

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND RE-
LATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2004**

THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2003

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met at 10:01 a.m., in room SD-124, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Conrad Burns (chairman) presiding.
Present: Senators Burns, Stevens, Domenici, Bennett, Campbell, Dorgan, and Feinstein.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FOREST SERVICE

STATEMENT OF DALE BOSWORTH, CHIEF

**ACCOMPANIED BY HANK KASHDAN, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM AND
BUDGET ANALYSIS**

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CONRAD BURNS

Senator BURNS. We will call the committee to order. Senator Dorgan is on his way. I will make my opening statement and he can make his opening statement when he gets here. It is 10 a.m. and we are going to run on time as close as we can, and get you out of here. We know you have a lot of work to do, Chief, but we welcome you here this morning and we appreciate you coming. We are operating on North Dakota time here, see—Byron, thank you for coming this morning.

The Chief was the regional forester in Missoula, MT, and we had an opportunity to work together on some of the issues that always seem to follow the Forest Service around. It was a pleasure working with him then, and it is a pleasure to work with him now.

The President's budget for the Forest Service is \$4.058 billion in discretionary appropriations this time. It represents a modest overall increase of 2.7 percent, compared to the 2003 level at \$3.95 billion. Most of the agency's programs are funded at levels similar to last year. However, I want to point out some that are not, and some areas that I find disappointing.

There are some significant increases, however, the forest stewardship program at \$35.5 million and the forest legacy program at \$22.4 million, and wildfire suppression is \$186 million. I believe the increase in the wildfire suppression is particularly important,

given the experience you have had for the fire seasons of the past few years.

Last year, the Agency spent \$1.3 billion putting out fires, and the position of the Forest Service and how they handle themselves should be commended. The American people are now aware of what we can do to manage our forests in the areas of prevention, and to keep small fires small fires, instead of having these big ones that we have experienced over the last 10 years.

DROUGHT

Last year, and of course starting back in 1988, pointed up that we cannot stand drought in our country and prevent these fires or keep them under control. The agency was forced to borrow \$1 billion from nonfire programs, which caused significant disruption in many projects, and some had to be cancelled altogether. If the Forest Service spends as much money in fiscal year 2004 as they did last year, it will still need to borrow several million dollars from other accounts under the proposed budget. I hope we can work with you, Chief, and figure out some long-term solutions to this funding of firefighting costs so these disruptions can be minimized in the future.

FIRE PREPAREDNESS

There is also a significant decrease in the proposed 2004 budget which I find troubling. The levels proposed for fire preparedness, for example. This would cause a loss of over half of our firefighters and engines we had on the ground last year. Reducing our readiness capability to this degree will only lead to more small fires escaping, and turning into the devastating fires that we have seen in the past on the evening news.

BURNED AREA EMERGENCY REHABILITATION

I am also concerned about the elimination of funding for rehabilitation and restoring burned-over lands. Two years ago this program was funded at the level of \$142 million. We have had two severe fires since then, which has burned millions of additional acres. There are many areas in my State that burned in 2000 that have yet to be treated or dealt with. If these acres are not restored soon, they may be permanently lost to invasive weeds and erosion.

Funding for backlog maintenance has also been decreased by \$46 million, compared to the current level. This is unwise. However, on the financial management side I want to congratulate you. I am very pleased to see the agency finally obtained a clean audit. That is a credit to your office and your work. I can remember when you came in 2 years ago, looked at the books, and said, this is one area we really have to work on, otherwise we will always have a credibility problem. So I congratulate you on that. That is the first time that has been done in a long time.

The monies—to work with you, though, not only in fire suppression, but prevention, stewardship, forest legacy, and forest health—all of these programs are necessary, and I believe the American people are supportive of what you are doing. The fires that were seen on television every evening were devastating fires, and hot

fires. These fires took everything right out of the soil. Management adjustments have to be made for future years, if we are to see healthy forests.

We also need to do some management work in the areas of disease and bark beetle infestation. I would like to work with you on those areas. We have some forests that need attention, not only in Montana, but nationwide. Those areas are being identified and need special emphasis.

I thank you for coming this morning. We look forward to your testimony and again, congratulations on your audit. This is our first year at this and I look forward to working with Senator Dorgan of North Dakota. He is my new ranking member, and Peter, it is good to see you back as we start down the Interior appropriations. We look forward to working with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle as this appropriations process moves on.

Senator Dorgan.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BYRON L. DORGAN

Senator DORGAN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I, too, look forward to working with you. Montana and North Dakota have a rather lengthy common border, and I know that you know a lot about—

Senator BURNS. Thank God for the Little Missouri, right?

Senator DORGAN. That is right. You know a fair amount about North Dakota and I know a lot about Montana, so I think we will get along just fine.

Chief, thank you for being here. You run a big agency, 34,000 people and \$4 billion, a big responsibility. You and I met yesterday and talked a bit.

Mr. Chairman, I just got notice a few moments ago that Senator Daschle has called a meeting of the Democratic leadership at 10:30, so I am going to have to leave earlier than I expected today, and I regret that is the case, but let me begin my opening statement, then, make a couple of points with Mr. Bosworth. I am going to submit some questions for the record, but I want to make a couple of points.

FIREFIGHTERS

One, the chairman mentioned the issue of the firefighting budget. You and I talked about that yesterday, but firefighters have gone from 10,480 in fiscal year 2002 to 4,898 in fiscal year 2004, fire engines, 995 to 465 during the same period. I mean, it is wrong. This is not good planning. It is not good management. It is not an appropriate approach to these issues. You and I have talked about that.

I recognize that this comes from deep in the bowels of the Office of Management and Budget, where they know the cost of everything and the value of nothing, and I understand you probably cannot say much about that because you are a public servant who is going to have to support whatever is submitted to us as a budget, but I think deep in your heart you know that this does not make sense. We have got to adequately fund firefighting and fire suppression and preparedness, and this is not the case in these budgets. It was not last year.

We raised the point last year during the hearings and it was sort of just dismissed, but the fact is that this has to be dealt with, and doing the little tip-toe dance that Mitch Daniels is doing on this does not do anybody any favors. That is not the way to address these issues. I hope if I do not get a chance to tell him, you will tell him that for me.

LEAFY SPURGE

Let me just—I want to show you—Mr. Bosworth, this is leafy spurge.

Let me tell you something about leafy spurge. We have lands that you are in charge of, the Forest Service is in charge of, that do not deal with their weeds appropriately. The Forest Service is not a good neighbor, and when you have got an infestation of 30,000 or 40,000 acres of leafy spurge and you do not control them, what happens is, everyone else who is on the periphery of the Forest Service land is affected by it.

The reason I brought this plant today is, I wrote an earmark of \$200,000 in to have some additional chemicals put on the ground and to control leafy spurge on specific grasslands in North Dakota, and the fact is, I saw no evidence that that was put in the ground to control leafy spurge. Although the Forest Service did a little tap dance for me to say, well, here is how it happened, the fact is, I think it was subsumed into payment for the bureaucracy, and I did not see any evidence that there was additional control on the ground of leafy spurge, despite the fact that that is what we put the money in for, and we have got ranchers out there that are trying to deal with this, and leafy spurge is one noxious weed, but in our part of the territory it is one that is pretty devastating, and we have to control these noxious weeds on our land. This is Forest Service land. We have a responsibility. If regular folks do not control it, we are after them all the time, and the Federal Government has to meet its responsibility, Mr. Bosworth. You and I have talked about that. I know you are looking into this.

At any rate, Mr. Bosworth, this is serious business for a lot of folks in North Dakota, and I want to work with you on that, and I mentioned the fire suppression. As a matter of fact, on forest issues we rank 50th among the 50 States in native forestlands in North Dakota, so I am a lot less familiar with forest issues than many of my colleagues, who have great familiarity with them, but I am anxious to work with you on many of these issues.

GRAZING PERMITS

If I might mention one additional point we have got with respect to our grasslands in the Cheyenne Valley, we need a new 10-year grazing agreement, and I think on March 23 the current one expires, so there is great concern that we would have a circumstance were cattle to be taken off of those lands. You told me yesterday that would not be the case, and that you would do extensions until we reach a new agreement. For that I am very appreciative, and I hope we can reach an agreement.

But Mr. Chairman, thanks for indulging me to be able to do this now so that I can go to that leadership meeting later.

Senator BURNS. Yes, and do not let it go to seed. That is all I ask.

He brings up a good point, I also want to bring it up, and there is not a better place. He brought up grazing permits. We not only have spurge, but we have spotted knap. And now we are going to have a little lesson in weeds. I do not know what it is in Washington, D.C. Just go to one of these glitzy Grey Poupon and white wine receptions, and when they come around and they ask what your main interest is in Washington, and you say weeds, see how fast you are left standing there by yourself.

It is not a big thing here. It is like yesterday morning, I offered to go down and help the guy get his John Deere tractor out of that puddle, because it is just too wet to plow there.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

The grazing permit—because what he is trying to do, and this problem of noxious weeds go hand in hand, Dale. The only way you get this weed and spotted knap is sheep. Sheep will do it. You can put chemicals out there, you can fight them with hoses—

Senator DORGAN. To explain, sheep eat it.

Senator BURNS. That is right. Sheep will get rid of noxious weeds. And it is a problem in Montana, so I appreciate—we are going to get along just fine. I found another weed guy. There are not very many of us here, Byron.

Senator DORGAN. That is right.

Senator BURNS. But this is something that has to be dealt with. The grazing permits, and the control of noxious weeds go hand in hand in our forest management.

Senator DORGAN. Mr. Chairman, we could do a caucus of leafy spurge, spotted knap, and creeping Jenny.

Senator BURNS. And Russian thistle.

Senator DORGAN. And Russian thistle.

Senator BURNS. You bet. We could get them all.

Senator Campbell.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL

Senator CAMPBELL. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I sure do like this hearing.

It sure is a lesson. What we really need in your budget is something for more sheep, apparently. We probably will not have that, but I do know that you recognize the real danger. All of us come from western States that are on the committee today, and the fire season out there, they tell us, even though we have gotten a lot of snow in Colorado in the last few days, they say is going to be every bit as bad as it was last year, and as I look at the President's budget there is obviously a slight increase from \$4.7 billion to \$4.8 billion. I do not think that is nearly enough, and I have to associate my comments with Senator Dorgan. I think that maybe the best thing we can do is, the next time we have a big fire out there is press OMB into service to come out there and help fight the thing. Maybe they would recognize the real dangers that we face.

But you know, as I travel around, like my colleagues from the West, we are seeing more and more indicators that because of insect infestation there is just mile after mile of dead timber, which

always is going to become worse fuel this summer. I was down by Cortez, Colorado about 2 weeks ago, and I was just amazed. All the pine in that area, it is almost all dead, and you can just pick them out from the junipers and the other trees. Whatever that insect is is just attacking pines, and by next year there is just going to be a whole dead forest there.

Well, in any event, you know the devastating fires we had in Colorado—last year between the Hayman fire and the Missionary Ridge fire, the cost of property. Fortunately we did not have many lives lost—I think only one or two, frankly, but it is getting worse.

GROUNDING FIRE AIR TANKER FLEET

But there is something else, too, that is really beginning to bother me, and hopefully you will address it, or I will ask it maybe in a question, but it is my understanding that one-half of the whole tanker fleet is grounded now and out West, boy, we really rely on those planes, and I do not know how we are going to replace the planes or the money for the planes, because I imagine they are pretty darned expensive.

A lot of those old World War II planes, the airframes are getting fatigued and they just cannot fly them anymore, and after those two tragic accidents last year I certainly recognize they have got to be grounded if there is a chance of killing some of the pilots, but out where we are, those things are the first responders in many cases, and I have been to a couple of fires where I have seen them start, seen the planes take off, seen them put out, all within a 1-hour period of time before people could even get out there, so I would like you to address that if you could and just let me tell you that I would like you to maybe also give us your prognosis about some of the litigation.

ANALYSIS PARALYSIS

I think all the attacks from the environmental community every time you want to do a prescribed burn or do a clearing is probably on the downside a little bit this year, because they are clearly recognizing they are on the wrong side of public opinion and most Americans, particularly out West, are saying we have got to do a better job of managing the forest, and I remember, perhaps it was last year or a year before, we were told that about 41 percent of the money that was used in the Forest Service program was either—it was called analysis paralysis, I think was the word they used. It was used for doing studies and preparing to defend yourself and, in fact, in defending in the actual lawsuits, and I would like to know a little bit more about what you see in that area, too, this year.

But thank you for being here. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BURNS. Senator Feinstein. Turn your button on, Dianne.

Senator FEINSTEIN. I have only been here for 10 years. I am a slow learner.

Senator BURNS. Auctioneers know how to use these things pretty rapid.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN

Senator FEINSTEIN. Thanks, Chief. Thank you.

Mr. Bosworth, in California I do not think we have the leafy spurge or the Russian thistle, but we do have the Yosemite toad and the fairy shrimp, and I want to talk to you a little bit about the Sierra Nevada Framework Agreement.

I very much appreciate what you have done with respect to the framework, particularly because it actually prevented a listing of the California spotted owl as threatened and endangered, but this past week the Forest Service announced that it is planning to proceed with a plan to undo some key elements of the framework, and I am very concerned about it, because I think it is going to cause a huge problem of conflict in the State, and I would like to give you a March 19 letter from Mary Nichols, the Director of the Resources Agency, who expresses concerns that you have not worked with the State in determining this, and she says the outcome is unacceptable to the State.

COLLABORATIVE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

They have proposed an alternative plan offering to bring the resources of the State to a collaborative adaptive management program in the 2½ million acres of wildland-urban interface, where you have got Class 3 forest problems, and my hope would be that you would work with the State. The State—and I have had a conversation with Secretary Nichols, and they understand, and they are prepared to be supportive of the need to clean out the forest for a forest fire. She says they want to work more aggressively than you want to work to do it, so that is the first issue.

