

# **House Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Dicks Opening statement US Forest Service hearing February 25, 2010**

Today we welcome the Chief of the Forest Service, Tom Tidwell and the budget director, Kathleen Atkinson. I believe this is the first time for both of you in front of this subcommittee. Thank you for coming today.

I have a long-standing interest in the Forest Service. This agency is important in my district, and in the State of Washington. We had oversight hearings last year on Forest Service management and on the wildfire program, and I am sure this Committee will continue this oversight. Last year's budget was pretty generous to the Forest Service. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act also focused an additional \$1.15 billion for various important projects. These projects are fixing federal assets and improving our environment, while creating many jobs, especially in rural areas. Chief, you will need to explain your agencies' accomplishments.

This year all of our budgets will have to be tighter and more focused. We need to use this hearing and other opportunities to understand what is in the budget request, and to look for areas where savings might be realized. This Committee will look at GAO and Inspector General reports and other sources for information concerning Forest Service waste, performance and efficiency.

The new budget request has a couple of big changes. I want to hear your rationale for these items. We need to carefully examine and evaluate how you are planning to restructure your national forest system budget. Although I certainly support your goals of improving watersheds and restoring forests, it is not at all clear that this big funding bucket, with less accountability, is needed. Just last year at our oversight hearing the GAO once again raised concerns about your data collection for performance and environmental monitoring. We need to see if your newly merged budget has meaningful performance measures. The Forest Service has an ongoing problem demonstrating that it is not wasting or properly prioritizing funds. People think that you fund internal administrative functions first and use what remains for your core conservation and forestry mission.

I hope you can explain why you feel it is necessary to reduce the Legacy roads and trails program so much. It is vital for fixing roads which damage sensitive watersheds. This is a key aspect of watershed restoration, but it is left out of your new restoration focus. You also need to explain how the Service will be able to maintain access to the national forests without any

funding for road improvements. And we'll need to take a careful look at the proposed funding reduction for the Forest Service research program, which does very high quality science helping public and private land managers nationwide.

I can't finish without a comment on the wildfire program. The request has a very large sum for wildfire suppression, well in excess of recent expenditures. And the budget has reductions for several important cooperative wildfire programs. I am pleased to see that the request has funds for the newly established FLAME account. But I am interested in hearing how the additional suppression reserve account will work, and why we need three separate wildfire suppression accounts.

People here in the room also know that I am concerned about the long-range impacts of global warming. Our forests, both public and private, are important parts of the carbon and water cycles. Land managers need to take a longer view as they plan ahead. This must be based on solid, sound science. The national forests and grasslands were originally established to protect watersheds and guarantee the steady flow of water. Western America gets over half of its rain and snow from the national forest system. Nationwide, State and private forest lands provide the water for over 125 million people. As climates change, the treatments and condition of the all these forest lands will be even more vital for America.

**I look forward to good discussion at this hearing, but first-  
Mr. Simpson, do you have any opening remarks?**