anticipate or experience above normal fire activity, the Departments have the authority, through what is known as "severity funding", to provide suppression funds to those units so that they can bring in additional staff and equipment to improve initial and extended attack response capabilities and increase prevention activities. Already this year, the Forest Service has approved over \$11 million for severity assistance; Interior has approved nearly \$3.5 million in severity assistance. Federal wildland fire agencies have enhanced initial attack capabilities in Arizona and New Mexico by pre-positioning resources ranging from airtankers, to hand crews, to engines in strategic locations.

Weather, fuels, and drought conditions all contribute to the number and size of wildfires. We will never be able to put out every fire every time, but we can reduce the number and the risk of wildfire over time.

REDUCING FUEL LOADS

Fighting wildland fire is only one part of addressing the long-term buildup of hazardous fuels in our forests and grasslands. Reducing the risks and consequences of severe wildland fires is a high priority for the Administration and Congress. Bipartisan Congressional support has provided the Forest Service and Interior with the necessary funding to increase the amount of acreage treated to reduce risks to communities and ecosystems. The importance of reducing fuel loads has been recognized for some time as an important issue. For example, studies performed in 1994 and 1996 recognized the issue. In 1996, a joint Forest Service and Department of the Interior wildland firefighter safety awareness study found that nearly 83% of all wildland firefighters identified fuels reduction as the single, most important factor

for improving their margin of safety on wildland fires. As we stated earlier, the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior treated 2.25 million acres to reduce fuel loads and protect priority communities at risk. For the Department of the Interior, this is more than doubling prior accomplishments. We will continue this success in FY 2002 and collectively plan to treat 2.4 million acres. Continued bipartisan Congressional support for working with communities and interest groups are vital to firefighter and public safety, reduction of risks to communities, and to the implementation of ecosystem health goals of the National Fire Plan.

This year, the Departments are beginning the development of a common inter-agency fire budget planning process that will better refine wildland fire management readiness resources. The process will provide all agencies with a uniform, performance-based system for identifying the preparedness resources necessary to deliver a cost effective fire management program. This system will be deployed by the 2004 fire season and will influence readiness decisions for the 2005 fire season. Some interim components may be online even earlier.

SUMMARY

As stated earlier, the outlook is for a potentially severe fire season this year. The five federal land-managing agencies and our partners at the State and local level are doing all that we can to be prepared for the upcoming fire season. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure the safety of firefighters, communities, and resources. We appreciate continued bipartisan support from the Congress. We will continue to cooperate and communicate among Federal agencies, States, local governments, Tribes and interested groups and citizens to ensure the long-term safety and health of communities and resources in our care.

This concludes our statement, Mr. Chairman. We would be happy to answer any questions you and the members of the committee may have.

The CHAIRMAN. That is fine. Do not let that light cut you short. If you have anything more to tell us in your opening statement, please do so.

Mr. Hartzell, go ahead.

Mr. HARTZELL. Thank you, Joel.

Mr. Chairman, I am Tim Hartzell, Wildland Fire Coordinator for the Department of the Interior. Members of the committee, Mr. Chairman, as the signals began to come in that this was going to be a severe fire season, the two Departments began to actively initiate recruitment to bring fire readiness capacity up to its highest level.

To date, the Department of the Interior has hired more than 4,800 firefighters. The Forest Service has hired nearly 9,000 firefighters, and we are still actively adding to those rolls. Our combined goal is to have nearly 18,000 firefighters available by mid-June. This is an increase of over 6,300 personnel and nearly 400 engines from fiscal year 2000.

Let me explain the significance of that just from the Department of the Interior's perspective. We have hired 4,845 firefighters to date. The total number of firefighters we had during the fiscal year 2000 fire season was only in the vicinity of 4700. We have significantly been able to add to our readiness capacity with the moneys that we have through the National Fire Plan.

Now, this spring our focus has been on coordinating to ensure that crews and equipment are in place where needed. In situations such as we are experiencing in the Southwest, when local agencies anticipate or experience above-normal fire activity, both Departments have the authority to use something called severity funding to provide suppression funds to those units so they can bring on additional staff or equipment to improve their initial attack and extended attack capability.

To date the Forest Service has provided nearly \$11 million to States and regions for severity assistance and the Department of the Interior has provided approximately \$3.5 million. What this has meant in Arizona and New Mexico is that we have been able to preposition resources such as air tankers or hand crews and engines in strategic locations to be as prepared as we can for a rather severe situation.

No question, weather, fuels, and prolonged drought all contribute to the number and size of wildfires. We are never going to be in a position where we can extinguish all fires every time, but without a doubt we can reduce the number and risk of wildfires over time through a coordinated program.

I would like to close by talking briefly about hazardous fuel loads. Mr. Chairman, your comments were very insightful and right on target. Firefighting is only part of the equation for addressing the long-term buildup of hazardous fuels in our forests and grasslands. In fact, because of our effectiveness in suppressing fires over many decades and our inability to actively manage forests and rangelands, we have added to the problem of fuels buildups and the hazards in our wildlands.

Reducing the risks of the consequences of these severe fires is without question a high priority for the administration and Congress. We appreciate the bipartisan support you have provided both the Forest Service and the Interior Department with necessary funding so that we can increase the amount and acreage treated to reduce risks to both communities and the environment.

The importance of reducing fuel loads has been recognized by scientists for many years. But to hear it from the folks in the line of fire is most telling. In 1996 the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior commissioned a study on wildland firefighter safety. The number one factor that our frontline firefighters—in fact 83 percent of our frontline firefighters—concluded that the primary factor that was most important for improving their margin of safety was to increase the management and reduction of hazardous fuels.

As I think Joel had stated earlier, last fiscal year, 2001, the two Departments treated nearly 2.25 million acres to reduce fuels and to protect priority communities at risk. Our goal is to continue this success in fiscal year 2002 and we collectively plan to treat nearly 2.4 million acres.

In summary, I would like to say that the outlook for the fire season I think is fairly well known. Joel Holtrop has pointed it out quite vividly. The Federal fire management agencies and our State and local partners are going to do everything we can to be prepared for the upcoming fire season. We are going to do everything we can to assure the safety of our firefighters and communities' resources.

We appreciate the continued bipartisan support from Congress. We will continue to cooperate and communicate among the Federal agencies, our State partners, our local governments, our tribes, our interested citizens and stakeholders to ensure the long-term stability and safety of our resources and communities.

This concludes our prepared remarks, Mr. Chairman. We would be happy to answer any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you both very much. Let me start with a few questions.

One concern that we have is that the information that our committee staff has been given indicates that the agency is borrowing funds from its hazardous fuels reduction account to pay for emergency firefighting. However, after Congress reimburses you for the emergency costs it appears that those funds are not going back into the hazardous fuels reduction account.

For example, in fiscal year 2001 the agency borrowed \$37 million from the hazardous fuels reduction to pay for emergency firefighting and after Congress reimbursed the agencies for the emergency expenses there were \$11 million deposited back in that hazardous fuels reduction account. The remaining \$26 million was put in the fire preparedness account.

Obviously, this causes a concern long-term as to whether we are putting the funds where they need to be and whether we are borrowing against the future here. If either of you have a response on what is going on and what needs to be done, I would be anxious to hear it.

Mr. HOLTROP. The hazardous fuels program last year did close the year with approximately \$36 million remaining for projects that were not funded in fiscal year 2001. But when that is contrasted with the fire suppression activities and the costs of the fire suppression activities in 2001, there was not enough funding available for fire suppression and we needed to make up that funding for fire suppression both out of some of the remaining money in the fuel hazard reduction as well as in fire preparedness.

It does indeed bring up concerns in the long term. It is an unfortunate situation that we wish we did not have to be in, but again we needed to cover our fire suppression costs.

The CHAIRMAN. So can we anticipate that the administration will be asking for additional funds for the account that we have already reimbursed you for in order to compensate for what was used for other purposes? Or how do we get out of this long-term trend here of sort of robbing Peter to pay Paul?

Mr. HOLTROP. Well, once again, in this fiscal year, with the severe fire season, as we have already documented in our discussions this morning, projections are that we may again not have sufficient funding in fire suppression to cover all of our suppression costs. If that is indeed the case, we will need to look for other ways to cover those suppression costs over time.