YOSEMITE TOAD

The second issue is, there is something called the Yosemite toad. You know, the fairy shrimp are microscopic little shrimp that grow in vernal pools, so if a puddle lasts more than 90 days, a shrimp can pop up and it can stop whatever is going on around it, whether it is a new vineyard or anything else. Well, the Yosemite toad apparently comes out of pools at higher levels where there are ranchers grazing on public land, and it is my understanding that a number of these ranchers are essentially going to have to be put out of business, and I would like to ask you personally to take a look at that and see if there is not any way ranchers can be allowed to graze in other areas, rather than be put out of business.

I think there are anywhere from half a dozen to a dozen ranchers who are going to be put out of business, and one of the things that I really believe is also important as we do these things is to protect the heritage of the State, and ranching has been a heritage of the California frontier. I would like to see it protected wherever I can, and I think there is a way of moving around some of these pools without putting the ranchers out of business, so I would be hopeful that you would be willing to work with them.

BARK BEETLE

The third problem is the bark beetle. I think all of us have a big problem with the bark beetle. I know I talked to Senator Kyl yes-

terday about Arizona. There is a big infestation there, and we have 150,000 acres of forest that are infested, particularly in the Lake Arrowhead area, the Idlewild area of California.

The Governor has declared a state of emergency, and we need to find a way to quickly respond to these forest epidemics to reduce this spread, so I wrote you a letter on February 18, which is a month ago, asking you to address the situation and hoping for a response. I have not gotten that response as of yet, so I hope today you might address what you are going to do about the bark beetle as well.

LAKE TAHOE RESTORATION ACT

Additionally, 3 years ago Congress passed the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. As you know, the Tahoe National Forest surrounds Lake Tahoe, and we authorized \$300 million over 10 years, the Federal Government to contribute a third. There really is good news. First, there is a huge consensus in the population. Second, Lake Tahoe's clarity has been increasing. It is now 73 feet, which is good news, but the disappointment is that there is only I think \$6 million in this budget to continue that plan, and so I hope to be able to add to that a little bit.

QUINCY LIBRARY GROUP

The final thing is the Quincy Library Group. As you know, I was a Senate sponsor of that legislation. I am very supportive of it. The project has had a number of delays, had a number of bumps. The President proposes \$26 million to implement it this year the same as last year, and I am very hopeful that it will be able to serve as a model in other areas, and so I would like any comments you would care to make on that as well.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you, Mr. Bosworth.

Senator BURNS. Thank you, Senator Feinstein.

Senator Bennett.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ROBERT BENNETT

Senator BENNETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Most everything I was going to cover has been covered.

Senator BURNS. Turn your mike on.

Senator BENNETT. Oh, I have to do that, too. All right.

PRAIRIE DOG

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Most everything I had intended to say has been covered. Senator Campbell, because our States adjoin each other, has exactly all the same concerns I have. I have to say to Senator Dorgan, he says you get a prairie dog and as soon as you get one you get a whole bunch. There are parts of my State where they are endangered species, and you have got a whole bunch, but nobody can do anything about them.

Senator DORGAN. But they are not really endangered. They are just on the list, right?

Senator BENNETT. Well, they are endangered because the attitude in the local community is the three-S solution: shoot, shovel,

and shut up. Whether that really solves the problem, I do not know.

BARK BEETLE

Then Senator Feinstein talks about the bark beetle, the combination of Senator Feinstein and Senator Campbell. In our State the problem with the bark beetle are all of the lawsuits that get filed, and the Forest Service is absolutely handcuffed in dealing with it because every time they want to go into the Dixie Forest to deal with the bark beetle, which is an enormous problem, somebody files a lawsuit and says oh no, no, you cannot do this because somehow this will invade the pristine nature of the forest, and by the time they get through with the lawsuit, then the bark beetle has expanded another few thousand acres and the Forest Service says, okay, we are going to do it now.

ENVIRONMENTAL LITIGATION COSTS

Well, they file a new lawsuit because it is a new set of acreage, and there is great concern that we may, in fact, lose the entire Dixie National Forest over this, so I just echo the concern about the bark beetle that Senator Feinstein has and hope, along with Senator Campbell, that we can find a way to deal with the litigation. I would be interested, if you have not got the number ready for us here, if you would supply what percentage of your budget is taken up in fighting litigation.

We have asked that question of the BLM director and the numbers are between 40 and 50 percent, depending on which area you are talking about, and that is a huge, huge drain on the land management capabilities. We try to give you the resources you need in order to do the job properly, but if all of those resources are eaten up in lawsuits—which interestingly enough, the BLM always wins.

It is not a case that the BLM is doing a bad job of stewardship. It is the fact that they are constantly being diverted with lawsuits, and they have to prove over and over and over again that their stewardship is fine in court, and one begins to believe that the basic strategy is not to file a legitimate lawsuit, but to hamstring the agency through this device, and I would appreciate any statistics you could give us about what percentage of your budget goes to lawsuits, or defending legal activities, and whether or not it is rising.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BURNS. Thank you, Senator Bennett.

Senator Domenici.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PETE V. DOMENICI

Senator DOMENICI. Well, by the time we get to me, I have all the same problems. I would say that we did submit to Deputy Under Secretary Dave Tenny questions with respect to the bark beetle in New Mexico. I would appreciate it if you would look at the question and get it answered.

We have a very old, long-infested piece of BLM forest up in Northern New Mexico. It is already beginning to rot, it is old, and

it is growing. We submitted some questions about treating and the like to which we would like to have some answers.

You know, about now in my life in the Senate, I kind of get tired of coming to meetings and complaining that litigation is taking all our time. We cannot get anything done. I really wish that people like you would tell us what we ought to do so that we do not have that situation. I am not interested in having another long list of how much time it is taking. We are not doing anything to change the situation, and most of you all say that we cannot change it. It is the law.

I think we ought to give it a try, even if it is some very significant surgery that we have to do on these statutes. Something is amiss when we cannot take care of the problems that are so patent that anybody with an ounce of common sense, a few dollars, and a little bit of expertise would at least get started on some of these things, but we cannot.

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING

Let me suggest, if you look at this year's budget, in all deference to the President, you will not get much done this year, either. By the time we run out of money, when we cannot put out the fires and we start borrowing again, the good plans you have got going will get stopped. There is not enough money for the programs to clean the forest and thin them either, from what I can tell. I hope I am wrong, but that is what it looks like to me.

I have one ray of hope, and I hope it does not get bogged down in court so it takes forever. I do have a strong sense that if you all will apply the stewardship contract approach in the right way, and we do not get ourselves in lawsuits where we have acted improperly, I believe there is a real chance you can have companies that will go in and contract to clean and manage and thin out in exchange for what they can take off the forest. You might get a lot of work done for not too many dollars that can quite properly be managed. I think it can be used for cleaning out infestations and anything.

Right now, however, it is deemed by the environmentalists to be a subterfuge for logging. To the extent I read it, I see all the ways we could use it that would not be logging, would not be any subterfuge to get around the logging laws. I hope you can find ways to use stewardship contracting, and I hope you all think it is a good approach. I see no other way, based on personnel, management capacity, and money to get the forests of America managed and back where they are a credit.

So with that, if you can comment on that later, fine. I have some questions about my State that I will ask or submit later. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BURNS. Thank you, Senator Domenici. I read your statement, Mr. Bosworth, and I just want to point out a couple of things that you have highlighted in your statement. I am glad we are finally taking a look to see where we want our forests to be in 100 years, and the management it will take to get there within the next 100 years. That is foresight, and hazardous fuels.

You may summarize your statement if you like. Your entire statement will be made a part of the record. As with all of the Sen-

ators who are here today, your full statement will be made a part of the record.

Chief Bosworth, we welcome you and we look forward to your testimony.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF DALE BOSWORTH

Mr. BOSWORTH. Thank you. Is this on? It is on, good. After all these problems we had with that I was not sure.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I do appreciate the opportunity to talk about the President's fiscal year 2004 budget for the Forest Service. I have Hank Kashdan with me today. Hank is the Director of Program and Budget Analysis for the Forest Service. He will help me answer some of the specifics in terms of dollar questions that you might have.

It is really good to have you back in the chair, Senator Burns. I really appreciate the working relationship that we have had in the past so it is good to have you there. It is also good to have Senator Dorgan in the ranking minority member position. It does make me feel a little bit like I am back home in the Northern Region. I worked with both North Dakota and Montana. Of course, we had lots of opportunities to work together. It does make me feel like I am back home until I look out of the window and see that I am still in the city. It is a little bit different here.

I would like to acknowledge completion of the fiscal year 2003 budget process. It was important to us, the completion of that. There are some thanks that you deserve for supporting some things like: Fire reimbursement—\$636 million I believe is what we were reimbursed for the Forest Service—stewardship contracting, which was mentioned by Senator Domenici; an achievement of balance between fire suppression and fire preparedness. Those were some of the things that came up in some of the opening remarks.

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING

I wanted to take this opportunity to say right now that I am strongly supportive, almost to the point of obnoxiousness, of stewardship contracting. I mean, it can be our future. It can make a huge opportunity for us to be able to treat, particularly, some of the fuels kinds of problems that we have. There are other kinds of opportunities beyond fuels management. We have been experimenting with it now for about 4 or 5 years, thanks in good part to the chairman, and we have learned a lot. This is an expanded authority which, I think, if we are smart in the way that we implement it, we will have people from all different viewpoints feeling like this is a good tool to help us do the right things on the national forests. So I really appreciate having the opportunity to expand the use of that.

FIRE PREPAREDNESS AND SUPPRESSION

The other thing, the balance between fire suppression and preparedness: In the 2003 budget we have the opportunity to move the dollars back and forth between suppression and preparedness, depending upon what the fire season looks like. That can be very, very helpful to us because we are looking at—we are talking about

the 2004 fire season in this budget. We do not really know what that is going to look like in 2004. As we get closer and closer, then, you want to maybe move money from one side to the other, depending on what the conditions are like. So the way the 2003 budget is set up, that gives us that flexibility to be able to make some of those adjustments, which I appreciate very much.

AUDIT OPINION

I am going to talk mostly about healthy forests, the national fire plan, and the Agency priorities. I do want to mention our financial accountability first. I appreciate your comments, Mr. Chairman, about our accomplishment in finally achieving a clean audit opinion. It is very important for us to have done that. I am very proud of the folks who worked really hard to accomplish that. It is almost unheard of to, really, go from no opinion to an unqualified audit opinion in just 1 year. We feel very good about that.

But I also have to say that that is the very, very, very minimum that taxpayers ought to expect of us. At the least, we ought to be able to do that. We have a long ways to go yet in our organization to be able to sustain that clean audit opinion. We still have other changes we have to make in terms of how we are organized, in terms of how we manage our financial dollars. I believe that, while it is our job in the Forest Service to be good stewards of the public lands, it is also our job to be good stewards of the public funds. We intend to do that.

A little bit, just sort of an overview, I guess, of the fiscal year 2004 President's program: For me, the reality is that it is a flat budget, the very, very best that we can expect, given the international and domestic issues that we are faced with. Having a flat budget is the most that we can expect. That is what we have.

HEALTHY FORESTS INITIATIVE

We have legislative and regulatory initiatives, though, that I believe will help stretch those dollars a lot further to get more money on the ground. That would accomplish some of those things like the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. To me, the key solution here is to be able to do more with the dollars that we have. That is what some of these initiatives tie into.

We have the Healthy Forests Initiative—many of you are very, very familiar—and everybody from the West is very, very familiar—with some of the fires that we have had—the problems that the lack of good forest health has brought to us. Many of these large fires happened because of the lack of forest health.

Senator Feinstein mentioned the San Bernadino National Forest. One of the problems is that we are in a drought situation. There are way, way too many trees there for what the conditions, the natural conditions, would have been because we have been suppressing fires for years and years and years.

So now we are faced with the problem of trying to clean up a place that is messed up because of insects and diseases—particularly insects, bark beetles in this case, with a whole lot of dead trees—rather than having treated it 10 years ago, or 15 years ago—to have a healthy forest condition so that we do not have to

deal with the clean-up and then potential devastating fire problems.

I think that is a good example. There are many other examples that we have seen around the country that are facing us that, if we can be proactive and get the work done on the ground, we maybe hopefully can avoid some of those circumstances.

I think there are lots of opportunities—the same thing in Idaho again, or in Montana again—with stewardship contracting—to try to achieve some of the same things there, and that can apply to places—we have the same opportunities in New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. Those are some great opportunities that I am really anxious to continue the work with this committee on.

We have had good support from this subcommittee in the whole notion of forest health and long-term fuels reduction. That is going to be the challenge for us over the next 10 to 15 years. I hope we can continue with that.

RESEARCH

There are some other increases in the budget that I think are important that I want to point out. There is an increase in research that is targeted at sudden oak death and other invasive species—an additional increase for fire-related research, and that is going to be really important. We need to do a good job of research. We need to be building our research capacity back. When we get some of these events, like sudden oak death, we have to have the capability to try to learn as much about that as quickly as we can or we can end up with some really difficult situations.

RANGE MANAGEMENT

We have an increase in range management to help improve the health of rangelands—an increase for forest legacy, I think that you had mentioned, better enable acquisition of conservation easements on some important tracts.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

There is an array of legislative proposals that will do things like: update the appeals process; streamline the execution of the highest-priority hazardous fuels reduction areas; expand partnership authorities; improve the ability of partners to cooperate with the Agency—because right now it is very difficult for people to be partners with us and so there is a legislative initiative that would help that—and also to make existing watershed enhancement authority permanent, known as the Wyden authority.

It is also important to note that there is a proposal to make the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program permanent. I do believe that a large majority of recreation users support that program.

A lot of comments were made in the opening remarks that I would be happy to respond to. I could respond, I think, more to direct questions regarding these things. The one I would like to just—several people talked about “analysis paralysis” or “process gridlock.”

PROCESS PREDICAMENT

We submitted—developed a report in the Forest Service about a year ago in which we referred to a “process predicament.” The purpose of that report was to identify problems. It did not offer solutions but identified problems. We used that as a means to try to get some kind of understanding and agreement as to whether there was really a problem. We believed there was.

