

STATEMENT OF  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

regarding  
THE NORTHWEST FOREST PLAN

Before the  
Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry  
Committee on Agriculture  
United States House of Representatives

June 21, 1999  
Medford, Oregon

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am Nancy Graybeal, the Acting Regional Forester for the Pacific Northwest Region, which covers the national forests in Oregon and Washington.

I am here to discuss the Amendments to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl, commonly referred to as the Northwest Forest Plan. The Northwest Forest Plan amendments (NFP) amended the existing Forest Plans in western Oregon and Washington in 1994, and later served as the basis for the northern California Forest Plans, as well as the Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plans in Oregon and northern California.

There are four key messages regarding the NFP that I would like to deliver:

- 1) the NFP has succeeded in protecting and enhancing the environment through a big picture ecosystem approach. It is regarded as the anchor in the region for providing critical habitat needed for wildlife and maintaining water quality;
- 2) the NFP has improved intergovernmental coordination, public collaboration, and partnerships, resulting in many significant accomplishments improving streamlining processes, and community and economic development;
- 3) the Forest Service has offered over 1.6 billion board feet of timber during the past two years, providing a stable, sustainable timber supply, while protecting the health of the land; and
- 4) while overall the NFP is a success, there remain challenges.

## OVERVIEW

Prior to 1994, Pacific Northwest environmental and social issues, and the controversy surrounding them, had brought the majority of federal land management activities to a halt. Numerous lawsuits and three court injunctions nearly stopped the flow of forest products from federal lands. The northern spotted owl was listed as a threatened species. As a result, some communities experienced dramatic losses of jobs.

The goal of the NFP was to establish a new framework for managing federal lands to bring economic and ecological stability to the region. The guiding principles address economic assistance, forest ecosystem management, the role and use of science, sustainable timber supplies, and intergovernmental cooperation. The NFP led to fundamental changes in how federal agencies in the Pacific Northwest work with each other and with States, tribes, counties, and the public.

The NFP laid out a common vision with common goals to bring economic and ecological sustainability to our communities and environment. It provides a single policy, and promotes a unified framework with a commitment to science and full public participation.

One of the major achievements of the NFP is that agencies that were pursuing individual missions and agendas are now working toward a common goal of implementing the NFP. I cannot overemphasize the importance of government agencies and citizens working together.

To coordinate better this work, Federal agencies have developed the NFP interagency cooperation structure, including the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Environmental Protection Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, United States Fish

and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The focus is on early interagency collaboration for proposed actions and consultation under the Endangered Species Act.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Success of the NFP is based on three principal areas: forest ecosystem management, intergovernmental coordination, and the Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative.

### Ecosystem Management

The NFP gives direction to managers to focus on ecosystems or forest landscapes, not just single forest stands or individual species. Watershed analysis is the tool we use to consider past, current, and future conditions and needs of ecosystems at the watershed scale. Between 1995 and 1999, federal agencies have completed over 369 watershed analyses within the NFP portion of Washington, Oregon and California. These analyses set the stage for a variety of watershed efforts, including watershed restoration.

The federal agencies under the NFP have completed assessments for 5.5 million acres of Late Successional Reserves, about 74% of the total 7.5 million acres in this category. These areas are designed to protect late-successional and old-growth dependent species in the long term. Managers are using assessments to guide implementation of on-the-ground activities, such as thinning young forest stands to accelerate development of late successional habitat. Federal agencies have also completed 9 of the 10 Adaptive Management Area plans. These areas are designed to develop and test new management approaches to integrate and achieve ecological, economic, and other social and community objectives.

In the last two years, the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service in California, Oregon and Washington have offered over 1.6 billion board feet of timber under the NFP. In these first years of the NFP the harvest has been approximately 90 percent from regulated lands and the remaining 10 percent from other lands. This has been done while meeting commitments to manage, protect and restore Northwest forest ecosystems. For example, we have increased the use of thinning in young stands regionwide to reduce the risk of wildfires and maintain the long-term health of federal forests.

Implementation of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy and its principal components -- riparian reserves, key watersheds, watershed analysis, and watershed restoration -- is one of the most successful and rewarding initiatives developed and implemented to date on federal lands for protecting and improving water quality. The NFP Aquatic Conservation Strategy provides a significant cornerstone for other statewide conservation efforts.

Interagency data sharing has also proven effective as an opportunity to provide improved information management. Common data standards have been developed for vegetation, transportation, and aquatic features. We can generate Regional maps for old growth habitat, watershed boundaries, and land allocations. An intergovernmental steering committee has been the driving force behind these efforts with the goal of providing seamless local and regional data that can be tiered or aggregated to develop regional ecosystem maps and to assist in analysis and decision-making at various landscape scales.

Monitoring is the keystone to implementing successfully the NFP. The continuation of the plan's success depends on tracking results and making adjustments to the course when needed using credible information and an adaptive management process. Provincial Implementation Monitoring Teams, made up of members from multiple agencies and the public, have now completed their third year of implementation monitoring. The monitoring protocols used are research-designed and statistically valid for determining levels of compliance with the NFP Standards and Guidelines. The teams have evaluated timber sales, roads, and restoration products and found 95% levels of compliance nationwide.