We have a process in place in which we are going to look at—first of all, we are going to track our suppression costs closely and we are going to have projected suppression costs and we are going to know on a regular basis what is the status of the suppression cost funding for the year.

Secondly, we are going to identify, if we do need to borrow funds, what are some of the program areas that we can borrow funds and that do not have a direct impact on resource programs. What are the things that we can do that has the most opportunity for us to accomplish our suppression costs with the least impact on organization and programs?

Third, we are identifying those types of funds that have perhaps large out year expenditures or contract expenditures, things that

we can borrow funds from that will not have a direct effect on this year's resource management activities. At the conclusion, if indeed we do need to borrow some of those funds, we would seek through the administration to seek Congress for reimbursement of those funds, because those are important programs that we do indeed want to reimburse.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask about burned area restoration and rehabilitation. This is an issue. University of Arizona Professor of Fire Ecology Tom Swetnam states that "Human communities are as much or more at risk from post-fire damage as from the fire itself." I guess a recent Department of Agriculture Inspector General report found that the Forest Service used national fire plan rehabilitation and restoration program funds on unrelated projects, that the agency is not monitoring the use of the burned area restoration and rehabilitation funds.

Let me just read another sentence from that IG report. It says that "Since appropriated funds are significantly less than identified needs, any misuse of these funds will only further reduce the Forest Service's ability to restore and rehabilitate burned areas."

In fiscal year 2001, the first year of the national fire plan, the Forest Service got \$141.6 million for the program. This year the Forest Service requested \$4 million rather than \$141 million. What is there about this part of the national fire plan that is not supported by the administration? Obviously, we have got a disconnect between what we have in the national fire plan and what you folks are requesting money to implement. Could you explain what is going on here?

Mr. HOLTROP. First of all, let me agree with your statement that the rehabilitation and restoration of burned lands is very important and we do need to make sure that we focus appropriate attention on that because there could be catastrophes that follow catastrophes when there is a fire if we do not take appropriate steps to rehabilitate those areas.

Of course, some of the funding in the 2001 national fire plan was in direct response to the 2000 fire year and the extraordinary fire year that we had in 2000, with some extraordinary steps that needed to be taken in response to that. As we put together budgets that look at what our overall needs are in the national fire plan, some of the types of things that we need to balance and weigh in the various aspects of all of the important components of the national fire plan, and those need to be weighed recognizing what has happened and then projections for what is happening in the coming year as well.

The CHAIRMAN. So do I understand that, relative to the other priorities you had to request funding for, this was lower down? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. HOLTROP. Certainly compared to the 2000 fire season and the types of restoration work that we needed to do in the aftermath of the 2000 season, that was the determination we needed to make, yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. I have used my time. I will defer to Senator Murkowski if he has questions at this point or an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. FRANK H. MURKOWSKI, U.S. SENATOR
FROM ALASKA**

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am sorry, but I had a 9 o'clock engagement with some folks that feel very strongly about CAFE standards, which is far removed from fire concerns today.

But I recall a hearing that we held out in Montana a couple of years ago with Senator Burns. It involved the inability of the decision making to take place on the scene. For example, there was one particular case where a tractor, a cat, was poised to cross a creek and there was a concern about the effect that it would have in creating turbidity of the water and as a consequence that individual who was on the scene as the command of the fire did not have the authority to move that cat across the creek, so as a consequence the fire moved on and did devastating damage.

Another occasion was an individual who refused to provide access across his private land and as a consequence the fire moved into an area where, had they been able to move into the private land area, why, the individual might have been able to stop that from the spread.

My concern, Mr. Chairman, is in the interest of combatting these wildfires you have to make decisions on the spot and there should be, I think, an authority given to take appropriate action in some cases, whatever is necessary. Until we reach a point where we feel comfortable that indeed the decision making process has to be based on the facts on the scene—and I am sure that we can cite other areas, and we might even go back to the Los Alamos issue, as far as decision making.

I am not sure just how we are going to resolve this, but if it is going to take legislation to give them the authority I am supporting legislation to give them that authority. We have got some maps over here that identify the potential exposure associated with the drought and we have got charts that are prepared by the Department of Agriculture on the amount of land that normally has higher stream flows.

But to a large degree, at least in some cases, it is a lack of decision making by the landowners as to what to do to reduce the hazard. In my State we have the spruce bark beetle and you have got about three levels of management. You have got the Federal Government, the Forest Service; you have got to a limited degree the State; in my case you have partial ownership by the Native regional corporations; and then the individuals.

Unfortunately, the Federal Government through the Forest Service seems to be motivated by a consensus. They will hold a public town hall meeting to try and generate a consensus about what to do with the spruce bark beetle and the infestation and the realization that you are creating areas where wildfires can be determined, as opposed to making the decision on what is best for the forest health. Do you follow me?

As a consequence, they do not get a decision and nothing happens. The State to a lesser degree kind of follows the Federal procedure, and then we have the private landowners, maybe it is the Native corporations, that are trying to manage their land appropriately. Then the best manager, of course, are the private individ-

uals, who recognize that the best thing they can probably do is go in and clear cut the area while there is still enough value in the timber to move it out and make chips out of it.

Until we address decisions made on best forest management practices—and maybe I am speaking to the choir here, but we have to have a basic premise of how we are going to manage this problem, and as a consequence to suggest you are going to get a consensus on decisions when some people say you leave things alone and others say you take them out—if anyone here, and you have heard it time and time again, has an illness, you go to the best physician you can find and you abide by it. I think that is what we have got to do in the forest.

I would ask the balance of my statement be entered in the record, and I want to compliment the staffs on the chart. But I did want to bring up my frustration as former chairman of this committee and one who has taken part in these discussions time and time again. If we do not have our Federal agencies coordinated to make decisions based on a criteria that is in the best interest of the renewability of the resource we are just holding hearings and wasting our time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Murkowski follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. FRANK H. MURKOWSKI, U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA

This hearing is intended to find out how prepared our federal fire fighting agencies are for what looks like another challenging year. As of yesterday almost 471,000 acres of federal land have been burned in this very young fire season. As a comparison 481,000 acres had been consumed by this same date last year and 750,000 acres in FY 2000, that horrific year when Los Alamos burned. To date we have already lost more than 50 homes and structures in the first two months of this season.

While we need to know if our federal fire fighting agencies are prepared for this season, we must all understand that the conditions in the West, both in terms of drought and the ridiculous fuel loads that we in Congress have allowed to build up on those lands over the years, will result in conditions that make the situation impossible for our fire fighters.

I know Senator Cantwell is here today to decry the senseless deaths of four fire fighters in her State last year. And she is right: they were senseless. But we also have to look ourselves in the mirror and ask what we've done to reduce fuel loads on our federal lands. I hope she will remember the testimony we received last fall from Mr. Phil Schaenman of the Tridata Corporation. He testified that most of the fire fighters his organization interviewed in Tridata's Wildland Firefighters Safety Awareness Study believe that more harvesting and removal of dense fuels would make their jobs safer.

Let's look at the conditions as they now exist. The first map is the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's drought prediction map through this coming July. Look at the areas of red (high drought)—not an encouraging picture.

The second chart is a more detailed look at stream flows for April of this year prepared by the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The amount of land that has only 50% to 70% of normal stream flow and less than 50% of normal stream flow (in red). This map is an indication of the fuel moisture we can expect this summer. It is very clear that we are collectively in deep trouble.

In my own state of Alaska, the collective effects of the recent spruce bark beetle pandemic are still with us. The Kenai Peninsula has been the hardest hit, but the problem extends up into the Anchorage bowl and the upper Copper River area, near Glennallen. While the state and private landowners have made significant efforts to address fuel loading on their lands, Federal land managers have done little to correct the problem. Worse, by limiting their response to setting "controlled burns," they have courted disaster—the glaring example being the Kenai Lake fire set by the Forest Service last year that burned out of control, threatening homes and communities.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, let me remind you that more than 40% of the trees on your National Forests are less than 13 inches in diameter and will need to be thinned to improve the fire situation on those lands. When we pass laws that discourage the use of Stewardship Contracting, or biomass energy grants we (Congress) have to take a hard look at ourselves and consider whether we are contributing to the fire threat. When we ignore the underlying problem of sick and overstocked forests because people in the radical environmental movement tell us that no management is better for the environment—it is Congress that is failing our forests, our rural communities, and the American public.