My belief is that it was useful for that. People recognized that we have problems and are willing to work with us. Consequently, we have submitted a number of things. We proposed some changes in our planning regulations. That, hopefully, would reduce the time to do a forest plan from something like—8 to 10 years is what it has been taking us—down to maybe 2 years. I mean, they are out for public comment right now. That is what I would like to do: To be able to get them and shorten that period of time.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

We are proposing some “categorical exclusions” which would mean that we would exclude certain kinds of projects from documentation in an environmental impact statement. We would still do analysis, still do public involvement. We just would not document it in an environmental impact statement for those projects that we have done over and over and over and over again. We know, after having done it so many times, that we are not going to have adverse effects on the environment.

So we are proposing a number of categorical exclusions that we believe will help speed up the process for things like some small-debris removal, for fuels treatment, and for restoration and rehabilitation. Those are out for public comment right now. They are not all favorable, the comments we get on those but, again, I believe that if we get the opportunity to implement some of those things, we can show people what we can do on the ground. They will like what they see. We are trying to move forward and deal with that issue.

PREPARED STATEMENT

So I am going to wrap it up now. I will answer questions. I am happy to be in this job right now. It is an exciting time. It is an honor to be here. I look forward to working with you. I will be happy to answer your questions.

[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DALE N. BOSWORTH

Mr. Chairman, Senator Dorgan, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the President’s fiscal year 2004 Budget for the Forest Service. I am accompanied by Hank Kashdan, Director of Program and Budget Analysis for the Forest Service. It is a great privilege to be here today.

Before discussing my testimony in detail, let me first thank you Mr. Chairman for your support of the Forest Service and your focus on management of the nation’s natural resources. The Committee’s support of expanded authority for stewardship contracting as contained in the fiscal year 2003 Appropriation’s Act, exemplifies this focus. And Senator Dorgan, let me start by congratulating you on assuming the ranking member position on the Subcommittee. I look forward to working with you in this important role.

OVERVIEW

Teddy Roosevelt's rich legacy includes the Forest Service, and he once observed that people should make few promises and then keep them. Our agency, which will celebrate its 99th anniversary during the 2004 budget year, has made more than a few promises. I am often asked about my vision for the Forest Service. The Forest Service must be viewed as the world's leader in natural resource management by living up to commitments, efficiently using and accounting for the taxpayer funds that are entrusted to us, and treating people with respect. My vision as we approach the centennial is to heed TR's advice. We are an agency that keeps its promises.

The fiscal year 2004 President's budget request for the Forest Service is \$4.8 billion, \$119 million greater than the fiscal year 2003 Enacted Budget. The fiscal year 2004 Budget provides funding to reduce the risk of wild land fire to communities and the environment by implementing the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. In addition, it provides funds to enhance the ability of the Forest Service to meet multiple demands. The major departure from fiscal year 2003 is an increase of \$187 million for wild land fire suppression and additional increases in funds for forest and rangeland research, forest stewardship, forest legacy, range management, and hazardous fuels reduction.

This past August the President announced the Healthy Forests Initiative in order to help reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfires to communities and the environment. The fiscal year 2004 budget proposal contains a combination of legislative and funding priorities the President feels are necessary to address this need, as signaled in his State of the Union message. The Healthy Forests Initiative builds on the fundamentals of multiple use management principles that have guided the Forest Service since its formation. These principles embody a balance of conservation and balanced approach to the use of natural resources that are valid today in working with local communities, States, Tribes, and other Federal agencies.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In my testimony today I want to discuss in detail how the President's fiscal year 2004 budget and accompanying legislative initiatives will improve the health of our forests and rangelands, but first let me focus on the agency's effort to improve its financial accountability.

When I began my career, the Forest Service was viewed as a model federal agency, accomplishing our mission for the American people. I am pleased to share with you today a stride that takes us closer to the reputation of a generation ago. Through the extraordinary efforts of our employees across the nation, we and our USDA counterparts have achieved an unqualified audit opinion for 2002. This is an important step in a continuing effort to fulfill promises previous Chiefs and I have made to get the Forest Service financial house in order. To progress from no opinion to a clean opinion in just one year is unprecedented. This unqualified audit opinion sets the basis for our next steps, which include additional financial reforms to efficiently consolidate financial management personnel; improve the effectiveness of the financial management system as part of the funds control and budget execution process; and improve the quality of account reconciliation. It will take as much work to keep that clean financial opinion as it did to earn it. But, this important accomplishment of a clean audit opinion demonstrates the progress we are making in keeping our word.

PROCESS PREDICAMENT

When I met with you a year ago, gridlock and analysis paralysis directly affected our ability to deliver on many promises: to protect communities from catastrophic wildfire, to provide a sustainable flow of forest and grassland products, and to sustain the landscapes used and enjoyed by the American people. These problems still exist, but the Forest Service has taken the initiative to deal with this process predicament within its authority by proposing regulations and policies. I believe we are on the road to success. We proposed a revised planning rule to provide a more readily understood planning process—one that the agency can implement within anticipated budgets. We proposed new processes to simplify documentation under NEPA for management activities that do not significantly affect the environment—small, routine projects that are supported by local communities, such as salvaging dead and dying trees or removing insect infested or diseased trees. We propose to work with you and the American people to keep our promise that these measures are about sustainable land stewardship.

PRESIDENT'S MANAGEMENT AGENDA

The Forest Service has developed and is implementing a comprehensive strategy to achieve the objectives of the President's Management Agenda. Today I'll highlight a few of the significant efforts we're making to improve Forest Service management and performance. In the competitive sourcing arena, we will conduct public/private competitions on 3,000 full-time equivalent positions during fiscal year 2004, identifying the most efficient, effective way to accomplish work for the American people, as identified in the Agency's Efficiency Plan which has been submitted to the Administration. Our e-government energies will move beyond web information delivery into four important areas: incident planning and management, recreation services and information, electronic planning record, and the federal and non-federal assistance process. We are instituting critical oversight controls to keep wildfire suppression costs as low as possible while protecting communities and resources and improve our methods of reporting wild land fire suppression expenses. Several streamlining efforts are underway to reduce indirect costs and better examine the role and structure of various Forest Service organizational levels.

An element of the President's Management Agenda concerning budget and performance initiative, the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) analysis provides a standardized set of performance management criteria that provides a consistent evaluation process to identify areas of performance and budget integration they should improve. In fiscal year 2004, the Wildland Fire Management and Capital Improvement and Maintenance programs of the Forest Service were selected to participate in the first round of assessments using the PART. The PART analyses for these programs indicated that funds need to be better targeted within the Wildland Fire Management program while the annual performance measures of Capital Improvement and Maintenance program inadequately linked to ongoing management initiatives aimed at addressing the maintenance backlog.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

The President's budget provides a \$2.6 million increase that supports a significant Forest Service promise—to make progress on completing environmental analysis on national forest rangelands. The funding increase will enhance our capability to manage livestock and support communities where rangelands are an integral part of the economy and way of life.

FOREST SERVICE RESEARCH

Productive forests and rangelands provide wood and forage, clean water, wildlife habitat, recreation, and many other values. Key to sustained and enhanced productivity is developing and deploying integrated resource management systems based on the best science available. A \$2.1 million increase in forest and rangeland research is a valuable addition to our program. Some of the increase will support research and development tools essential to prevent, detect, control, and monitor invasive species and restore impacted ecosystems. Other emphasis includes a pine bark beetle program that looks at new management strategies, better utilization of bark beetle trees, and developing additional treatment options for managers and landowners. Programs to identify new biological control agents and treatment methodology and to develop integrated pest management technology for land managers will also be accelerated. The President's Budget recognizes the need for research to support the full range of challenges faced by land and resource managers because challenges don't stop at National Forest System boundaries. Addressing the issues associated with America's forests and grasslands—including hazardous fuels, protection of communities from catastrophic wildfire, invasive species, and pathogens—doesn't depend upon who owns the ground. Keeping this promise goes beyond the basic and applied science functions of research. We also need to bridge the gap between research findings and results on the ground. The request reflects the importance of technology transfer, internally in the Forest Service and externally through our university and State and Private Forestry program partners.

STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

Through close cooperation with State Foresters and other partners, our State and Private Forestry Program provides assistance to landowners and resource managers to help sustain the Nation's forests and protect communities and the environment from wildland fire. The President's budget contains an increase of over \$31 million for these programs. While most of the forest health management, cooperative fire protection, and cooperative forestry programs continue at fiscal year 2003 levels, forest stewardship and the forest legacy program reflect an increase. A \$34 million in-

crease for forest stewardship supports the objectives of the National Fire Plan, the Healthy Forest Initiative, and the Forestry Title of the 2002 Farm Bill. The increase will strengthen our partnerships through a competitive cost-share program, leveraging the effectiveness of federal funds to reduce hazardous fuels, improve invasive species management, and enhance forest production from state and private lands. This increase will support increased private landowners' investment in the management of small diameter and underutilized forest products. In the forest legacy program, the President's budget proposes a \$22 million increase to conserve environmentally important private forests through partnerships with States and willing landowners. The budget will support partnerships with up to ten additional States that have not previously participated in the program. We expect total conservation of more than 200,000 acres, benefiting wildlife habitat, water quality, and recreation.

THE NEXT 100 YEARS FOR AMERICA'S NATIONAL FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS

Some people and organizations still argue that timber harvest levels represent the greatest threat to the National Forests. However loudly voiced or strongly held these views may be, they are not accurate for the reality of management of the National Forests in the next 100 years. This year's budget request supports a program to offer two billion board feet including salvage sales.

The request addresses two key long-term challenges to America's National Forests and Grasslands: the build up of hazardous fuels and the spread of invasive species that seriously impair ecosystems. In August of last year, the President announced the Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI). Its objectives include streamlining the decision-making process and continuing our long-term commitment of working with communities to achieve a meaningful level of public involvement.

We are committed to our continued partnership with those that use and enjoy America's National Forests as well as those that value them as part of our nation, no matter where they live. Although we have made progress, we must do more. Last year, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior proposed new legislation to authorize permanent stewardship contracting authority, expedited review, hazardous fuels reduction projects, and address a burdensome administrative appeal process. President Bush reaffirmed his commitment to Healthy Forests during the State of the Union Address. We are committed to working with you as you consider the proposals of the Secretaries.

Hazardous Fuels

The presence of large amounts of hazardous fuels poses a tremendous threat to people and to public and private natural resources. The Budget increases emphasis on protecting communities and property from the effects of these combustible fuels—catastrophic wildfire. The budget supports the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan, developed in close collaboration with governors, communities, and the Department of the Interior. Through performance goals contained in the implementation plan, we will implement hazardous fuels reduction projects, improve fire suppression planning, expand forest product utilization, protect lands from fire related spreads of invasive species, and undertake key fire research.

The budget contains an increase of nearly \$187 million for fire suppression. Wild land fire suppression costs are increasing and are having significant impact upon a wide number of Forest Service programs. The cost increases are due a number of reasons, including costs associated with national mobilization, wild land fire suppression in areas of high hazardous fuel loads, large aircraft and helicopter operations, and the increasing complexity of suppression in the wild land-urban interface. To address these increasing costs, the Budget proposes that the Forest Service and the Department of Interior (DOI): review the cost-effectiveness of large fire aviation resources; establish a review team to evaluate and develop cost containment strategies; and revise procedures to improve reporting of fire suppression spending. Together with other actions, this should enable the Forest Service to significantly improve our ability to fight wildfires without the major impacts to other programs we experienced during last year's fire fund transfers. Last year we kept our promise by aggressively fighting wildfire—long after funds appropriated specifically for fire suppression were gone—and catching more than 99 percent of fires the way they all start, small. The request includes a renewed emphasis on up-to-date fire management plans and wild land fire use fires.

Accomplishing performance objectives under the National Fire Plan is also consistent with the President's Management Agenda. Reducing hazardous fuels, protecting against fire-related invasive species, and targeting adequate resources to suppress wildfire promotes improved health of Federal, State, Tribal, and local lands as well as enhancing the economies of natural resource based communities.

I again urge all of us—cooperators and skeptics—to keep a focus on what we leave on the land, not what we take from it. Effective, integrated hazardous fuels reduction can leave us with clean, healthy water, improved wildlife habitat, and more satisfying recreation experiences.

Invasives

Invasive species, especially weeds, pose a tremendous threat to forests and grasslands. Whether kudzu or leafy spurge or knapweed or oriental bittersweet vine, these unwanted invasives take hold and out compete native species, changing the look and structure of entire ecosystems. Our response to these threats needs to embrace an integrated approach. In the coming year we will improve integration of efforts among the National Forest System, Research, and State and Private Forestry, and other USDA agencies.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

The fiscal year 2004 Budget contains several legislative proposals that significantly advance common sense forest health efforts that prevent the damage caused by catastrophic wildfires and move past “process gridlock” to improve agency land management efficiency. Four proposals, in particular, promote the President’s Healthy Forests Initiative by reducing hazardous fuels; permanently authorizing stewardship end results contracting; repealing the Appeals Reform Act; and revising standards of judicial review in decisions that relate to activities necessary to restore fire-adapted forest and rangeland ecosystems.

Hazardous Fuels

As mentioned earlier, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior proposed legislation that authorizes emergency fuels reduction projects in priority areas of federal forests outside wilderness areas. This will allow timely treatment of forests at risk of catastrophic fire and those that pose the greatest risk to people, communities, and the environment. Our top priorities will include the wild land-urban interface, municipal watersheds, areas affected by disease, insect activity, wind throw, and areas subject to catastrophic reburn. We would select projects through collaborative processes, consistent with the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Fundamental to better implementation of core components of the National Fire Plan’s 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy is the outstanding cooperation that exists between the Forest Service, Department of the Interior, State governments, counties, and communities in the collaborative targeting of hazardous fuels projects to assure the highest priority areas with the greatest concentration of fuels are treated.