### **Intergovernmental Coordination**

The watershed restoration program implemented under the NFP has been a catalyst for change. Specifically, it has influenced agencies and other landowners to collaborate on developing natural resource management goals and partnerships to achieve them. In fact, many collaborative partnerships with other agencies and communities have been created and are operating successfully. Federal and State agencies are working with their local watershed councils and neighboring private landowners to complete overall analysis of watersheds across Oregon, Washington, and northern California. Examples of these partnerships include Little Butte on the Rogue River National Forest, Salmon Creek on the Mount Hood National Forest, and the Tillamook partnership in western Oregon.

In developing and implementing the NFP, federal agencies have worked together to improve coordination and communication with positive results. For instance, the time and resources required for federal land management agencies to consult with federal regulatory agencies as required under the Endangered Species Act has generally declined. However, additional improvements are warranted. This has, in some instances, improved the timeliness of planning and decision-making under the NFP. This could not have happened without coordination between the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

These partnerships have resulted in the expansion of collaboration in other efforts such as implementing the Clean Water Action Plan, Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watershed, Washington Governor's Salmon Restoration Initiative, and the Willamette River

Restoration Initiative. Although it is difficult at times, interagency and intergovernmental forums have improved relationships and trust between federal agencies, State agencies, tribes, and citizens of the northwest.

### **Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative**

The human dimension of ecosystem management shows up through the Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative which has combined the resources of 12 federal agencies and three State governments to deliver more than one billion dollars in assistance to Pacific Northwest communities since 1994. The beneficiaries of this assistance have been hundreds of counties, tribes, and local governments that have been economically affected by reductions in federal timber harvests.

What is especially noteworthy about the initiative is its innovative approach to providing assistance to affected communities. Through the Community Economic Revitalization teams formed in each of the three states, state and federal partners have acted as a clearinghouse to combine and leverage funding. This has eliminated duplication of services. The result of this collaborative process has been a simple, reliable way for communities to access technical and financial help. For example, in Oregon and Washington the Forest Service has awarded over \$38 million to 558 community-determined cost-share projects between 1994 and 1998.

The Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative also has promoted stewardship throughout the Northwest. For example, the Forest Service has cooperated with the Rogue Institute for Ecology and Economy and others to support several projects related to strengthening local economies through sustainable forest stewardship, ecosystem work-force development, and market opportunities for small diameter material and non-timber forest products.

The Rural Community Assistance program has provided technical assistance opportunities to local governments, tribal governments, private businesses, citizen's groups and non-profit organizations. The public has been key in bringing success to areas like the Hayfork Adaptive Management area in northern California. Through the help of local citizens and neighboring federal government agencies there, the Forest Service is experimenting with new approaches to fuels treatment and the development of alternative forest products.

Since 1994, the Region has actively and successfully implemented a watershed restoration, Jobs-In-The-Woods program. This restoration involves improving the health, sustainability and productivity of watersheds, communities, and people. Restoration activities include repairing or obliterating roads, stabilizing upland areas, and restoring stream channels and banks. These efforts have improved over 1,300 miles of anadromous fish habitat, decommissioned nearly 1,400 miles of roads, and stabilized over

5,000 miles of roads while creating a year's worth of work for more than 600 people. The Forest Service funding through the Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative has allowed the agency to begin building the framework for linking sustainable communities with sustainable ecosystems.

## CHALLENGES

The NFP continues to evolve, but not without challenges. Legal challenges to requirements in the NFP are affecting the Forest Services's ability to carry out much of its program. For example, one current litigation issue is whether the 1994 final EIS needs supplementation. As a result, judicial review continues for such aspects of the NFP as the Aquatic Conservation Strategy and environmental impact disclosure.

Under the NFP, the term Probable Sale Quantity (PSQ) is used to describe allowable harvest levels that can be maintained, without decline, over the long-term on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands within the range of the owl. This includes only scheduled or regulated yields from "matrix" lands and does not include "other wood" or volume of cull and other products not normally part of Allowable Sale Quantity calculations. The PSQ estimates for the NFP forests in Washington and Oregon were recently lowered by approximately 11 percent. Previously, the Bureau of Land Management had lowered its portion of PSQ by 13 percent, and the national forests in northern California reduced its portion of PSQ by 28 percent. These adjustments were made using the best available science, and reflect actual on the ground conditions.

Additionally, federal agencies in the Pacific Northwest are working to resolve difficult issues related to plan implementation such as how to survey and manage for many species of which little information is known and how to determine appropriate management activities within Late Successional Reserves. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are preparing a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to the NFP to modify standards and guidelines for survey and manage species. We anticipate having the Final EIS and Record of Decision issued in the early part of the year 2000.

Other challenges include the listing of new species as threatened or endangered and potential new listings for species where ranges overlap the area covered by the NFP. Since the NFP was initiated in 1994, there have been two new listings by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and twelve new listings by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Potential listings that could cause additional adjustments and analysis would be lynx, other fish species, and other terrestrial and aquatic species. While any new listing creates new challenges, there are some positive aspects to consider. As an example, recent fish listings would have more seriously affected the NFP forests had it not been for the provisions and processes established in the NFP.

CLOSING

In conclusion, the NFP uses the best available science to help assure viability of species dependent on late successional ecosystems, provide a dependable, sustainable timber supply, improved interagency cooperation significantly, and helped dependent communities adjust.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. This concludes my written statement, and I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee might have at this time.