I fully expect we will be back here in the fall holding a hearing about yet another fire tragedy, the loss of more fire fighters and/or another town or two and I expect some of us will want to ignore the fact that this Congress has continually failed to address the underlying problem.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Wyden.

Senator WYDEN. Thank you.

Gentlemen, I am troubled by your comments, because it just seems to me that this is still pretty much business as usual. I want to be specific about what I am talking about here. If you look at the cycle in this area, what you have seen historically is that government dawdles on fuels reduction and restoration, then we have a big fire and we have to go send all these very patriotic fire-fighters out to play catch-up ball.

As far as I can tell, we have given you several billion dollars to break this cycle, to come up with a different approach, to put more focus on prevention, to put more focus on fuels reduction and restoration, and it just seems to me to be pretty much business as usual.

Let me run through the Oregon numbers on this. In Oregon last year the Forest Service spent about \$86 million on wildfire suppression, but only \$17.5 million for hazardous fuels reduction. It seems to me that this is a classic case of the skewed priorities we are seeing in this area and this is what the Congress wanted to reverse on a bipartisan basis with respect to the fire plan.

So maybe you can share another view on this, but it just seems to me that in Oregon, for example—and this is going on all over the country—if you reverse those numbers we would be in a much stronger position to deal with this very serious problem for the rural West and specifically have less of a need to send these courageous firefighters out there to deal with yet another conflagration.

Gentlemen, what is your reaction to this?

Mr. HARTZELL. Senator, I think our progress last year indicates a significant shift in our thinking. We on the Interior side nearly doubled our production in the hazardous fuels program. We used the \$10 million that the Congress provided to us in the Rural Fire Assistance program to target rural fire departments, over 1400 of them, so that they could improve their capacity for preparedness and educate their publics about prevention.

We put a significant amount of our funding into the Firewise and the community education program so that we could increase the capacity of local communities to break the fire cycle and take corrective action to reduce fuels and public hazards. I think our record shows that in fiscal year 2002 we are again committed to increasing the level of hazardous fuels treatment.

I think the way we have gone about the program is worthy of mention. We have a requirement that in each of our States that the

fuels hazard reduction program not be conducted in a vacuum, but that we need to try to work in a seamless fashion among all the Federal agencies across all lands, with our State foresters and with other partners, and that fuel treatments are developed at the State and local level consistent with national priorities, and that there be a great deal of collaboration as to finding what the highest priorities are for fuels treatment.

Senator WYDEN. Why do we not hear from the Forest Service.

Mr. HOLTROP. Senator, I would like to ask Jerry Williams, our Director for Fire and Aviation Management, to help address this question.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you.

I agree with you, this issue is really about breaking the cycle. I would come back, though, to the condition of the forest. The accumulated fuels that we are seeing out there have severely diminished our decision space. The onset of drought, for instance, in New Mexico this year virtually precluded many treatment options that would use or rely on prescribed fire. As a matter of fact, it was only a few days ago that the Southwest in New Mexico suspended prescribed burning, given the severity of the situation.

What I am telling you is that they are pushing the risk to the limit in an effort to reduce fuels. I would like to put this in context a little bit. In New Mexico many of the dry forest types that we are fighting fire on right now, at the turn of the century those were dominated by only about 50 trees per acre. That same site today will often carry approaching 1,500 trees per acre. The biomass alone is a significant fuels problem.

But another dimension of this problem is the transpiration that is going on. As those trees move water out of the soil, they are almost inducing drought. Mechanical thinning, stewardship contracting, electric cogen, anything that we can do to accelerate the rate of fuels treatment is clearly what we need.

Many people will say that we need to continue to rely on prescribed burning. In my view we are at the very limits of risk with most prescribed burning in most dry forest types across the country, and particularly in the West.

Senator WYDEN. Again, you are making the case for a change in priorities, but I want you both to know that in my State the numbers do not back up what you are saying. I cited the numbers for the Forest Service. The Department of the Interior, the numbers are even worse. We basically have \$8.5 million spent on fuels reduction, \$36 million spent on fire suppression.

You all are talking one game and you are doing something else. I think that is unfortunate. We are not going to be able to break this cycle with this skewed set of priorities you have got. I think what you have said sounds very good, but you are not backing it up with the specific numbers. The specific numbers make the case that the Federal policy after a bipartisan fire plan where Senator Bingaman and Senator Domenici and others did a lot of good work, the numbers show that it has still been business as usual.

My time has expired. Hopefully we will get another round, but I thank you for this important hearing, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Thomas.

Senator THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

What are the criteria and priorities for fuel reduction? What do you use for a criteria as to where you can best spend your money?

Mr. HOLTROP. Well, Senator, there are a lot of criteria that we use to determine where we should best spend our hazardous fuels reduction money. Obviously, one of those criteria that we are going to use is where there are communities at risk and that is one of the places that we are going to focus our attention on.

There are also criteria that have to do with other resource values that might be at risk, such as watersheds that provide domestic water supplies and those types of things, are also going to be areas that we are going to focus our attention on. We are going to also make sure that, as Tim Hartzell described, we are going to make sure that as we determine where those areas are that we are going to do so in as seamless a fashion as possible with other Federal partners, with our State partners, and our local government partners as we identify where it is that we need to be focused.

Senator THOMAS. Do the various forest units have a list of priorities?

Mr. HOLTROP. Yes, we do.

Senator THOMAS. You could produce the priorities on the Medicine Bow in Wyoming?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I believe we could. Most of the geographic areas across the country have developed out year plans where they are directing fuels treatment work. This is—I am afraid that many times fuels dollars are directed where there is also a willing community. We have several cases across the country, especially where mechanical thinning is involved, where communities, even in the face of very recent devastating wildfires—

Senator THOMAS. Like Teton County, Wyoming?

Mr. WILLIAMS [continuing]. They do not want it, they do not want hazardous fuels reduction activities occurring if it involves mechanical thinning treatments.

Senator THOMAS. Do they want to fight the fire when there is one?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Pardon?

Senator THOMAS. Do they want to fight the fire, though, when there is one?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I do not think they want that, either, Senator.

Senator THOMAS. Oh, come on. We had one there, they were going to burn the houses down if it goes more. They have to fight the fire, you know that. Yet there is resistance to doing thinning.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Exactly.

Senator THOMAS. I think that you are going to have to make a decision on that.

There are 17,000 firefighters. Is that full-time employment?

Mr. WILLIAMS. That includes full-time and temporary employees.

Senator THOMAS. How many are full-time? What does a firefighter do year-round?

Mr. WILLIAMS. In many parts of the country, they are mobilized across the country. We have people that are in the northern States right now in New Mexico fighting fire. The fire season the last few years has been virtually year round. Someplace in the country, something is on fire.

Senator THOMAS. Yes, but that really is not, not much. There is a season, a fire season, pretty much, is there not?

Mr. HOLTROP. Those numbers also include others, fire management personnel that are also responsible for planning, both planning for our preparedness and planning our fire management plans on the individual units.

Senator THOMAS. It is a tough thing to be economically feasible to have firefighters on all the time, is it not? You have to have them, but it is a pretty tough deal.

Mr. HOLTROP. That is why many of the firefighters are not permanent, year-round employees.

Senator THOMAS. I see. What about the opportunity for private foresters, forest people, to cut the timber in a private situation and make some money maybe, and then it will not cost you anything? There is resistance often to letting those private people come on the land.

Mr. HOLTROP. Are you referring to—well, whether you are referring to those that are coming on the public lands or on the private lands, we do recognize that an important part of getting on top of this issue, as Jerry Williams stated a few minutes ago, that when you look at the magnitude of the biomass, the hazardous fuels buildup that we have, we need to use whatever rules we can at our disposal in order to accomplish the work that needs to be done.

Senator THOMAS. I understand that, but it is my impression from what I have heard that you are reluctant to let private timber harvesters go on and do it. If you had the way to control your contracts, it would seem to me that would be the most economical way for you to—

Mr. HOLTROP. In many cases it is the most economical way for us to accomplish some of this work. We also find that some of the hazardous fuels reduction work that we need to do over time also includes that we need to focus on some of the size of material that is not as economically desirable in some of those areas.