Stewardship End Result Contracting

Section 323 of the Omnibus Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2003, authorizes the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to undertake, for a period of 10 years “stewardship end results contracting projects.” The Administration had requested this extended authority last year in the President’s Healthy Forest Initiative. I appreciate the action of the Congress in responding to the President’s request. We expect this tool, which had been available only to the Forest Service on a limited pilot basis, to be used to implement projects that have been developed in collaboration with local communities and which will primarily improve forest or rangeland health, restore and rehabilitate fish and wildlife habitat, and reduce hazardous fuel. Projects will have appropriate NEPA analysis and comply with agency wilderness and roadless policies, the relevant forest plans and appeals regulations.

Repeal the Appeals Reform Act

The Forest Service is subject to procedural requirements that are not required of any other Federal agency. To address this issue, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior will propose legislation to repeal Section 322 of the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1993 (commonly known as the “Appeals Reform Act”), that imposed these requirements that I believe limit our ability to work collaboratively with the public.

Standards of Judicial Review

To ensure that courts consider the public interest in avoiding irreparable harm to ecosystems and that the public interest in avoiding the short-term effects of such action is outweighed by the public interest in avoiding long-term harm to such ecosystems, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior will propose legislation to establish revised rules for courts in decisions that relate to activities necessary to restore fire-adapted forest and rangeland ecosystems.

The President's Budget also includes legislative proposals to:

- Expand or clarify existing partnership authorities,
- Permanently authorize the Recreation Fee Demonstration program,
- Allow for the transfer of Forest Legacy titles to willing State governments,
- Promote watershed restoration and enhancement agreements,
- Authorize a Facilities Acquisition and Enhancement Fund,
- Restore eligibility for State and Private Forestry Programs of the three Pacific island entities in "Compacts of Free Association," and
- Eliminate requirements of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 that duplicate the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993.

CONCLUSION

We are fulfilling key promises in re-establishing sound management throughout the Forest Service. I want the Forest Service to be an organization people trust and once again point to as an example of good government. Earning this trust means becoming good stewards of not only public land and natural resources, but of public dollars, of public trust. We know the work is not complete—there are still many opportunities like large fire cost management, integrating information systems, and making organizational changes in administrative support operations—but we're making good progress.

Traditional functional and program boundaries do not serve us well—they get in the way of our ability to keep our word. I am committed to putting more effort into integrating our programs and becoming better partners with people interested in leveraging our work. The President's Healthy Forest Initiative exemplifies an integrated approach to problems that affect not just national forests or national grasslands, but America's forests and America's rangelands. It is an opportunity for our private land neighbors, for research, for partner agencies, for everyone concerned about America's forests and grasslands.

Let me reiterate the deep honor I feel in being Chief of the Forest Service in this challenging time and the equally deep sense of obligation I feel to keep our promises to the American people. I enlist your continued support and look forward to working with you toward that end.

I will be happy to answer any questions.

Senator BURNS. Thank you very much, Chief. I have a couple of questions, and then I want to move to my colleagues, because everyone is on a tight schedule. I have just a couple of questions.

RESEARCH

In your R&D, I noticed in your monies to do research—the continual research of what we can do—how do we better manage our forests? I was going to ask you: Do you ever commission or grant out to land grant colleges for work to be done with regard to soil or water management, or watershed, or any of those things? Do any of the colleges across the country—I mean—New Mexico State University, I know, has a forestry school that is very good. Do you ever outsource any of that research to these colleges and land grant schools?

Mr. BOSWORTH. We do a lot of work in terms of research with colleges and universities. Yes, we do outsource research to colleges and universities. It depends upon the circumstances. In some cases, they are doing it in combination with our research organization. In other cases, it is just strictly outsourced to a college or university.

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING

Senator BURNS. You might bring this up. I know some folks believe that stewardship contracting is somewhat controversial. I think you emphasized in your statement that stewardship contracting is going to be sort of the centerpiece of getting some things done on our forests that we need to be done. What are the other

main objectives that could be accomplished through those stewardship contracts? How many contracts do you plan to let this year?

Mr. BOSWORTH. Well, the first part, the other kinds of objectives: The whole notion behind stewardship contracting is, first, to collaborate with the public up front, to figure out what condition you want the land to be left in. You work together to figure out what that may be. Then, under one request for proposal, you end up with a contract that will accomplish all the things that you want to accomplish on that piece of land. In other words, you are bundling all the activities together.

So it may be things like reducing fuels. You may be able to do some work like habitat improvement for a threatened or endangered species, or for other species, some restoration work for a watershed, rehabilitation or restoration work. I think there are great opportunities to do some of the noxious weed kind of work that needs to be done as part of that.

So you do all those jobs together. Then there is some value, there may be some value from some of the materials, some of the trees that are there. The value that is there would help offset the cost of doing that work. The contractor then would be able to utilize that material. So it makes a lot of sense because you work together and reduce the amount of dollars.

Senator DOMENICI. Would the Senator yield?

Senator BURNS. Sure.

Senator DOMENICI. Have you not done that, experimented four or five times in pilot projects?

Mr. BOSWORTH. We have—let us see—we had 28 projects each year authorized for the last 4 years. It is a total—I do not have a calculator. I cannot multiply that out in my mind right now. Anyway, that is how many we are authorized to do.

We have not completed a lot of those but we gained a lot of experience in working with the public in setting those up. We have done multi-party monitoring where we had people from the public to help monitor those experiments or those pilot projects. They were working very well.

Again, we did not have final results in a lot of cases. We have the final results in some and a certain amount of progress in lots of cases. To me, the thing that was important—to monitor and see how it was working—is public acceptance: Whether or not we were actually getting people to look for common ground and find common ground. That was the important part.

In terms of the number of projects or number of contracts that we have this year, it is difficult for me to answer that specifically. You know, we have delegated the authority, or will delegate the authority, to the regional foresters to use that tool wherever they can use it. There will be some sideboards. There are going to be more projects. We need to train people. There is some work that we are going to have to do now. We are expanding the use of that. I am anxious to get moving. I am anxious to have more opportunity to show people how it will work. I am certain it is going to be successful.

Senator BURNS. Well, thank you very much. I am going to move on. I was going to ask you about your—I see you brought all your

boxes of appeals to make some points. I will let somebody else handle that end of it.

Senator Feinstein.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate what you are trying to do to correct the long-standing, I think, failed policy of fire suppression. I want you to at least know that this Senator wants to work with you in that regard. I am very concerned about the Class 3 areas in the Sierra Nevada, which are about a third of the Class 3 areas in those strategic areas of Class 3.

SAN BERNADINO NATIONAL FOREST

The San Bernadino National Forest supervisor, Gene Zimmerman, told my staff that he believes solving the bark beetle problem will require at least \$300 million—at least—just for that forest, including \$5 to \$6 million which is needed immediately simply to ensure that: Evacuation routes are maintained; critical fire breaks are established; and the necessary manpower and equipment are on hand.

The Omnibus Appropriations bill provided about \$3.3 million for this problem but it is not enough. How do you intend to address this issue financially?

Mr. BOSWORTH. The total amount that Forest Supervisor Zimmerman is talking about—I have not scrubbed those numbers myself or had my staff take a hard look at those numbers—but there is no question that the problem there is going to be extensive to deal with.

The regional forester, Jack Blackwell, has already committed to shifting some dollars within the region to get down to, shift them down to the San Bernadino NF because that is an urgent problem. There is a will to deal with it. The public down there is interested in dealing with it. So he is going to be shifting some of those dollars.

They have already implemented some projects—I can get you some exact acreages, if you would like, and some more specific kinds of plans for what we can do—but we are not going to be able to put \$300 million into that in the short term. That is just too much money.

We also need to be very strategic in where we locate the kinds of treatments that we are going to do so that we can get the most out of every treatment to protect the communities, to protect the homes, and to protect the forest as well.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. I recognize that \$300 million is probably out of the can. As has been said by others here, it is a really serious problem. Anything you can do would be appreciated.

LAKE TAHOE

I wanted to ask you about the Lake Tahoe situation. As you know, both California and Nevada are putting up their share of money. They have had enormous success at raising money in the private sector for that part of it. I am disappointed that so little is in the budget for the Lake this year. I have another question, too.

There was \$21 million transferred from the 2003 budget for Lake Tahoe to meet emergency wildfire suppression needs in that area. The regional forester, the one and only Jack Blackwell, has committed to use reimbursement monies in the Omnibus bill to restore those funds to Lake Tahoe. Chief, will you commit as well to use reimbursement monies in the Omnibus bill to reinstate the funds?

Mr. BOSWORTH. Actually, the dollars that were—the way that the payback—or the dollars to restore—the \$636 million that I talked about earlier—some of that would have been automatically restored, about a third of it would not, of National Forest System dollars. About a third of it would not have been restored for Lake Tahoe. Regional Forester Blackwell has agreed to move the dollars to make sure that Lake Tahoe and, I believe, the Quincy Library Group as well—100 percent of those dollars will be restored. He is doing that within his own region. I appreciate the fact that he is taking that on and doing that within the flexibility that he has. Those dollars will be there. They will all be back in Lake Tahoe.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

LAKE ARROWHEAD

Can you quickly tell us what you are going to do in the Lake Arrowhead area—now, this is for residence protection—in those areas that are in the greatest danger of catastrophic fire due to the tree mortality surrounding their property?

Mr. BOSWORTH. Well, I am going to need some time to be really specific. I can tell you that our folks are working very closely right now with the county, with local law enforcement, as well as fire departments. Together we can take what we have to offer in the Forest Service, along with what the State, counties, and local jurisdictions have to offer, to work together to be able to provide that safety net that people need, but I cannot be specific about—

Senator FEINSTEIN. Maybe somebody could brief me on what you are doing in those areas, the bark beetle infestation areas—

Mr. BOSWORTH. We would be happy to do that.

Senator FEINSTEIN [continuing]. With some specificity. I would appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BURNS. Thank you. Senator Campbell.

Senator CAMPBELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chief, I recognize, as I am sure you do—we all do—we have got a huge deficit this year. Demands are up. States all have deficits. I have to tell you, I think when I look at your budget we are being penny-wise and dollar-foolish.

WESTERN FOREST FIRES

Those fires are so intense out there. I do not know if you have visited some this last year—like the one in Arizona in the national forest down there, and on the Indian reservation, or the Hayman fire in Colorado, or the Missionary Ridge fire—but they are not like fires years ago. These things are—I mean—they are hotter, move faster, are more unpredictable—they are worse.

I visited the Missionary Ridge fire near Durango while the firefighters were there. I talked to a couple of firefighters. They told me that the flames were moving at about 50 miles an hour some-

times. They actually saw birds being burned out of the sky. They could not even out-fly the flames. That is a hot fire.

I think that, you know, we are going to pay the bill no matter what. Durango is a good example. After that particular fire, there was a lot of sediment washing down from the burn area. They came back and asked me to get them one-half million dollars in the appropriations process to upgrade their water filtration system plant to be able to handle that increased sediment, which I did. They got the money. I would have rather put that money into your budget, very frankly.

It seems to me that when we do not plan ahead, do not have adequate precautions, we are going to pay the bill. We are going to pay the bill anyway at a later date. This all comes out of the same taxpayer's pocket one way or the other. I just think that if we had more money through the administration's request, it would not cost us on the other end. It is going to cost, as I understand it, about \$3 million to stabilize some of the areas around Denver where sediment is already washing down—and will even more after this last huge snow begins to melt—and washes into the filtration system. I just wanted to pass that on and maybe ask you a couple of questions.

RECREATION FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

By the way, all the calls we are getting in our offices out West are absolutely against that fee demo, making that Fee Demonstration Program permanent. I think most people think, as I do out there, that if you are using the land—like you are taking firewood or cutting Christmas trees or something of that nature—when you take something from it—or filming for profit or something—then it is fair to ask them to pay some kind of a fee. But most of the people I talk to out there are absolutely opposed to paying just to go out and look at what they think they own as an American citizen in a forest. I thought I would pass that on to you.

WESTERN WATER RIGHTS

Let me ask you just two questions. One deals with water. Out West, we are very, very protective of our water, as you might know. It goes back to years and years ago. Mark Twain once said that whiskey was for drinking, water was for fighting. They still think that way out there, as you know. We have this constant struggle between those people who believe there is an implied Federal reserved water right and those people who think that all water within a State ought to be adjudicated through the State water courts.

I would like to know your view on that, because in some cases—and I know it depends a lot on which administration is in power, too—but in some cases the Forest Service has tried to impose bypass flows in our national forest and circumvent working with State instream flow programs. I am sure you are aware of that. I would like you to give me your view on where you think that is going, particularly as we possibly face another drought in the West.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Well, the first thing is that States adjudicate water rights. My belief is that people who have water rights, that is their water. The State is the organization that determines who has those rights.

I also think that, in the end, the way to work with this is in a collaborative way to find common ground. The land is not worth much if you do not have water on it whether it is private land or whether it is public land. So it is important, in my view, that: We work together with those folks that hold the water rights; do what we can to try to make sure that we are still able to keep the functioning of the streams intact and also meet their needs; but do it in a working-together way rather than in a going-to-court or a regulatory way.

I may be a little bit naive, but I believe that in most cases if you really sit down and try to work toward each other's interests, you can find solutions to those problems.

Senator CAMPBELL. Well, I would like to think so, too. But, as I said, sometimes it depends on the administration. It seems to me the past administration was hell-bent on usurping State water rights in all of our rivers that come through our Western States. We had those constant fights. I wanted you to be aware of that.

FIRE IMPACTS ON WATERSHEDS

Let me just ask maybe one more, and that is: When I think in terms of how watersheds are affected by these murderous fires we have out now, it would seem to me the Forest Service would get ahead of the curve and try to work with municipalities in offering some suggestions or recommendations or something before the fires start on what precautions they ought to be taking. Do you have anything like that in place in the Forest Service? I see Hank is nodding his head so you must have something.

FIREWISE

Mr. BOSWORTH. We have a program called FIREWISE where we work with, usually through the State Foresters, the local community in making sure that people have the information to know what things they can do on their own property and around their own homes.

WATER FILTRATION PLANTS

Senator CAMPBELL. Yes, I knew of those because I have sat in some of those meetings. I meant particularly dealing with water filtration plants and precautions that can be taken by towns to protect their water after a fire.

Mr. BOSWORTH. I guess I am not aware specifically in terms of water filtration. We would certainly have some expertise that could work with that. We also have some programs, like our Forest Stewardship program under State and Private Forestry, that helps in terms of how you manage on private land, how the vegetation is managed to help private landowners do things that will keep the land in better condition in the event that you have a fire. You would not need to deal with the problem in terms of filtration through plants. I would be very happy to explore some of our State and Private Forestry programs to see whether there are some things that can get at that more directly.

Senator CAMPBELL. Well, I might compliment you on one thing. I know in our State—and I think it is probably pretty much like

this in other Western States, too—that Federal and State Foresters really work well together. I have done a number of town meetings—the things that we all do—and invited them to come answer some questions about it. They really have a very close working relationship and good communication between States and the Federal level.

They are all strapped with the same problem—that is, not having enough resources—but they do have tremendous lines of communication.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BURNS. Senator Bennett.

Senator BENNETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

DROUGHT

Again, most of the questions that I am concerned about have been asked. You are aware of the fact that we are in the fifth year of a drought. It seems hard to realize here in Washington—where we have just dug out from under huge amounts of snow and now we have rain coming down—but in Utah the conditions are very bad. I would hope you would do everything you can. I know you are doing everything you can.

I simply want to underscore that. We are reaching a point where we need, not just good stewardship, but we need heroic kinds of statements to deal with the challenges of drought. Aside from doing a rain dance and making it rain—we will assign that to Senator Campbell—I am not quite sure what you can do.

Senator BURNS. He said it is a matter of timing.

Senator BENNETT. I see, okay.

I want to compliment you on the people you have on the ground in Utah. We have a good relationship in our office with Forest Service personnel in Utah. We very much appreciate their cooperation. Other than that, as I say, all the issues relating to the bark beetles and litigation, et cetera, probably have already been covered.

Senator CAMPBELL. Would the chairman yield?

Senator BURNS. I would.

GROUNDING AIR TANKER FLEET

Senator CAMPBELL. I had asked you earlier if you would comment on the tanker fleet, too, that many of us are worried about so much, if you could do that.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Yes. As you know, we had two accidents last year where the fatal crashes were air tankers: one was a C-130A and the other was a PB4Y. Subsequently, the Director of the Bureau of Land Management, Kathleen Clarke, and I commissioned a blue ribbon panel. It was a very high-level group of people from outside the Forest Service to evaluate our aerial firefighting program. They came back with some recommendations. We are looking through those and implementing some of those recommendations.

But one of the things we have done is, we have grounded the C-130As and the PB4Ys. We are taking the rest of the large aircraft and, working with FAA, have developed an inspection and maintenance program. We are in the process of inspecting those before we are going to put them back in service. Once the inspections are

completed, and we find out what kind of maintenance has to be done, then we will be able to move forward.

It is my expectation that we will have retardant aircraft available this year. It may not be at the full level that we had last year. We are supplementing the numbers with what we call SEEDS—it is a single-engine aircraft as opposed to the larger ones. Then we also have—we are looking at more heavy-lift helicopters.

Senator CAMPBELL. Those will be leases, I guess. You do not own any of those.

Mr. BOSWORTH. That is right. The other part of it is, we need to make sure that we are putting those retardant aircraft in the right places. What I mean by that is, I think that the best place for using those is in the initial attack and extended attack. When you get these huge fires—like the Hayman fire, the Rodeo-Chedeski fire, and the Missionary Ridge fire—in a lot of cases, heavy-lift helicopters are much more effective in terms of trying to protect private homes. You have seen how big those fires are. You know, dropping retardant in a lot of cases is just dropping dollar bills out of the aircraft and not doing much more than that.

We will be prepared this year—maybe not at the full level, as we were, but we will be functioning very well.

Senator CAMPBELL. Thank you.

Senator BURNS. Senator Domenici.

Senator DOMENICI. Thank you very much.

First let me compliment you on your enthusiasm. I think it could be a good year for you and for the Forest Service. I was going to ask about your airplanes. You have answered that to my satisfaction.

WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

I noted from my staff that a couple of weeks ago, in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, you testified there that you expected to be able to put out 98 percent of the fires in 2004. I am wondering how you are going to do that. It is our understanding you are going to have about half the firefighters you had in 2002.

Mr. BOSWORTH. What I would like to do first is put a chart up here for you to take a look at. I believe you have a copy of it in front of you there. It is the chart that shows—if you will notice there on the left, the blue circle: That is the total number of fires that we had between 1996 and 2001. That is that circle. The little pink pie shape in there is 1.8 percent of those fires. That 1.8 percent are those fires that exceed 300 acres.

So then if you go to the right and you look at the top circle, that is our suppression costs. What that shows is that 86 percent of those suppression costs came from that little pink wedge on the left-hand side. In other words, the 1.8 percent of the fires caused 86 percent of the costs and 95 percent of the acres burned. The idea, then, is to keep that little pink wedge as small as you can keep it. If you could keep all fires less than 300 acres, then, of course, we could significantly reduce the dollars.

Now, we are never going to be able to do that, not with drought and not with the situation we have with fuels. Our best hope to ever do that is by treating fuels. In the long term, there is hope that we could even significantly reduce the cost even more.

So, then, our challenge is to look at that balance between suppression costs and preparedness costs to make sure that we have enough firefighters to do the initial attack, to keep those fires small, but still make sure that we have enough money to fight those large fires that we are going to have a certain amount of.

There are differences of opinion about how much that ought to be. For me, the important thing is to have some flexibility to move funds back and forth between suppression and preparedness because, again, it depends so much on what the fire season looks like when you actually get closer to it. The fiscal year 2003 authority provided us that opportunity for 2003. We will see how well that works this year. My expectation is that that will help us get the right level of preparedness and then still be able to do the job that we need in suppression.

Senator DOMENICI. Well, you are saying that you want to try to have fewer big fires.

Mr. BOSWORTH. That is right. We want fewer big fires because that is where the cost and that is where the acres are.

Senator DOMENICI. Well, if you can do that, wonderful. We will give you some kind of medal if you can do that.

PROCESS PREDICAMENT

Let me talk just a couple of minutes about the report on process predicament. I thank you for reminding me of it. I will review it. I am at fault for not having reviewed it if there are things in there that we ought to be doing. You have stated that you are going to be working to get at some of the predicaments in the process that that study revealed. We ought to be doing some of them if they are legislative. I hope we will look at them collectively and see what we can do.

If there are any legislative changes in that that stand out to you, I would hope you would call it to our attention. We, too, have a responsibility to help you as you try to do that.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Thank you. I would just like to respond very quickly if I could. The process predicament write-up does not give answers. It just kind of defines a problem. We are trying to work together to develop the answers.

I would like to point out one thing that I have here since we are talking about process predicament. The Lolo National Forest had fires along with a lot of others in the year 2000. They attempted then to do some work, to do some restoration and rehabilitation. I would like to point out over here: This is an environmental impact statement. This stack here, which is a pretty good size stack of stuff—in order for them to do work on 752 acres of soil stabilization, 224 miles of road decommissioning—closing roads—2,172 acres of timber salvage, 2,377 acres of commercial thinning, and 12,900 acres of reforestation—in order to do that work, it took this environmental impact statement.

When we got the appeals, if you take this—we have the appeal record. That box—12 of those boxes is what it took to transfer the appeal record to the regional office from the forest—12 of those boxes to do the work on one forest after just one of the many, many fires that we had—to do some of the work of restoration and reha-

bilitation. That is why I am so focused on trying to deal with this process predicament. That is just a huge problem for us.

Senator DOMENICI. Well, you know, we can just continue on and complain, or we can try to do something like you are doing and find some of the actual problems.

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING

I have a personal commitment to myself to try to establish a presentable case for the use of the stewardship contracts. I have a certain entity that I would like to convince in my State that they are a good thing. To that end, I have the language of the law. I wonder if you could have one of your staff just take a couple of projects that have worked, even if they are small—they do not have to be in my State, obviously—and just narrate how they start, who gets involved, how it proceeds beyond that, and how it ends up—being able to accomplish something collectively that is contemplated by this new statute. Could you do a couple of those for me, please?

Mr. BOSWORTH. I would be very happy to do that. I could also make some people available to go through the whole process of what they used. We have some people in my office now who have actually done those, as forest supervisors, and who have now transferred into my office. They would be happy to sit down. They have done some projects that are very successful. They had a huge amount of public support for them. We would be happy to go through some of those examples.

Senator DOMENICI. If you could get me one in writing. If I may—in New Mexico—want to ask you to send a couple of your people with me to show some constituents how it is done. If I could start with a written explanation, it would be extremely helpful to me.

Mr. BOSWORTH. I will do that.

COUNTY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Senator DOMENICI. I have about 8 or 10 questions I am going to submit. One of which has to do with asking you whether you will continue to handle the so-called county partnership restoration program. Will you continue to work with the counties? There are a number of those going. Some of them are working. We do not want you to let up on that kind of relationship. Could you just take a minute or so and talk about that?

Mr. BOSWORTH. The way that we are going to get these jobs done is through those kinds of partnerships. There are a number of projects that I know of that folks are working on, where county partnerships are working together, I think, in New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado.

Senator DOMENICI. Right. Lincoln is one, Apache—

Mr. BOSWORTH. Apache-Sitgraves is one, and then the San Juan, I believe, is one.

Senator DOMENICI. Right.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Those folks are working together in that partnership to move forward.

Now, we have not taken dollars off the top in my office and sent funds to those places specifically. We are looking at what kind of things we might be able to do in addition to help to make it easier for them to do that.

Senator DOMENICI. The only thing we expect you to do is to continue to push those and give your blessings to them so that the people know they are for real and that you support them.

Mr. BOSWORTH. I am more than willing to put emphasis, to talk it up, and to encourage the regions and the forests to take the dollars that we are giving them, and to work them into those partnership areas.

The only thing I am reluctant to do—I am trying not to do very much of—is take dollars off the top here. I want to get as much money out as I can without me taking it off the top.

Senator DOMENICI. Sure.

Mr. BOSWORTH. So we have reduced that significantly, but boy—I am willing to do all the rest of that.

Senator DOMENICI. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BURNS. Yes, sir.

WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

Would you put the last chart that you had up there, sir, please? I have a question regarding it. That is a very, very compelling chart that you have up there. I would just like to know—up there in the big blue circle where you do your circle irrigation up there—that is what it looks like, does it not?

Mr. BOSWORTH. It does.

Senator BURNS. How many of those big fires started—or had their origination—started in your wildland-urban interface areas? Would you have any idea? Have you ever looked at that?

Mr. BOSWORTH. We can get some information on that. I could not tell you just offhand. I am sitting here trying to decide—what I was pausing about was whether or not, in my view, most of those would be in sort of roaded areas versus the backcountry kind of areas. I just do not know. I would have to do some work, particularly—and we can do that. I mean, I think you can get the information. We will see what we can find and at least figure out whether they are in the wildland-urban interface or whether they are in roaded versus unroaded areas.

Senator BURNS. And along with what Senator Domenici had to say, it would be good if we could do some kind of a white paper. He wants some concrete information that he can take to his communities in New Mexico as far as stewardship is concerned and how those are working.

We also should take a look and see what changes we would have to make in the law to facilitate both what we are trying to do on the forest, and also take a look and see where the objections are—how we address those objections or those questions by people who would file these appeals—because, no doubt, some of those appeals have a legitimate basis. How do we address those in certain circumstances in order to deal with an isolated case? That would help us up here.

Mr. BOSWORTH. That is part of—that is what the Healthy Forests Initiative wants to do in large part as well.

Senator BURNS. That is right.

Mr. BOSWORTH. So that is why that proposal is out there.

Senator BURNS. Okay. Well, we sure appreciate your work on that.

Senator Stevens, welcome to the committee this morning, the chairman of the full committee. We look forward to your—if you have a statement you may put it in the record.

TONGASS TIMBER REFORM ACT

Senator STEVENS. No, I do not have a statement, Mr. Chairman. We have four subcommittee meetings this morning. I am trying to go to each one. I am sorry to be late here, Mr. Bosworth. I have great interest in the Forest Service, as you know. We recently had to put a provision in the law to assure that the Tongass Timber Reform Act concept was finally approved in the Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP). I hope that you will have no difficulty with that.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Not at all.

Senator STEVENS. Are you all going to be able to observe that provision of the law?

Mr. BOSWORTH. We are going to make every effort to do that, yes, I believe so.

Senator STEVENS. I have lived now through too many agreements with people over what happens in Alaska. One of them was in the Tongass Timber Reform Act. It was the third in a series of agreements we had to reach in order to continue Forest Service operations in Alaska, and harvesting timber. It has now been held up, as you know, for about 12 years or more. I hope that we will go ahead.

Mr. Chairman, I am thinking about offering a provision that says anyone who challenges those plans must pay the loss of income to the people who have suffered by the delay—if they suffered—if they prevent going ahead now with the contracts that have been in place for so long, as far as harvesting Alaska timber.

These people, who are just professional protesters in the legal profession, do nothing but file lawsuits in order to raise more money. The contributions go to a foundation they form themselves. They pay themselves and they have no downside when they lose. I think we have got to find some way to prevent people from holding up the harvesting of timber under a plan such as—I do not know if you know it—I opposed TLMP when it first came out. By the time it has gone through 12 years, I have no alternative but to support it.

I do hope we can find some way to make certain it goes—I notice from your resume you never served in Alaska, Mr. Bosworth.

Mr. BOSWORTH. I have never served in Alaska. I have been in a number of regions. I have been to Alaska a number of times. I spent a week there last year trying to gain a better understanding of the issues. There are some real challenges there. There are also some very good—we have some very good employees there. They are working hard.

Senator STEVENS. Well, we would invite you to come up, because, you know, some things that may work elsewhere, such as backfires and other things, can really cause holocausts in our State. I think it takes someone with firm professional experience to oversee operations on a day-to-day basis up there.