Senator THOMAS. I understand. I suggest to you that where there is an opportunity and where it is economically feasible that you do some contracting in the private sector, which not only is less expensive, but also can be done in more magnitude at the same time. I hear a lot of resistance to that from the Forest Service.

Thank you.

Senator MURKOWSKI [presiding]. Whoever is next is next.

Senator DOMENICI. I will try to be quick, Senator.

First, do you have now a policy with reference to post-burn activities? We are still beset by people complaining as they drive by a forest that was burned 18 months ago with the dried trees standing. The fire has burned out the underbrush. We even have viewed that in some areas of New Mexico where there was a lumber mill not too far away that is about to close up shop and it looks like these trees could be used, and month after month after month—now some of them are up to 24 months and pretty soon they will not be good for anything.

Is there a policy or are we being ordered around by courts and lawsuits with reference to it? Could you tell us briefly, please?

Mr. HOLTROP. Again, our intentions following a fire are to do whatever rehab and restoration is desirable and appropriate for us

to do in those cases. There are times in which the salvage of the dead material is an economically viable way to go about doing some of the restoration, as well as providing opportunities in the local communities. All of those types of activities require us to go through the various processes that we need to in terms of environmental analysis and working with the community.

Senator DOMENICI. Yes, I understand. But let me ask you, what you are saying is that you do not have one set pattern for each burn in terms of what you will do. But is there a policy on either of our Departments against cutting the trees and using them? Either of you? Tim?

Mr. HARTZELL. No, there is no policy against cutting trees. The Department of the Interior policy is to first immediately stabilize the site so that we do not destroy watersheds, we do not put silt in a stream that is a municipal watershed, and we prevent erosion to keep the soil off of roads.

Our second priority after immediate stabilization then would be to begin to rehab the site and to initiate long-term restoration of that ecosystem, for a whole variety of reasons, to maybe begin reforestation, to get productive range forage, to preclude the spread of noxious and invasive species.

Those decisions are made at the local level. They use the NEPA process Mr. Holtrop was talking about, and there are no sideboards on the types of stabilization or rehab activities that the field offices cannot consider. It has to be done in an open process and utilize the NEPA.

Senator DOMENICI. Do you as the chief executives in this area, do any of you have a philosophical approach that says we do not cut trees after a burnout just as a matter of management? Do any of you have that philosophy?

Mr. HOLTROP. No, sir.

Senator DOMENICI. How about you, Mr. Hartzell?

Mr. HARTZELL. I have not heard that expression from any of my colleagues, certainly not me.

Senator DOMENICI. I did not ask you that. You are the boss.

Mr. HARTZELL. No, not me.

Senator DOMENICI. How about you?

Mr. HOLTROP. No, I do not.

Senator DOMENICI. You do not have a philosophy that you must leave the trees there for the wild animals rather removing them?

Mr. HOLTROP. No, sir.

Senator DOMENICI. Somebody asked a question about how do you select priorities. When we prepared the legislation that started on the Senate floor, when it went to conference and got the acceptance of the administration, one of the sticking points was a provision that required the Forest Service to go through its forests and determine where buildings and/or improvements were vulnerable to a forest fire, and you had to list them all.

I understand that has been done. If it has not been done, I wonder why. If it is done, do you use it?

Mr. WILLIAMS. If you are talking about the communities at risk list—

Senator DOMENICI. That is correct.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yes.

Senator DOMENICI. That is finished?

Mr. WILLIAMS. It is pretty well complete, as I understand.

Senator DOMENICI. Mr. Hartzell.

Mr. HARTZELL. Senator Domenici, it is complete, but it is a work in process. We work with the local communities and the State foresters. That list is continually reviewed. Projects are judged against it and if a community was fortunate enough to have all the necessary work done around it to make it safe and mitigate the hazard, it would come off the list and another community would replace it.

Senator DOMENICI. Somebody alluded to a priority should be watershed. We have the city of Santa Fe. Did you say anything about that, Senator Bingaman?

The CHAIRMAN. Not specifically, no.

Senator DOMENICI. Let us just take it for a minute. Just yesterday a fire started up on the way to Las Vegas, which is 9 miles direct from the Santa Fe forest, where I am from, which feeds the small lake that is at the end of an arroyo with a dam on it. That is a substantial portion of the city's water supply.

We have all concluded that if that forest burns that water supply will be ruined because there is no way currently to retain the aftermath of the fire. It will all go down into the water and the water will change, obviously, from excellent drinking water to something nobody would drink or be able to.

Is this forest something you have on a priority list? If so, are my figures correct that what we are doing now will take us 15 years to finish at the pace we are on now and the dollars we are spending now?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I believe that that project is on the region's priority list. This is an area a lot of us are familiar with. I have been in this watershed. One of the things that we are concerned about is some of the prioritization criteria with the fuels money, should that be directed exclusively to the interface? I am very concerned about many of the attributes that these communities depend on, watersheds being one very important example.

Senator DOMENICI. Well, listen. I know this is far more complicated than I could understand, but I would just like to ask you, would you take a look at the current plan to rehabilitate that forest and tell the committee how long it is going to take to fix that watershed so that you will not have the possibility of a fire resulting in the destruction of that water supply? Could you do that within a reasonable time so we might share it with our people?

Mr. HOLTROP. Yes.

Senator DOMENICI. And include in it how much you are spending and whether you are going to up that to get this done quicker. I think my arithmetic is just straight line, if you spend what you are spending now it will take 15 years. But I am not sure that that kind of arithmetic is appropriate. Maybe you were going to do something different, but I think we ought to know. It is a very serious problem and we would appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. HOLTROP. Senator, we will be happy to do that for you. I would also say, like Jerry just said, that we do recognize that as

one of the highest priority watersheds that we need to be paying attention to.

Senator DOMENICI. Fine. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cantwell.

Senator MURKOWSKI. May I just ask that a statement by Senator Craig be entered in the record. And I am going to submit questions, written questions to the witnesses, and I would ask them to respond as they see fit.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Senator Craig follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. LARRY E. CRAIG, U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO

Chairman Bingaman, I want to thank you for holding this hearing and I want to thank each witness from the Administration who has come here today to help us assess our readiness for what looks like what could be yet one more in a series of disastrous fire seasons.

Given Senator Murkowski's opening statement, I am not going to dwell on the drought and fuel conditions that we face. I expect we will get plenty of understanding from the fire experts who will testify today.

What I want to focus on is a blind spot in our perception. A blind spot that we in Congress have when it comes to the health and vitality of our federal forests. Over the last several months this blind spot has become painfully apparent. During both the Farm Bill debate and then again in the debate on the Energy Bill we adopted forestry language that failed to take advantage of opportunities to improve the health and condition of our federal forests.

In the Energy Bill we had to craft last minute language to correct definitions of biomass in the Renewable Energy Portfolio. Fortunately, we largely corrected the language which would have limited to use of renewable energy portfolio programs on federal forests. I appreciate the work that the Chairman's staff undertook to help correct these mistakes.

In the Farm Bill conference Senate Democrats rejected our own Senate passed version of Stewardship language because the House negotiators wanted a compromise. Thus, the much needed authorization for additional Stewardship Contracting authority and a Farm Bill biomass grant program were lost. The Senate Democrat's hard line approach to these issues resulted in at least a dozen other important forestry related provisions being lost. Including: State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees, Adaptive Ecosystem Restoration programs, parts of the Chesapeake Bay Program, an Office of Tribal Relations for the Forest Service and perhaps the most troubling, a program to deal with Sudden Oak Death Syndrome which threatens California's magnificent Oak Forest savannas.

Mr. Chairman, over the last five years we have burned more than 30.3 million acres, approximately equal to one-half of the area the Clinton Administration attempted to set-aside in its Roadless Policy to "protect ecosystem health and wildlife values". So far this year we have already burned 470,000 acres and the maps we will see today tell us we are in for perhaps the worst fire season we have seen in the last 50 years.

Mr. Chairman, I don't think many of my fellow Senators know this, but fully 80% of the citizens in our western States are very concerned or somewhat concerned about wildland fires. What we in Congress better learn quickly is that the two leading concerns we are facing are the loss of wildlife habitat and the loss of homes and property. For those of my friends that keep saying we have to put all our efforts into the wildland/urban interface, I am here to tell you we are missing the point.