BEETLE KILL ON THE KENAI PENINSULA

I went with Senator Domenici when they had those terrible fires out in his area. I could hardly believe them. We have now—I am told we have over 3 million acres of beetle kill on Federal lands that are in the vicinity of our major city of Anchorage, and coming up—that is the Kenai Peninsula, up towards the Matanuska Valley in Alaska. The beetle kill is substantial.

I hope that under the President's new program that we can take some steps to try to thin out some of those dead trees so they do not provide the fuel for fires such as we have had before in that area. Beetle kill—I have flown over the forests when they are burning. The sinuosity of the fire follows the dead trees in our area. They just end up by consuming an enormous acreage of forest because the trees that are dead, because of the infestation, have not been removed.

I hope you will look at a plan to try and remove some of those dead trees.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Actually, when I was up visiting there last summer, I did get up in the Kenai. I did look at some of the area where the spruce is dead. It is a huge problem. I certainly agree with you. A lot of that is private land. Some of that is national forest. We are working through our State and Private Forestry program with private landowners. We are then trying to do as much as we can on the national forest as well.

One of the successful programs I think also is the FIREWISE program there on the Kenai. We are working with those folks, the actual homeowners, helping them find ways that they can make their homes safer from fire. I appreciate your support and your attention on that.

ALASKA JURISDICTIONAL PROBLEMS

Senator STEVENS. You are right, it is a checkerboard of Federal ownership. Part of it is a wildlife refuge, for instance, and the forest surrounds that. The wildlife refuge was actually carved out of national forest lands in the past. There are enormous problems jurisdictionally between the two Federal agencies in determining how to deal with fires in the peninsula. In the final analysis, you know, we have less than 2 percent of our land in private ownership. It is all surrounded by Federal or State land. If Federal and State people do not fight their fires, the people who suffer the most are the people who have the inholdings, so to speak, that are involved in those areas of heavy forestation.

Southeastern Alaska, I am sure you saw, because of its rainfall, does not have as much difficulty. But it has been drier this year, too. We are going to have enormous fires if we do not get prepared for them.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Again, my belief is that the solution is both fuels treatment and working together between State, Federal, local jurisdictions, and working with homeowners. We can do that by working together to make a big difference. That is an important part of the National Fire Plan.

ALASKA FOREST TRIP BY AIR

Senator STEVENS. Mr. Chairman, once in the past I got the cooperation of the Department of Defense. We took one of the enormous passenger planes from the military. We went through the forested area of our State. We had helicopters and National Guard standing by to take people, Senators and staff, out to look at these areas of really great risk to everybody. That is 15 years ago now. I am not sure there are many people around here that made that trip.

I would like to suggest to you that we try to organize a trip to go up there. It only takes a weekend, really. I think we should go up. We should ask Mr. Bosworth and some of his staff to go along. You just have to view it in totality. These are the two largest forests in the United States. Beyond that are millions of acres of forestland that is owned by the Federal Government. There is just not proper stewardship of handling the problem of infestation of the timber in particular.

I do not want to belabor it. I urge you to think about it. I think that is a fantastic legacy for the future. I think the day will come when we will be compelled to resume harvesting that timber. We could have harvested that timber on a 103-, 104-year cutting cycle, using only 10 percent of the forest, and supplied better than 450 million board feet forever. That has been challenged and cut back. As you know, we are down now last year to 34 million board feet.

The year that I came to the Senate, the harvest was 1.5 billion board feet. We still only cut—in the history of man, we have cut 3 percent of the forest. It does not make any sense what happened. I think more people in the Senate, and more of your people, need to be exposed to the whole of the totality of forest areas in Alaska in order to make sure we have a sound policy.

I appreciate what you are doing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BURNS. Mr. Chairman, thank you for coming by. I noted, Senator, that he said he had spent 1 week up there last year in your forest. I spent 1 night up there that turned into 1 week.

You know how that is. He raises a very legitimate question, though, I will tell you that.

NATIONAL FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING

There are a couple of things I want to ask you about, and then—forest plans, money to—we understand that they are incredibly costly, to do forest plans. Are you on schedule to do, redo forest plans—we have some coming up, I understand—especially when it has taken us 5 to 6 years to prepare one of those things. How are we on that schedule of redoing some of the forest plans?

Mr. BOSWORTH. We are behind in terms of—you know—we are supposed to have our plans done—they are supposed to be revised every 10 to 15 years, 15 being the outside. We have a number of forest plans that are 15 years and beyond.

The important thing, I think, is our attempt to update the planning rule and, frankly, to modernize the planning rule. The way it has been—the last time it was done was back in the early 1980s and then, of course, in 2000. The problem with the 2000 planning rule is that it would cost us an estimated \$12 million per forest

plan to do a revision. It would take several years—I mean, probably more than what it has taken under the old rule. It is my strong desire to get the timeframe down to just a couple of years.

I also have a belief that the only people that can be involved in forest planning, when it takes you 8 or 9 years, are those who are being paid to be involved. But the person who just cares—the person who likes to go hunting or fishing, or the person who wants to go camping—they cannot stay with it for 8 years and work with us for 8 years along with everybody else. So if we really want to work with the public in a collaborative way on how their forests are going to be managed, we have to get that timeframe down to just 2 years or 3 at the max.

That is what our proposed planning rule would do, I am hoping and expecting. If it does, then I think we can make a huge difference, reduce costs, and get caught up.

Senator BURNS. The same thing on grazing permits?

RANGE MANAGEMENT

Mr. BOSWORTH. In the 2004 President's budget we are increasing the amount for Range that would—I will have Hank give you the dollars—that would increase the number of allotments that we could get under NEPA by about 30 percent, I believe. Can you give him the figures specifically, Hank?

Mr. KASHDAN. Yes.

Senator BURNS. Turn your microphone around there, Henry.

Mr. KASHDAN. Mr. Chairman, the grazing increase of \$7.3 million, compared to the President's budget, would enable us to do 33 percent more allotments and get them under decision notices than we had been able to do in 2002. You would still continue to have the backlog issues.

Senator BURNS. You still would, okay. That goes hand in hand, I think, with the forest plans and the grazing permits. All this is linked together, the invasive weeds, these forest plans, grazing permits.

NOXIOUS WEEDS MANAGEMENT

Now, if you think just getting rid of weeds, that helps, especially in sheep. Now, cattle not so much. The cows will not eat that stuff. Sheep will. Doing these grazing permits is very, very important not only from a weed standpoint, but also in our fire management.

Where we had grazing, we do not have those really hot fires. That excess grass and undergrowth is—and sheep browse—that is all taken away. It is part of fuels reduction. It does not hurt the land. We can do that—not using tax dollars—to remove some of those undesirable things that we think that are on our forests—such as weed management—and that costs—and also fuels reduction.

There are some natural harvesters out here that will help us manage our forests. I do not know why we are not using those tools. Any other person who is in charge of managing—just like I said: The old equation of sun, water, and soil—and using those resources—and knowing how to use those resources.

Now, does it work on every forest? No, it does not. That is why we cannot write a law that one size fits everything. It just does not.

There are circumstances. There are growing seasons. There are variables in moisture, a lot of variables, that we have to take into account. It takes a really experienced person to understand what forest I am managing and what practices work, and what practices do not work. That is why it just has to happen that way.

You can take every ranch in the State of Montana—and Dale, you know this as well as anybody else—and no two ranches are alike. They may lie right next to one another. How you manage it; how you take care of it; how you make it produce—but I will tell you, I bet the guy that has lived there for a generation-and-a-half or two generations—they know how to manage it. The next guy comes by and he buys it—he changes everything—he learns pretty quick—some things work and some things do not work.

By the way, I called the Park Service up. I had a way to get that guy on that John Deere tractor out of that puddle but they did not take my advice down there.

Just comment on that, then. I think those issues really link together. I would help us to complete as much of this as we can. That really enables us to deal with some of the problems we have, this management problem.

LEAFY SPURGE

Mr. BOSWORTH. I would like to say something, first, about leafy spurge up there. I did not respond to it when Senator Dorgan was here. I know what leafy spurge is. It is a huge problem. Springtime, as you know—it will have yellow flowers on it. Most leafy spurge that has been there for a while will have a root system that is 20 and 30 feet deep.

Senator BURNS. That is right.

Mr. BOSWORTH. You cannot pull it out when it is 20 or 30 feet deep. You can pull it and break it but it just pops right back up again. You can do some things with grazing. Both goats and sheep will eat it. We have even tried in some places to contract with goats to pay, in other words, to graze, to try to eradicate leafy spurge.

We are also making some progress on leafy spurge with wasps, the bugs that are natural enemies to it.

Senator BURNS. Doing work at Sidney, Montana.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Yes, that is correct, and at a couple of other places along the Smith River we are working with it, too.

INVASIVE SPECIES

I will tell you, I am so convinced that invasive species—which would be insects, diseases, and weeds—are probably one of the biggest threats to our national forests and grasslands that there is, and not just to the national forests but the Nation's forests and grasslands. I mean, it is a huge problem. Our country spends a lot of money every year trying to deal with invasive species—either insects, diseases, or weeds—and I will be very happy to work with you to try to improve our program and to do it better. But it has to be integrated, like you say.

Senator BURNS. Right.

Mr. BOSWORTH. When we have fires, when we have wildfires, we end up with a spread of—knapweed, for example, in the Bitterroot Valley. After those fires, we just had bumper crops of—

Senator BURNS. Knap.

Mr. BOSWORTH [continuing]. Of knapweed, yes. That is one of the problems that you have in many places in the West now. When we have fire, whether it is a prescribed burn or whether it is a natural fire, we have got to be doing something about weeds right after the fire because there are so many of them.

But again, to me it is essential that this be integrated between the fire, between the insects, between the diseases, between the weeds, and that our management work on all parts of those together. It is critical.

Senator BURNS. I do not know whether you have had the opportunity to visit with Packy Burns yet—no relation—no relation. She lives at Big Timber. They run sheep in the Big Timber area. She contracts out to private lands and also permittees. She takes her bands of sheep wherever she is contracted. They pay her to come in and do it.

Mr. BOSWORTH. No, I have not met her.

Senator BURNS. Well, you ought to meet her. She is a very interesting woman and, of course, I knew her old father-in-law many years ago. He had sheep and cattle in the big sheep and timber area. We used to do a lot of business in Sweet Grass County.

We thank you for your testimony today. I just want to say publicly, I remember that when you came to this office I had the feeling that we made the right choice, that the President made the right choice to put you in charge of the Forest Service. You sure have not been a disappointment. I just want to congratulate you on the work that you are doing.

We are not going to agree on everything. No people do. Differences of opinion are what make the country go. Generally, though, when I talk to your people who are on the ground, morale is very good. You are to be complimented on putting some people around the forests. I think that are doing as good a job as they can possibly do under the conditions they have to do them.

So thank you for coming this morning. We are willing to work with you on funding those areas—that white paper on what we can do on stewardship, how we make it work, and how we make it work for everybody in America. Thank you for coming this morning.

Mr. BOSWORTH. Thank you, and thank you for those comments.

ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

Senator BURNS. There will be some additional questions which will be submitted for your response in the record.

[The following questions were not asked at the hearing, but were submitted to the Department for response subsequent to the hearing:]

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY SENATOR PETE DOMENICI

COUNTY PARTNERSHIP RESTORATION

Question. Chief Bosworth, I know that last year you made efforts to ensure the Lincoln, Apache-Sitgreaves, and GMUG National Forest received funding to work

with County Partner Restoration Projects to help reduce hazardous fuels loads in Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado.

I am told that last year, before you had to pull back funding to pay for fiscal year 2002 fire fighting, that about \$1 million was slated to be expended on these three forests for this type of work. How much funding should we anticipate will be slated for these three forests this year?

Answer. The following table displays Hazardous Fuels, Forest Health, and Vegetation/Watershed funds committed to the County Partner Restoration projects for the three forests in fiscal year 2003:

	Lincoln NF	Apache-Seagraves NF	GMUG NF's	Total by BLI
Hazardous Fuels	(¹)	(¹)	\$90,000	\$90,000
Forest Health	(¹)	(¹)	33,000	33,000
Veg/Watershed	\$330,000	\$305,000	(¹)	635,000
Total by Forest	330,000	305,000	123,000	758,000

¹ None.

DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

Question. Chief Bosworth, I note Deferred Maintenance/Infrastructure Improvement is down \$50.9 Million from the fiscal year 2003 request of \$50.9 Million. In fiscal year 2002 we funded this line Item at \$61 Million.

With your current budget, are you able to fully manage and maintain the ecosystem health of the lands that are already entrusted to the Forest Service? Please provide a yes or no answer?

Answer. No. However, the Agency's efforts will be to focus on the critical high priority work. Limited resources and combined with a multitude of resource management issues at the ecosystem level on the 191 million acre National Forest System requires the careful balancing of funding priorities reflected in the fiscal year 2004 Budget. Within the Capital Improvement and Maintenance budget line items, the focus is on addressing the critical deferred maintenance health & safety items deferred maintenance backlog.

Question. Specifically, which programs will not be funded at amounts called for in the Forest Plans, as a result of the fiscal year 2004 budget request?

Answer. Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (or Forest Plans) do not identify specific funding needs for an individual program in a given year. Forest Plans are the result of completing the middle-level of the agency's 3-tiered planning process. They are programmatic documents that tier from the agency's strategic plan and establish a framework for identifying, planning and implementing projects designed to achieve Forest and agency objectives.

Program funding needs for a fiscal year are determined based on a combination of factors, including the results of project level planning within each program. The agency identifies various combinations of programmatic needs in its budget submission that are designed to address different sets of goals, objectives, and budget constraints. Reduced funding in any program will result in less work being accomplished on the ground and potentially lengthen the time it takes Forests to achieve their Plan objectives and the agency to achieve its strategic objectives.

Question. I also note that there are a significant number of insect and disease outbreaks that are not being sanitized or salvaged. Would you provide me an explanation of the relative priority given to treating these outbreaks as compared to completing deferred maintenance?

Answer. The President's Budget provides a balanced program to meet forest health protection and deferred maintenance/infrastructure improvement needs.

VIBRANT FOREST AND RANGE BASED ECONOMY

Question. Give me a list of the legislative changes that you need to ensure you can implement the National Fire Plan, not only in a safe and effective manner but also in a manner that is environmentally acceptable?

Answer. If Healthy Forest legislation is enacted, we don't anticipate a need for other legislative action. We are in the process of establishing and implementing several Healthy Forest related administrative actions that will enable the Forest Service to safely and more effectively implement the National Fire Plan. We will keep you informed of any change in circumstances.

FIRE PREPAREDNESS

Question. Chief, a couple of weeks ago you testified to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee that you expect to be able to put out 98 percent of the fires that start in fiscal year 2004. I am wondering how you will accomplish this with half as many fire fighters as you had in 2002?

Answer. Preparedness funding was at an all-time high in 2001, the first year of the National Fire Plan. This included significant funds for one-time purchases of heavy equipment including engines and dozers to reach a maximal readiness level. While of that equipment will have to be replaced someday, annual investments needs not be maintained at the 2001 level.

In 2002, fire readiness proved to be as good as or better than ever. Ninety-nine percent of wildfires on Forest Service-managed lands were controlled on initial attack. Preparedness funding in the fiscal year 2004 is \$9 million higher than fiscal year 2003 request. Preparedness funding will be targeted in 2003 and 2004 to maintain the agency preparedness at the highest level possible, with resources being positioned in the area of extreme fire danger. In addition, resources will be moved throughout the fire season to areas in need. If 2004 is another severe fire season, the fire program has the flexibility to augment Preparedness funding with "severity" funds from the suppression account to fund the placement of additional resources in the areas most at risk from catastrophic wildfires in order to maintain sufficient readiness and initial attack capability.

Unfortunately, no amount of preparedness can prevent all fires from escaping to levels requiring extended fire suppression. When fires become large, the costs to contain them become large as well. The rise in the 10-year average recognizes the long-term trend in fire frequency and severity. Even so, even that increase falls below the costs of the past three years. We consider it prudent to maintain a funding level based on the 10-year average. Anything less would seem shortsighted given what we know today.

I have directed the Regional Foresters to use funds for the purpose of attaining preparedness levels that are similar to fiscal year 2002. The following table displays a comparison of what we plan to provide in fiscal year 2003 versus 2003.

Resource type	Fiscal year		2003 planned
	2002 actual	2003 base	
Firefighters	10,480	6,008	10,480
Prevention Techs	403	296	332
Engines	995	700	1,072
Forest Helicopters	75	57	87
National Helicopters	7	8	8
Smokejumpers	277	277	277
Type I Crews	65	65	65
Airtankers	41	33	33

Question. I also see that you have grounded 11 heavy slurry bombers and 11 of 19 of your Beech Craft lead planes. Half as many fire fighters, half your lead planes gone, and quarter of your slurry bombers out of commission. Please provide specific steps that you have taken to make up the 50 percent reduction in fire fighters and the grounding of these aircraft?

Answer. We have some concern about the loss of 11 large airtankers but feel we have several alternatives available to us that will mitigate the effect of losing this capability. In our 2003 Fire Operations planning we are instructing Incident Commanders to shift the emphasis of the airtanker fleet to initial attack rather than large fire support. We will shift suppression tactics from those that require close air support to those that do not require such close support (direct fireline construction versus more indirect). This may cause a marginal increase in total burned acres but not enough to be significant. We will add contract helicopters with aerial suppressant capability to help offset the loss of the airtankers. Finally, we will add as many as 11 Single Engine Airtankers (SEATS) to help with local initial attack. In a normal year, these alternatives will allow us to effectively suppress wildland fire without compromising safety, burned acres, and program costs.

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING

Question. Chief, you advocated for stewardship contracting while you were in Region One. Can you tell us how that worked in Region One and how you see using

Stewardship Contracting in New Mexico? Specifically, what type of projects are you thinking about implementing in New Mexico under this program?

Answer. The demonstration pilot authority for stewardship contracting in the Northern Region (Region 1) has shown that some projects are better able to get needed work done in an area than what could be accomplished using a timber sale.

In the Southwestern Region (Region 3), the Cibola National Forest is currently working on an existing stewardship contract on the Mt. Taylor Ranger District, and has also started to work on a new one using the new authorities on the Mountainair Ranger District. The Mt. Taylor Ranger District is also working on a new environmental impact statement that is scheduled for completion in fiscal year 2004 and is currently planned to be implemented through a stewardship contract. In addition, the Lincoln National Forest and the Santa Fe National Forest have stewardship contracts that will be completed by the end of the current calendar year. All the National Forests in New Mexico are looking at stewardship contracting opportunities and are interested in completing projects with this new authority.

INSECTS AND DISEASE

Question. As you know we have a large area of forest that is being devastated by bark beetles in Northern New Mexico. This has been on going for several years and is likely to continue and spread due to the drought.

Can you tell me the specific steps the National Forests in New Mexico are taking to combat these insects and stop the spread of the outbreaks?

Answer. Severe drought conditions and overcrowding have weakened many trees in New Mexico, including those on the National Forests. These weakened trees are now being attacked and killed by native bark beetles. Piñon and ponderosa pines are most severely affected. Large scale control measures to stop the beetle outbreaks are not feasible. However, spraying of 55 high-value trees to protect them from attack was completed in two campgrounds on the Santa Fe National Forest in March 2003. Thinning to enhance tree vigor is planned for those and several additional developed recreation sites on the Santa Fe National Forest. The thinning is scheduled to begin in the fall, when cutting activities are less likely to attract bark beetles. Thinning currently underway on the Santa Fe Watershed includes mastication, or shredding, of woody debris, rendering it unsuitable for bark beetle breeding. A pine bark beetle strategic communication plan is being utilized to provide the public with information about bark beetle activity, management, and impacts. A bark beetle website has been developed to provide information online: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/resources/health/index.shtml>

Information has been provided in the form of presentations to adults and children, in articles, responses to phone and internet questions, and dissemination of literature. An informal interagency bark beetle meeting was held at the FS Southwestern Regional Office on June 24, 2003 to discuss bark beetle impacts and explore opportunities for information-sharing and coordination. In attendance were representatives from the Forest Service, the BLM, the BIA, and the NM State Forestry Division. A follow-up meeting is planned. The Southwestern Region is participating in a Forest Service interregional piñon mortality assessment which includes supplemental aerial surveys of piñon-juniper woodlands over about 2 million acres in NM. Ground crews will also be collecting field data. Surveyed lands will be across all ownerships and will cover about 22 percent of the piñon-juniper woodlands which exist in New Mexico. The Forest Service solicited input from State and federal agencies to delineate priority areas of private and public lands to be surveyed. Traps to monitor the piñon ips spring emergence, number of generations produced per year, and onset of hibernation have been placed in six locations across New Mexico to aid in our understanding of this insect's behavior.

Question. Also specifically, what steps you are taking on each forest to remove this dead timber before it provides the fuel for another catastrophic fire?

Answer. The mortality in northern New Mexico is primarily occurring in pinyon pine in the pinyon-juniper woodlands. This mortality is at the higher elevations, and is quite scattered. Because most of the mortality is pinyon pine, very little salvage is occurring, aside from firewood gathering. Most Forests do treat areas where personal use firewood gathering occurs, but they are not planning on doing any large-scale salvage to combat bark beetle outbreaks. All Forests are continuing to encourage salvage removal where trees are accessible. Some thinning is occurring around Las Alamos using FEMA fuels reduction dollars. The state also has a fuels reduction program on private lands, where most of the pinyon pine mortality has occurred. However, pinyon pine infected by the ips beetle decomposes rapidly, and after one season is no longer useful as fuelwood.

As long as the dead needles remain on the trees, there is an increased risk of fire ignition. However, once the needles fall, the fire hazard for defoliated standing dead trees is less than for standing green trees. Needle fall can take as little as 6 months in pinyon pine or as much as 2 years in ponderosa pine. The only way a fire in a pinyon-juniper stand will advance is with a sustained stiff wind, because many of the high mortality sites have almost no understory vegetation and are quite rocky.

Forests have begun using the new timber salvage categorical exclusion authority so that our removal efforts can be focused in a timely manner to remove the material that is still useful. This authority allows Ranger Districts to treat larger areas and create effective barriers at key points on the Forest.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL

Question. Last year's fires were not helped by the fact that Colorado and much of the West was and still is experiencing the worst drought on record. As you know, catastrophic wildfires can have catastrophic effects on watersheds where communities located below the National Forest boundary get their water. Many communities are concerned about the threat of ash and sediment from wildfires clogging their ditches, reservoirs, and drinking water intakes in the middle of this drought.

I would be interested to learn a little more about how the Forest Service is working with local communities to guard against future water contamination due to fires, as well as what they are doing now to rehabilitate those affected watersheds. I'm sure that the Forest Service really appreciates the effects fire has on existing municipal water supplies and is willing to work with the state.

Answer. Prevention.—The agency's first efforts are directed towards reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire occurrence. The National Fire Plan and the President's Healthy Forests Initiative provide the agency with strategic guidance for implementing this goal. In close cooperation with the Department of Interior, states, local governments, and communities, the Forest Service is working to reduce hazardous fuels accumulation, and to manage wildland/urban interface forests to be more resistant to catastrophic wildfires. In spite of a very challenging fire suppression season, the Forest Service reduced hazardous fuels on 1.3 million acres in fiscal year 2002.

Stabilization.—Before a catastrophic wildfire has been extinguished, the agency quickly mobilizes Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams to assess environmental degradation. Water quality and flood potential are prime considerations. The team establishes objectives for protecting water resources and prescribes needed actions. Treatments may continue up to a year after the fire, and monitoring of affected watersheds continue for up to three years.

In 2002, the Forest Service conducted 130 BAER assessments, authorizing \$70 million of emergency stabilization work. \$47.7 million was obligated in fiscal year 2002. These projects will treat 136,000 acres of severely burned land, of which about 90,000 acres were treated before the winter snows. Typical emergency actions include stabilizing slopes with log structures, straw wattles, and straw mulch, installing larger culverts to handle increased water flows, and seeding burned areas. Communities are protected from flood by installation of flood warning systems and construction of impoundments to reduce peak flows.

The Hayman Fire stabilization work illustrates the types of accomplishments achieved through BAER team efforts. Hayman Fire BAER treatments cost \$24 million of the \$70 million authorized in fiscal year 2002, resulting in the following accomplishments:

ASSESSMENT OF THREAT

Sedimentation of a major water supply reservoir: Post fire erosion into Cheesman Reservoir may exceed 1 million tons in the first year if storms of 1 inch per day occur.

ESTABLISHMENT OF EMERGENCY TREATMENT OBJECTIVE

Reduce impacts to the Denver water supply reservoirs and the water quality-listed streams.

Reduce erosion by establishing ground cover and increasing infiltration by scarifying the soil surface.

Hayman BAER treatments in this emergency phase have been aimed at re-establishing the vegetative cover lost in the fire. Ground cover holds the soil in place, allows absorption of water into the ground, minimizes runoff, reproduces wildlife habitat and generally rejuvenates the area. Often, soils in fire areas where high in-

tensity burn occurs become water repellent, and the hardened surface must be broken up by scarification, or raking, as part of the treatment.

AERIAL OPERATIONS

Application of hydro-mulch (recycled wood fiber, grass seed, water and a binding agent) has been applied via helicopter on 1,569 acres of heavily burned slope. This work was completed in September 2002.

Aerial seeding is complete on over 19,835 acres. The seed mix is an annual cereal rye mixture, which will germinate readily and persist for two to three years to provide ground cover until the native grasses and forbs come back.

Approximately 6,000 acres have been treated as part of an aerial dry mulching project (applying straw to burned slopes via helicopter) during September 2002. Straw is applied over previously seeded areas. The straw helps to minimize erosion during rains, and provides necessary moisture and shade for quicker seed germination.

GROUND OPERATIONS

Seeding and scarification (raking the soil) has been completed on 13,800 acres.

Hydro-mulch is being applied by truck to 1,500 acres along Forest Roads and highways, 300 feet on either side of 25 miles of designated roads. Work was completed in October 2002.

Many private landowners in the burn area have been contacted to assess risks from adjacent National Forest lands. BAER is working with Natural Resource Conservation Service to formulate and implement rehabilitation plans with landowners.

Culverts and stream crossings within the burn area are being cleaned and reinforced to prevent washout along roads. Grading and reconditioning of the roads within the fire area is ongoing.

The Lake George Community Park has been demobilized, and the grounds within and around the camp are being rehabilitated. The roads at the Lake George Community Park have been graded and reconditioned. The area used for the fire camp is being seeded and straw mulch is being applied. The park has been reopened for public use.

Treatment of noxious weeds is complete on 340 acres within and adjacent to the fire area.

An archaeological assessment and clearance of all areas where BAER treatment will create ground disturbance has been achieved. Two sites within the fire area were identified as needing protection using straw-bale check-dams, which have been completed.

Remote Area Weather Stations (RAWS) have been installed in and around the fire area. This will facilitate early detection of rainfall for public evacuation and emergency warnings when needed.

Additional details on accomplishments at the Hayman fire are available at www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/hayres/baer/index.htm.

Rehabilitation.—Efforts to repair damage caused by the fire begins as soon as the fire is out, and focus on lands unlikely to quickly recover from fire damage through natural processes. In fiscal year 2002, the Forest Service implemented 518 projects costing \$35.8 million. These projects treated 435,000 acres of severely burned land through invasive plant control, seeding, planting, and watershed improvements on federal lands. Additional work was accomplished on trail reconstruction, roadwork, riparian enhancement, fencing and boundary line location.

Communities are included in rehabilitation efforts. In June 2002, the Hayman Recovery Assistance Center (HayRAC) was established in Castle Rock, to aid victims of the Hayman Fire. This recovery assistance center provided representatives from state, federal and non-profit agencies who provided information on financial, logistical, human services, and fire rehabilitation techniques to citizens and businesses directly impacted by the Hayman Fire. The center served as a central source of information during and after the fire, providing a mechanism to coordinate inter-agency restoration and recovery efforts with the community, collaborating on short and long-term restoration needs, and coordination and facilitating volunteer programs to support community and forest restoration efforts. In 2002, HayRAC coordinated 55 volunteer projects, with more than 3,000 volunteers, for about 22,000 volunteer hours, and responded to about 1,600 phone calls for fire recovery assistance.