With an accumulation of low water years and a looming drought, fire is a natural topic for all of us to think about. With the combination of drought and increased fuel loads, once again our public lands are an easy target for catastrophic fires.

Fire is a natural part of any ecosystem. It stimulates growth, maintains the understory, and creates diversity. All of these aspects are healthy characteristics of a thriving forest. However, when fire is suppressed and active management activities (thinning, prescribed burns, etc.) that mimic fire behavior are ignored, this is a prescription for disaster. The neglectful management practices of the past will continue to plague our public lands unless we pursue active management practices that result in a balanced ecosystem.

I will work with the Bush Administration to help provide funding for the fire budgets of both the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. In order to prevent devastating fires, the agencies need the resources and flexibility to make management decisions that maintain our public lands. The spiraling circle of increased fuel loads create catastrophic fires, contribute to declining watersheds, increase sedimentation and decrease water quality, and add to the demise of fisheries must be stopped.

I am also happy to see this Administration worked so hard with our Western Governors to develop their Memorandum of Understanding and their Ten Years Strategy for dealing with the 70 million acres of western forests that are at high risk to catastrophic fires and insects and disease. To that end, today, Senator Feinstein and I have introduced a Senate Concurrent Resolution to the House of Representative's concurrent resolutions Number 352. When local, State, and Federal Agencies work to develop joint plans to deal with problems, I believe we in Congress should recognize those efforts and do everything we can to assist.

The point is, Mr. Chairman, we cannot save all of the wonderful forest attributes by building defensible space around our communities and towns. We in Congress need to rethink our strategy and start treating the entire ecosystem, not just those parts we think the environmental hardliners are willing to allow us to work in. When it comes to federal forests, our experience in the Farm Bill and the Energy Bill are but a sign our tunnel vision on these problems. We are failing the American Public, our forests, and our communities.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARIA CANTWELL, U.S. SENATOR
FROM WASHINGTON**

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I get to the specific focus of this morning's hearing, I want to thank you for mentioning the *Washington Post* article this morning. The paper, the headline paper, shows that "Enron Manipulated California Crisis." Mr. Chairman, I can guarantee you the State of Washington suffered from that same crisis and possible manipulation of prices. We have asked for a FERC investigation of that.

This has caused great damage in the Northwest, where we have seen everywhere from 85 percent increases in electric rates and contracts that were signed with Enron for 8 and 9 years. So the Northwest is definitely suffering from this potential manipulation.

I applaud you for suggesting this morning that this committee may hold further hearings on this. I think this is a critically important issue for my State, and I thank you for mentioning it, and for the further oversight of the committee.

Mr. Chairman, this hearing I believe is very important in discussing the preparedness of the Forest Service and Department of Interior for the 2002 fire season. But I think it is important that we take a step back because last year was a particularly devastating season for us in Washington State. On July 10, near a town called Winthrop, in the midst of the worst drought on record in our State, the Thirty Mile fire burned out of control and four young firefighters were killed.

Sadly, these young men and women did not have to die. In the words of the Forest Service in its own report, "The tragedy could have been prevented." We know that the firefighting business is dangerous, but despite its inherent dangers we seem to think that the Thirty Mile fire is something that can be responded to in pushing memos and papers around.

It is very important, I believe, in the reports that were issued that, first, we have accountability of the firefighters on the line all the way up to the chief; second, that training of the firefighters puts safety first; and third, that we have an independent and con-

sistent review of the incidents in which those safety rules have been broken and whether or not they have resulted in these fatalities and what we are going to do to fix them.

These are the conclusions that were reinforced in an OSHA investigation released in February that found the Forest Service had committed two serious and three willful violations of employee safety during the Thirty Mile fire, even stronger citations than those handed down after the Storm King fire in 1994, in which 14 Federal firefighters died.

To me, this indicates that we have taken a step backwards since Storm King and obviously what we have done since the Thirty Mile fire to implement or change the culture of the Forest Service as it relates to these very important issues. So first I guess my question is, this committee and the Senate took action in putting language into the Agriculture bill that said that the Forest Service investigations of these fires should be done by an independent investigator under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That passed out, with the favor of this committee, passed out of the Senate, and was killed in conference.

So first and foremost I want to know, does the U.S. Forest Service support that language of an independent investigation in the Department of Agriculture?

Mr. HOLTROP. The Department did not object to the review by the Inspector Generals in the farm bill.

Senator CANTWELL. So you will be supportive of legislation that I introduce separately?

Mr. HOLTROP. Since we did not object to that in the farm bill, if it is similar language, obviously I cannot take a position for the Department on a bill that is not introduced yet, but we do not object to the oversight.

Senator CANTWELL. Well, we are going to get this introduced, and it is a great mystery to the public, to people in my State, and I think in other places why this language did not go through. Somewhere, somebody behind the scenes was objecting. I hope it was not the Forest Service.

Mr. HOLTROP. It was not.

Senator CANTWELL. I hope that we can bring light to this issue in separate legislation. I know that my colleague Congressman Doc Hastings is going to introduce similar language in the House and we are going to have a bipartisan effort to draw attention to this issue, because accountability starts first.

Second, I am interested in understanding as we approach this fire season and preparedness, in looking at the report that you have given to Congress on the implementation of the recommendations since the Thirty Mile fire, they look very similar to the Storm King recommendations. I have a feeling that we are pushing paper around at a time when people have lost their lives.

How are you going to assure people that these are real management and cultural changes and not just a memo or a directive that was sent to individual employees within the Forest Service?

Mr. HOLTROP. Senator, I very much appreciate that question, and I appreciate your ongoing interest in this subject. We are also concerned that we do not just take steps that are just pushing paper around, that are saying safety is first, but without dem-

onstrating that safety is the most important aspect of firefighting from our perspective as well. Some of the types of things that we are doing to help ensure that it is more than just words is that we are making sure that our administrators at every level of the organization are hearing this message and are being told that it is our expectation that our district rangers, that our forest supervisors, are talking to and spending time with their incident commanders, both that are assigned to their units on a regular basis or are assigned to their unit during an incident, that they continue to have interaction with them and are asking and focusing on what are the safety concerns and are the safety concerns being taken care of.

Every meeting that we have with our firefighting personnel, we are stressing this. I have been at several meetings myself personally in which I have talked to our lead agency administrators at the field level and had discussions with them about asking them and insisting that they take personal attention and accountability for making sure that that is being paid attention to.

I know that Mr. Williams has had similar conversations with the incident commanders. The Chief of the Forest Service has met with all of our incident command team leaders, talking to them about the importance of this. It is our intention to have this be something that we are focusing on, more than just words.

Senator CANTWELL. What if the rules are broken? Is someone going to lose their job? People lost their lives here. Yet no one loses their job over the fact that these rules are not implemented, and they are the same recommendations after Storm King. So now I am supposed to go home and tell the families of Tom Cravens, 30 years old, Karen Fitzpatrick, 18 years old, Jessica Johnson, 19, and Devon Weaver, 21, I am supposed to go home and tell those families: Well, here is what has happened so far; a bunch of memos have been written and the language that would have given us direct oversight got killed in the House by we do not know who.

So they want to know that these same recommendations—I know my time is up, Mr. Chairman, but this is a critically, I believe, important issue, given the droughts that are happening in the West, the likelihood that it is going to be a tumultuous season, the fact that these safety rules and implementation I believe need to be a cultural change with accountability where people are going to lose their jobs if they are not implemented. Otherwise, other people are going to lose their lives.

Mr. HOLTROP. Senator, there is an administrative review that is nearing conclusion, that is looking at the events of the Thirty Mile fire. I would also like to just mention that the oversight by an Inspector General, whether there is legislation passed or not, that is something that is always an option that we can choose to use if there is a situation that we think that that is an appropriate thing.

Perhaps we need to work with you and others to determine whether that is an incident where we might want to ask for an Inspector General oversight on a specific incident.

Jerry, do you have some additional things?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Just a couple of comments. On the issue of accountability, the Chief of the Forest Service has made clear with all of us that he expects accountability to occur on the fire line as safe practices rules are violated, before somebody gets hurt. We are

putting all of that in motion this year and have been working on that the last several months.

Two areas that we are focusing a lot of attention on right now besides the meetings, besides the backup to crews directly: one has to do with establishing fire danger risk thresholds for every unit across the United States, and that is Forest Service and DOI working together. That puts in place the mechanisms for managers to beef up oversight when fire danger escalates.

The other area we are putting a lot of energy in right now, and we will be sharing the details with committee staff this Friday, has to do with firefighting safety compliance models. We are borrowing models from the aviation industry that will get at some of the behavioral issues that we are trying to overcome here.

Senator CANTWELL. Well, Mr. Chairman, I know my time is up, but hopefully we will either have another round or—I am glad to see you are looking at the private sector. OSHA regulates the private sector on safety issues. You could enter a partnership with OSHA to make sure that there is additional oversight. I do not know if you are going to agree to do that as well or whether you believe OSHA should have mandatory oversight, because I guarantee you then these safety implementations would be made, just as the private sector has had to be accountable.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Kyl.

STATEMENT OF HON. JON KYL, U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA

Senator KYL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think, gentlemen, you can see there is a fair degree of frustration over a variety of different problems here. The problems that Senator Domenici and Senator Cantwell discussed were different from those that were discussed earlier by Senator Wyden, and I think the chairman also had some comments on that and I will.

But it is getting to the point where members of the committee are finding it frustrating to the point that we are going to have to legislate separate solutions to these problems, which is not the way it ought to be done. It ought to come from the administration. It ought to be in the budget.

If you look at that area up there, you know the drought conditions, you know the conditions in my State. We started our fire season in March this year. We have had over 50,000 acres already burn on Federal land in Arizona, at least 81 fires on Federal land. It is the driest winter in 104 years in Arizona. We have virtually no runoff. Our mountains are extraordinarily dry. The fuel loads are extraordinary, as, Jerry Williams, you pointed out. That 50 versus 1,500 trees is the rule in the ponderosa forests in Arizona and New Mexico.

There is no plan as far as I can see to deal with this on a landscape or large area treatment basis. Or if there is a plan, it does not have the support of the administration. I find this odd because last August the Secretary of the Interior and Director Bosworth came to Arizona—is there anybody here that does not know Dr. Wally Covington?

[No response.]

Senator KYL. You all know him. Is there anybody at the table who does not think that he has good ideas about what needs to be done? I mean, they are basically the underpinning of what you are trying to do.

So we went out with Wally and Secretary Norton and Director Bosworth, and they all agreed that we needed to convert the demonstration research that he was doing near Flagstaff to large area treatment. The following week the President was—there were pictures taken up in, I believe, Idaho. I am not sure, but he had a saw. He was sawing a branch off. The point was that we need mechanical thinning because the prescribed burning, as you pointed out, Mr. Williams, it is almost to the point of too risky to do in many cases. But there are still areas where it can be done, especially after mechanical thinning.

Now, the GAO 3 years ago put out a report, and I do not have the exact statistics in front of me, but I think they said we had something like 35 million acres to treat and we had no more than 20 to 25 years to do it before it would all be diseased or burned up. I do not know what the ratio is between number of acres burned versus number of acres treated, but I will just bet you that it is on the order of ten to one burned. So we do not have that 35 or 36 million acres to treat any more. It is down now to about 30 or 31, because most of them have burned.

Can you tell me, anybody, off the top of your head how many acres have been treated with mechanical thinning last year on our Federal lands, order of magnitude?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I cannot give you a firm accurate answer, but it is only a fraction of the total treatments.

Senator KYL. Right. What I would like to know is, just give me two numbers here within the next few days: the number that were planned to be treated and the number that were actually treated last year? And what is on your plan for treatment this year? If you could just do it in two tranches, on the national land generally and then if you would also give me the figure for the New Mexico-Arizona ponderosa pine forest. I would appreciate that.

We are getting nowhere fast, is the bottom line. Does anybody disagree with that?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I would point out, though, that mostly with the support of this committee and others, funding for the national fire plan has helped us tremendously. We are treating more acres than we are losing to wildfires in the last couple of years, but the rate of treatment is still far short of where it needs to be.

Senator KYL. Why eliminate the funding, just \$1.6 million for the Rocky Mountain research work at Northern Arizona University?

Mr. HOLTROP. The Department outlined in the budget justification the funding needed for fiscal year 2003. We are focusing the agency's budget on results and we are moving toward consolidating and coordinating research projects.

Senator KYL. Okay, so did you recommend that?

Mr. HOLTROP. Decisions have not been made yet as to what actual programs—

Senator KYL. The budget that came up from the administration, this program was not in there. Was that a decision by Director Bosworth or was that a decision by OMB?

Mr. HOLTROP. There has not been a decision yet as to what specific programs. We are waiting on whatever action comes out of the appropriation language for 2003 before decisions are made as to what specific programs.

Senator KYL. Just as of right now that \$1.67 million, would you support keeping that in the budget?

Mr. HOLTROP. We would look at that in conjunction with all the other research needs and all the other proposals that we have and make sure that we are focusing on the important things.

Senator KYL. Will you tell me what the recommendation is at the time that it goes up the chain to Director Bosworth and on to the OMB?

Mr. HOLTROP. Will I tell you what that recommendation is?

Senator KYL. Yes, what your recommendation is.

Mr. HOLTROP. To the degree that I get involved in that level of detail in it, certainly.

Senator KYL. Well, see, the problem is we cannot figure out where these decisions do not get made. And the problem is it was not in the budget this last year. Everybody recognizes the work is very important and nobody can figure out how to get it back in there. We can do that through earmarks through the appropriation process, but there is a finite amount of money involved in the appropriation process. Somebody in the administration has to fight for what you say you believe in.

Let me ask you this. Do any of you disagree with this proposition, that there are two main reasons this is not getting done: A, not enough money; and B, too many environmental lawsuits or too much environmental opposition. Does anybody disagree with that proposition?

Mr. HOLTROP. Well, certainly when you look at the magnitude of the issue before us, the amount of money that is needed in order to do so is tremendous and we do need to continue to focus on that as well. Also, we recognize that there are several steps that need to be gone through before we are able to accomplish some of the projects that we want to have. Chief Bosworth has been talking about some of those concerns over some of the types of process problems that we have.

Senator KYL. We know that there are steps and we know that he is talking about it. I am trying to get down to specifics. As an order of magnitude, how much more money would have to be in the budget to realistically accomplish this within an appropriate time frame?

Mr. HARTZELL. Senator, I have not seen an analysis of that.

Senator KYL. Well, whose job is it to figure out how much it would cost?

[No response.]

Senator KYL. Do you know who in the Federal Government has the responsibility for carrying out the plan, which is to engage in this large-scale restoration in a time frame that beats the fire or the bugs?

Mr. HOLTROP. Senator, we are currently, the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service, are currently working on a cohesive strategy for fuel hazard reduction work which identifies what

are some of the long-term needs that we need to do to help us get on top of the hazardous fuels reduction program.

Senator KYL. Mr. Chairman, I would suggest we are going to have to do it. If they are just now working on a plan to try to figure out what is going to be necessary when it has been evident—I have been working on this since 1994 and every year I try to get more money, and I have talked to you, Mr. Chairman, about it. Everybody recognizes what has to be done, but nobody can figure out how to get it done. Nobody knows who is in charge. Everybody is afraid to fight the environmentalists. Nobody is willing, I think, to take it up the chain.

If OMB is the problem, then we can deal with OMB. But we have got to have people who understand the issues, as the three of you gentlemen do, to lay it out so that we can have a coherent plan we can take to the administration and get done.

I am very, very disappointed in your testimony, I have to say.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Smith.

**STATEMENT OF HON. GORDON H. SMITH, U.S. SENATOR
FROM OREGON**

Senator SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would ask that my opening statement be included in the record.

The CHAIRMAN. It will be included.

[The prepared statement of Senator Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. GORDON H. SMITH, U.S. SENATOR FROM OREGON

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing on the National Fire Plan and our nation's preparedness for wildfire. I continue to believe that attentiveness to this subject is one of the most important tasks of this Committee, lest we forget that on the ground there are thousands of brave men and women putting their lives on the line to defend society's values against the increasingly destructive forces of mismanaged forests.

Unfortunately, the past Administration was in a total state of denial over the cumulative effects of non-management on the health of our forests. They believed that if you wrapped enough red tape around a forest, fire and disease would be held at bay. After eight years, however, the "gag rule" in the Executive Branch has finally been lifted. There is now an open and honest acknowledgment of the need for regulatory and administrative reform-breaking what Chief Bosworth calls "analysis paralysis."

Unfortunately, that recognition has yet to sink in with this Congress. The Farm Bill contained several provisions in the Forestry Title—such as the "hazardous fuels to energy" grants program that were absolutely vital to making tangible forest health progress. Yet these provisions, and nearly all others in that Title, were eliminated from the bill. I hope that this Committee is prepared to take up where the Farm Bill left off with respect to biomass and stewardship contracting authority.

In a time when mills continue to close in my state, and timber offered on public lands is virtually non-existent, we should at least attempt to demonstrate that the government values living and sustainable forests and healthy riparian areas more than charred wood, burnt homes and scorched earth. As a Senator from a state whose fire season is already well underway, I hope that commitment comes sooner rather than later.

Again Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today's hearing.

Senator SMITH. Gentlemen, one of the comments I hear with some urgency is from private landowners in my State of Oregon whose land borders forest land and the health of which is I think in question, and the fear is that because there is such a heavy fuel load that it is ripe for catastrophic fire that clearly does not have a boundary when it comes into private land.

Is there a focus on that now? Can you describe that focus, if any?

Mr. HARTZELL. Senator Smith, I can tell you on the Interior side, specifically in the Pacific Northwest, the agencies are running a pretty seamless program where they are providing fuels treatment funds to adjacent private landowners so that they can treat fuels adjacent to Federal lands so that it can benefit the overall landscape or watershed.

I am not prepared to give you the specific amount of funds that we have used to accomplish that. I would certainly be happy to follow up on it. I can assure you that we are collaborating with private landowners in trying to get funds in their hands so they can treat on private lands to benefit all lands.

Mr. HOLTROP. That is true with the Forest Service as well. It is a component part of our national fire plan strategy.

Senator SMITH. I think I am glad to hear that you all recognize that as a real urgent problem, because no one knows exactly what the fire season is going to be like this year, but some evidence that it is already beginning and we may not be as optimistic as we perhaps were earlier in the spring when there was a lot of rainfall.

But there is an active program. Are you hearing from neighbors that they are reaching out to you, they are getting the resources they need?

Mr. HARTZELL. Again, I go back to the Pacific Northwest. It is an area that we talk about being a model for cooperation. It is a good example of an area where local governments and homeowners associations are coming to the Federal agencies and saying: What can we do to help in the overall effort? How can you help us, train us so that we can talk to our citizens about reducing fire risks in their communities? There seems to be a great deal of interaction in that area.

Senator SMITH. Well, the reason for it is simply that what little active forest management is going on is happening on private lands and there is obviously an awful lot of economic value there they want to protect, and they are concerned that we are not getting to you the budgets, you are not asking for the budgets, to do the thinning, improve the forest health in a way that can protect them and the public resource of our forests against catastrophic fires.

So I would echo what Senator Kyl was saying only in that we really need to make this the highest priority. Mr. Chairman, for that reason I thank you for holding this hearing because I think it does put the focus where it needs to be.

So anything and everything you can do, know that you are going to have a lot of people anxious to be helpful to you here, because nothing is served, the environment is not served, the economy is not served, and property rights are violated by catastrophic fire that does not know the boundary between public and private lands.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Let me ask about two other issues. One, Mr. Hartzell, I could ask you. In the year 2000 Congress required you to publish a list of these wildland-urban interface communities within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk for wildfire. In January 2002 the General Accounting Office report notes that, because you did not establish well-defined criteria, you determined that over half of the high-risk communities are in three States, in Georgia, North

Carolina, and Tennessee, and these are States that are not prone to severe wildland fires.

Is this being reprioritized? Obviously, I think my interest, perhaps a parochial one, but my interest was to see that the communities in the areas of the country where the fire risk was greatest would be on this list, and that did not seem to happen. We had a few communities in New Mexico that were identified, but very few.

Did you have an insight into what has happened there or what is happening, what is planned?

Mr. HARTZELL. Yes, Senator. I think much has been taken out of context in that list of communities. Here is what I mean by that comment. The initial list of communities was established in January 2001. There were roughly 4,000 communities on that list. We tried to work with the State foresters to establish that list. What we heard was: We need more time, we need another opportunity to evaluate communities at risk; you came at us quickly; this is going to take some time.

We published another *Federal Register* notice sometime in the summer of 2001 and the list of communities was expanded from roughly 4,000 to somewhere in the vicinity of 11,000 communities at risk. It was up to the State foresters to identify those communities. Of the roughly 11,000 communities within the vicinity of Federal lands, roughly 9,000 of those are within the vicinity of lands administered by the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service.

Then the State foresters said: But that does not reflect the pure magnitude of the problem. There is another 11,000 communities in this country that are at risk. They are not within the vicinity of Federal lands. So the State foresters are maintaining a list that has over 22,000 communities at risk.

The issue about so many communities being identified in Georgia and that vicinity I think has gotten blown out of proportion, in our opinion, by the General Accounting Office. When you look at where the fuels treatment dollars are targeted, 94 percent of them are west of the Mississippi, where some of the most hazardous fuels conditions exist.

The other thing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to mention, we did provide some uniform national criteria for the State foresters to use when they prioritized communities. We said as a minimum they had to look at fire behavior, they had to look at the infrastructure that was in place, they had to look at the values at risk, and they had to determine the willingness of the community to participate.

You mentioned the State of New Mexico with 20 communities on a list. That is a good example of collaboration between the Federal agencies and the State forester. That is a very well-defined list of communities and the State forester and the two Departments are working hard to try to address fuels conditions around the communities on that list.

The CHAIRMAN. The concern I have is that there was a group of highest risk communities. It is a group of 545 and of that group—and I gather this must have been decided by the Department of the Interior or somebody at the national level, because obviously each State wants to have its communities on the highest list. But there

was a highest risk list and of the 545, 278 out of that or a majority are in those three States.

So why—I can understand why State foresters would say we have got all these communities and they are all high priority. But when it comes to the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service making up the list of highest risk communities, why would we be putting such priority in these three States that do not seem to have a real fire hazard problem. At least it does not seem comparable to what we are faced with in the West.

Mr. HARTZELL. Well, again, Senator, we are not placing a high priority on the communities in those States. Again, 94 percent of our planned fuels program last fiscal year was west of the Mississippi.

Senator, just for a point of clarification, we have told all of our States to go back to their State foresters and continually work with State foresters and collaborative working groups in every State to make sure that those lists are up to date and that we are feeding the fuels treatment program with the highest priority projects.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask about one other issue and then I will defer to Senator Cantwell and she can ask her questions and close the hearing.

Categorical exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act allow the Forest Service to expeditiously review whole categories of actions that do not have a significant effect on the environment. About 2½ years ago a Federal district court invalidated the Forest Service's categorical exclusion of timber sales and salvage harvests. The court left room for the Forest Service to reinstate categorical exclusions for small timber and salvage sales that the agency can demonstrate will collectively lack these significant environmental effects.

It has been 2½ years. The problem I am trying to address here is that some of the fires we have had in the last couple of years in New Mexico, they have had an enormous delay after the fire in trying to determine whether they could do salvage sales. It takes more than a year to make a determination as to whether some salvage sale is possible and by then at least in the view of some is that the timber has been rendered useless and nobody bids on the salvage sale.

So why is it taking so long, more than this 2½ years, to complete work on this categorical exclusion? Is this something, do you have a draft policy for the categorical exclusion of salvage timber sales that we can expect soon, or what is happening on that?

Mr. HOLTROP. We are currently working with CEQ on categorical exclusion authorities. We have, I believe, a couple of our employees working full-time with CEQ in their offices to work on that issue and other issues to try to get at what are the types of things that we need to do to help improve our ability to streamline our environmental analysis processes, such as expanded use of categorical exclusion authority.

The CHAIRMAN. Can you give us an estimate as to when this might come out? It has been a long time.

Mr. HOLTROP. I am not prepared to give you an estimate, other than knowing that we have been working with CEQ over the last several months, the last few months, where we have increased our

level of involvement with them by bringing those couple of folks over to there from our agency.

There are some procedural things that are beyond—I do not understand how long it is going to take, but I know we are hoping to be able to accomplish some of this type of work in the next several months, next year, or something like that.

The CHAIRMAN. I would like to ask you to look at some of the fires, like we just got control of this Peñasco fire in southern New Mexico. There is great concern that it is going to be over a year before a decision can be made on whether or not to have any kind of salvage sale down there. It is not nearly as large as the Scott Abel fire of a couple of years ago, but still significant.

Could you perhaps look into that and get back to us as to how quickly you think a decision can be made?

Mr. HOLTROP. Yes, Mr. Chairman, we can do that. Again, let me express that while we are continuing to work with CEQ on some of the administrative steps that need to be taken, that does not mean that while we are waiting on that, that we will not be continuing to work in as expedited a way as possible at looking at what are the appropriate responses to a fire such as the Piniasco fire.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Let me defer to Senator Cantwell and ask her to conclude the hearing.

Senator CANTWELL [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to follow up if I could, Mr. Williams, on the OSHA question. I got a lot of nods at the table and I am not sure exactly what that meant. Have you reached an agreement with OSHA on how to pursue a partnership?

Mr. WILLIAMS. We have not. The Forest Service, though, is in partnership with OSHA in several other areas and we are looking at it and we continue to talk to them about it.

Senator CANTWELL. So should I view that as a commitment or an exploration? I am very interested in getting a specific answer.

Mr. WILLIAMS. We are anxious to do anything we can to improve firefighter safety, including partnerships with OSHA.

Senator CANTWELL. So are you going to pursue one in this case?

Mr. WILLIAMS. We are working with the region, the region is working with the local region of OSHA, and I believe that they are pursuing this. I would be glad to look into it further and get back with you.

Senator CANTWELL. I would like that. I would like an answer on whether the Forest Service is going to enter into a partnership with OSHA, given that they have a great deal of expertise here pointing out in some independence the problems with the implementation that have occurred in the past, the fact that we have had the Storm King recommendations that mirror the Thirty Mile fire and yet were never implemented—I think that they have a great deal of expertise that could be beneficial to the Forest Service.

I have a question about the budget. We had a hearing in February where Senator Bingaman asked questions and at the time we raised the question that, while the Forest Service has repeatedly assured that safety is a key priority, the budget actually cut \$39

million from the fire preparedness account which funds firefighting training and activities. At the time, Under Secretary Ray was present and said that he would get back to us on exactly how this would pencil out and what exactly this would mean.

To date I do not think we have seen any figures from the agency on this, nor have we seen any projected figures for fiscal year 2003. So my question is, if safety is such an important issue—I am not even sure if you keep track of how money is spent. We were led to believe that you kept track of money that was spent on safety and preparedness. So my question is, is that the case? Are you looking at a decrease? If that is the case, how can we assure people that safety and preparedness is a priority?

Mr. HOLTROP. We do track the preparedness curves. We do not track specifically yet how much we invest in safety per se. We are able to get at that figure, but we do not have a database that does that specifically. We are developing one that will do that. I am afraid I do not have the figures in front of me that thoroughly answer the question you are asking, but we can get back to you on that question.

Senator CANTWELL. Preparedness curve, you are just saying what you spend every year that is in a large bucket that comes under the category of preparedness?

Mr. WILLIAMS. No, it is what the preparedness budget is for every year. It has been trending upward. I am not sure what the 2003 program is, but I know that for instance this year we will have hired approximately 1,000 firefighters more than we had the year previous. That is a reflection of the preparedness budget that you folks have helped get.

Senator CANTWELL. Well, we were told by Under Secretary Ray that we would get this information and that we would see that there is actually an investment being made here. We have not seen those figures. Now today you are saying you have to go back and get those figures. So I think this is a very important issue, firefighting safety and training specifically. We want to know how much money is being spent on it and whether you are decreasing that or increasing that in this for 2003. And exactly—again, it is hard to imagine if you are not keeping track of the specific numbers how effective some of those programs are.

Mr. WILLIAMS. We will get back.

Mr. HOLTROP. We have some information on tracking of firefighter training and safety costs combined, but we do not have those penciled out as Under Secretary Ray indicated yet for 2003. We will get those for you.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you.

That is all the questions I have, but I think we will be submitting some. So if not, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:18 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX
RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC, May 10, 2002.

TIM HARTZELL,
*Director, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination, U.S. Department of the Interior,
Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. HARTZELL: I would like to thank you for appearing before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on May 7th. As a follow-up to our hearing, we have received extra questions to be submitted for the record.

The attached questions have been submitted by my office and the office of Senator Jon Kyl. I would appreciate it if you would review the questions and return your answers to us by May 24th so that they may be added to the record. If no reply arrives by this time, we will print the hearing record and note that the answers to the additional questions were not supplied at the time of printing.

Due to the current delay in receiving mail, please provide us with your answers by faxing them to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Democratic Staff at (202) 224-9026 or (202) 224-4340. Should you have any questions, please contact Kira Finkler (202) 224-8164 or Shelley Brown (202) 224-5915 of the Committee Staff.

Sincerely,

JEFF BINGAMAN,
Chairman.

[Responses to the following questions from Senator Kyl were not received at the time this hearing went to press.]

Question 1. How many acres were mechanically thinned in 2001 in Arizona:

- A. by the Forest Service?
- B. by BLM?

Question 2. How many acres do the Forest Service and Department of the Interior plan for mechanical thinning in 2002?

Question 3. What is the ratio of treated acres to burned acres in Arizona for 2000 and 2001? Were more acres burned than were treated in 2001?

Question 4. What is the Forest Service doing to implement treatment on a landscape scale?

Question 5. How much money is needed to complete landscape treatment in Arizona and New Mexico?

Question 6. I note that the Forest Service plans to terminate the wildland-urban interface research program at the Rocky Mountain Research facility in Flagstaff. This program is a leading center to help us understand how to better manage the small stem material that chokes our federal forests in Arizona and New Mexico. Please explain the recommendation to terminate this important program? Where this work will be carried out in the absence of this center?

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC, May 10, 2002.

JOEL HOLTROP,
Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. HOLTROP: I would like to thank you for appearing before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on May 7th. As a follow-up to our hearing, we have received extra questions to be submitted for the record.

The attached questions have been submitted by my office and the offices of Senators Ben Campbell and Jon Kyl. I would appreciate it if you would review the questions and return your answers to us by May 24th so that they may be added to the record. If no reply arrives by this time, we will print the hearing record and note that the answers to the additional questions were not supplied at the time of printing.

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JEFF BINGAMAN,
Chairman.

[Responses to the following questions from Senator Campbell and Senator Kyl were not received at the time this hearing went to press.]

QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR CAMPBELL

On cost-benefit issues related to wildfires and forest management:

Question 1. In a perfect world, are we better off to work to modify stand density through timber harvesting and thinnings, or pay for fire suppression and then rehabilitation? What are the resource values that are lost when we have catastrophic fires?

Question 2. In the NEPA analysis that the Forest Service does on its multiple-use projects do you assess the risk of catastrophic fires? Do you consider the cost of fighting the fire and then performing the rehabilitation work that these fires cause and contrast that against the cost of thinning or harvesting?

On fighting fire:

Question 1. In practically every firefighting scenario, the initial attack is carried out by local communities, oftentimes by volunteer and rural fire departments. How are initial attack firefighters considered or included in preparedness response?

On the National Fire Plan:

Question 1. I am interested in learning a little more about complexities concerning the forest and urban interface. As we are witnessing in Colorado, fires can begin far from urban areas and then rage in toward populated areas. Current fire mitigation practices focus on a space in a subdivision, for example. Yet, wildfires can overcome that initial area. What mitigation resources are available to reduce fuel build up to the land adjacent to the subdivision?

QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR KYL

Question 1. How many acres were mechanically thinned in 2001 in Arizona:

A. by the Forest Service?

B. by BLM?

Question 2. How many acres do the Forest Service and Department of the Interior plan for mechanical thinning in 2002?

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