Question. Recognizing the drought conditions that the West, in particular, is facing, I think that it is more important than ever for the Forest Service to commit to work with the states in good faith on water issues. Unfortunately, some in the Forest Service have tried to impose bypass flows in our national forests, and circumvent working through state instream flow programs. You are aware that bypass

flows are estimated to cause a reduction in the dry-year water supplies available from water facilities on National Forest lands by 50 to 80 percent?

Answer. There are numerous permitted water storage and transmission facilities on National Forest lands in the west. Some of these authorizations have clauses that allow for temporary changes to authorization conditions during times of drought or emergency. Prior to last year these drought clauses had generally not been invoked, and many were undefined. In 2002, we worked actively with Denver Water, and others to modify authorization terms and conditions to allow for needed flexibility in operation during the drought. We will continue to work with facility managers and water providers in 2003 to meet changing storage and operation needs that have resulted from the drought.

Question. Isn't the Forest Service's official policy to work with the states, pursuant to state law in administering water? Can I tell city officials in Colorado, as well as farmers and ranchers, that you, and the Forest Service in general, are committed to working through the state instream flow program and eliminating the perception of threats to existing water supplies by imposing bypass flows?

Answer. The Forest Service has, and will continue, to work with states, tribal governments, water users, and any interested parties in resolving water issues on National Forest System lands in accordance with both federal and state laws. The State of Colorado's instream flow program falls short of meeting the needs of the United States in the matter of in-stream flow protection for federal purposes, such as, but not limited to, wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, and habitat for aquatic species listed under the Endangered Species Act. In other western states, the Forest Service does participate in state in-stream flow programs where its water needs can be met with reasonable legal certainty. The Forest Service has been very judicious about requiring instream flow conditions in its land use occupancy permits and easements, and will continue to unilaterally require bypass flows as a last resort when other options to sustain aquatic resource values have failed.

Question. Colorado experienced its worst fire season on record last summer. My compliments go to the brave men and women who risked their lives to fight these fires. We also learned some lessons last summer and maybe you can tell me what adjustments we are making in anticipation of this year's fire season.

Particularly, how do we use our local resources in suppression operations?

Answer. We use predictive services and monitor local conditions to adjust resource locations so that new starts can be suppressed quickly. If we can respond to these new starts and suppress them within 24 hours, we can minimize their cost. Wildland fires that resist suppression efforts typically transition from a small, inexpensive event to something larger and more expensive within the first 24–48 hours of the event start. We emphasize and concentrate on aggressive initial attack to minimize large fire occurrence. It's not a question of what we can do better during the first 72 hours of an event. Our firefighters are very successful in initial attack. During the fiscal year 2002 fire season, they caught more than 99 percent of all unplanned and unwanted wildland fires during initial attack. What we need to do is continue to support the initial attack force by maintaining training curriculums, providing quality equipment, develop the lessons learned program, and maintaining coordination and intelligence systems.

Question. How do we follow up with our communities to make sure we are reducing the risk?

Answer. Local project managers carry out project monitoring. Project plans for treatments on National Forest lands adjacent to communities typically include specific objectives for addressing risk to the community. Appropriate project follow up includes assessment of how well project objectives have been met. Such project monitoring is the responsibility of the District Ranger. Federal financial and technical assistance, provided in conjunction with the efforts of State Foresters and other state, local, or tribal governments, will be increasingly focused upon the optimal reduction of the risk posed by catastrophic wildfires, particularly in the wildland-urban interface. In these efforts, communities, non-government organizations, and private landowners also have a key responsibility. In most cases such projects are developed using project planning standards similar to those used by the Federal agencies. Project plans establish risk reduction objectives. Federal agency grant administration includes spot reviews of projects to establish effectiveness of projects delivered by State Foresters or other grant recipients. Success may be judged by a measured change in the vegetation condition class or by simply a reduction from a high risk ranking to a moderate or low risk based on the rating system applied for the area.

Question. One other thing, with the drought and the forest conditions what can we do better during the first 72 hours of a fire?

Answer. After the 2002 fire season, the Forest Service reviewed lessons learned, after action assessments, and formal program reviews to develop new direction, clarify existing direction, and communicate expectations of line officers and Incident Commanders. These considerations manifested themselves in a Fire and Aviation Operations Action Plan for the 2003 fire season. This plan emphasizes four areas (Preparedness, cost containment, hazardous fuel treatment, and safety) of the Fire and Aviation Management program where I expect improved performance from the line officers, Incident Commanders, and other personnel involved in the conduct of operations in these areas. The plan seeks to improve fiscal integrity and reflects important performance measures.

Specific to your question, initial attack and extended attack are the number one mobilization priority. We will continue to use predictive services, anticipate threats, and pre-position protection resources to those local areas that may need additional resources. Our first priority will be to maintain sufficient local initial attack resources to maximize our ability to staff new fire starts. Our second priority will be large fire support. These actions will continue to allow us to minimize the number of fires that grow large and require a larger response.

Question. I wanted to mention to you the National Forest County Partnership Restoration program. This pilot program is an example of how restoration programs can be led by communities as Congress had requested.

As I understand it from the restoration program that serves the area I live in down in southwestern Colorado, funding for the three partnerships that were created has not reached those who need it.

Could you give me your views on this program and what is being done to fund it?

Answer. The Forest Service supports the collaborative approach in the development of restoration programs. Funding for restoration programs should be developed through the normal budget process.

This program involves a total of three forests, two forests in R-3, the Apache-Seagraves NF in AZ and the Lincoln NF in NM, and one forest in R-2, the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) NF in CO. The program is a multi-year collaborative partnership between the Forest Service and County governments for large-scale landscape restoration utilizing an adaptive management process. It will test streamlined processes in administration, contracting, planning and inter-agency cooperation with an idea toward national application of the model.

In fiscal year 2002 each forest was allocated between \$305,000 and \$330,000 in start up funding. Given the severity of the 2002 fire season, not all of the funds were obligated, consistent with the Chief's direction on deferring funds as a result of fire suppression needs. The GMUG Forest received some of this funding in fiscal year 2003 as carryover, and the R-3 Forests received a 2nd year allocation in fiscal year 2003 dollars. Fiscal year 2004 allocations for the CPR program have not been finalized.

The three Forests and three Lead Counties have completed a Master MOU for the CPR Program. The following table displays Hazardous Fuels, Forest Health, and Vegetation/Watershed funds committed to the County Partner Restoration projects for the three forests in fiscal year 2003:

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QUESTION SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BYRON L. DORGAN

FIREFIGHTERS

Question. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, much of the West is expected to experience an above normal fire season. If that turns out to be true, I'm concerned that the Forest Service would be unable to handle 7 million acres of fire with the resources being requested in this budget. Your Preparedness request of \$610 million would provide for 4,900 firefighters, which is 53 percent fewer than the 10,480 you employed in fiscal year 2002; 465 fire engines, which is 53 percent fewer than the 995 you had in fiscal year 2002; and 48 helicopters, which is 49 per-

cent fewer than the 94 that were available in fiscal year 2002. It seems to me that the administration is proposing to cut its firefighting capability in half, while at the same time the fire experts are predicting an above normal fire season. How does the administration square that incongruity? And what was the dollar amount requested for Preparedness; both the request to the Agriculture Department, and the department's request to the Office of Management and Budget?

Answer. Preparedness funding was at an all-time high in 2001, the first year of the National Fire Plan. This included significant funds for one-time purchases of heavy equipment including engines and dozers to reach a maximal readiness level. While some of that equipment will have to be replaced someday, annual investments needs not be maintained at the 2001 level.

In 2002, fire readiness proved to be as good as or better than ever. Ninety-nine percent of wildfires on Forest Service-managed lands were controlled on initial attack. Preparedness funding in the fiscal year 2004 is \$9 million higher than fiscal year 2003 request. Preparedness funding will be targeted in 2003 and 2004 to maintain the agency preparedness at the highest level possible, with resources being positioned in the area of extreme fire danger. In addition, resources will be moved throughout the fire season to areas in need. If 2004 is another severe fire season, the fire program has the flexibility to augment Preparedness funding with "severity" funds from the suppression account to fund the placement of additional resources in the areas most at risk from catastrophic wildfires in order to maintain sufficient readiness and initial attack capability.

Unfortunately, no amount of preparedness can prevent all fires from escaping to levels requiring extended fire suppression. When fires become large, the costs to contain them become large as well. The rise in the 10-year average recognizes the long-term trend in fire frequency and severity. Even so, even that increase falls below the costs of the past three years. We consider it prudent to maintain a funding level based on the 10-year average. Anything less would seem shortsighted given what we know today.

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FIRE FUNDING

Question. In the past, there has been a fairly large gap between what the administration requests each year for firefighting activities and what the Congress eventually ends up having to appropriate. In the mean time, the Forest Service is frequently forced to borrow money until Congress and the President can agree to reimburse the agency for its actual costs. That is not the best way to operate. In fact, the Chief has been as suggesting the current system is "absolutely crazy," and that what's needed is a long-term solution. I know the administration's request includes an additional \$187 million for fire suppression, but even with that money, you could

easily be \$600 million short of what's actually needed. Nevertheless, as I read your prepared statement, and as I look at the administration's budget, I don't see a long-term fix proposed anywhere. Has the Forest Service actually proposed a solution to the Agriculture Department, or to the Office of Management and Budget? And if you have, would you please tell us what you proposed, and why that proposal hasn't been sent to the Congress for consideration?

Answer. While the fiscal year 2004 proposed budget line item structure for suppression is the same as previous years, the methods used to calculate the suppression proposal is different from previous years. The fiscal year 2004 Budget proposes the 10-year average of total suppression costs adjusted for inflation, \$604 million. As noted, this is \$187 million more than the fiscal year 2003 enacted level and is also \$129 million greater than what would have been required if the same method was used as in fiscal year 2003. The method used for fiscal year 2004 provides a more realistic amount that decreases the likelihood of having to transfer funds and should it be necessary to transfer funds, the amount would be substantially less.

The Chief of the Forest Service has finalized direction for the fiscal year 2003 fire season. The USDA Forest Service Fire & Aviation Operations Action Plan (04/01/03) responds to lessons learned following the 2002 fire season, and focuses attention on four critical areas: preparedness, cost containment, hazardous fuels treatments, and safety—for both ground and aviation operations. A copy of the Action Plan is attached.

The best long-term solution to reverse the increase in suppression costs and eliminate annual transfers is to return the forests to their natural fire regimes. The fiscal year 2004 Budget proposes the Healthy Forest Initiative for this very reason. It is a tool to implement effectively and efficiently core components of the National Fire Plan's 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan. A century of well-intentioned but misguided management has interrupted the natural fire cycle and allowed forests to grow unnaturally dense. In addition, excessive analysis, ineffective public involvement and management inefficiencies have further delayed treatments to return our forest to their natural fire regime. The Healthy Forest Initiative includes legislative and administrative actions that provide the necessary tools to efficiently implement actions to return our forests back to their historic densities and natural fire cycles. Together with updated fire management plans and greater application of wildland fire use, implementation of the Healthy Forest Initiative is the solution to increase the health of our forest and the pro-active solution to decrease the likelihood of extraordinarily expensive fire seasons and funding transfers.

In the interim, we must respectfully defer any discussion of pre-decisional issues.

MAINTENANCE

Question. The administration's request for the Capital Improvement and Maintenance account includes an increase of \$14 million for Roads and \$9 million for Trails, but completely eliminates the \$46 million provided for Deferred Maintenance. Overall, the request cuts maintenance activities by 4.4 percent. I'm puzzled by these cuts because your budget documents clearly state that the deferred maintenance backlog is over \$7.8 billion. Now, I understand the Forest Service has management problems with its maintenance program, but I don't understand, when you have such an obvious need, why you've chosen to cut back on deferred maintenance?

Answer. Deferred maintenance is an important concern to the agency and we will continue to focus on addressing the deferred maintenance backlog through use of our existing appropriations. The authority to expend funds on deferred maintenance already exists within Capital Improvement and Maintenance budget line items, Facilities, Roads, and Trails, the Roads and Trails for States—10 Percent fund (Expenditure from Receipts Act of 1913), Operation and Maintenance of Quarters funds, and the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program funds.

The Department has a number of facilities and appurtenant administrative land excess to agency needs. The fiscal year 2004 Budget contains a proposal for the establishment of a Facilities Acquisition and Enhancement Fund that would enable the Secretary to sell such units excess to need and to utilize proceeds from those sales for the acquisition or development of land and improvements for administrative purposes. Funds collected under this authority would address backlogs and administrative consolidations while improving efficiencies through the reconstruction of functionally obsolete facilities or construction of new facilities. To this end, the Department will submit proposed legislation concerning this Fund in the upcoming weeks.

LEAFY SPURGE—NOXIOUS WEEDS

Question. I'm very concerned with the noxious weed problem in North Dakota. My constituents who live near the Sheyenne National Grasslands in the southeastern part of my state and those who live near the Missouri National Grasslands in the western part have complained bitterly to me that the Forest Service has not been a good steward of the land. In particular, I'm talking about the spread of Leafy Spurge, which, by your own agency's account, has infested somewhere between 30,000 and 35,000 acres of the Missouri Grasslands. That's more than a quarter of that land. For the past two years, I've had funds earmarked for leafy spurge management on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands; \$200,000 in fiscal year 2002 and \$300,000 in fiscal year 2003. Unfortunately, because I've received conflicting reports, I don't have a great deal of confidence that the \$200,000 provided in fiscal year 2002 was used as Congress intended; that is, as an addition to what was otherwise provided, not \$200,000 total. I want to make sure that that does not happen again, Chief, and so my question to you is what assurances can you give me and the people of North Dakota that the fiscal year 2003 funding will be used for additional weed control programs?

Answer. Interagency and interdepartmental efforts have attempted to address the leafy spurge, one of the most insidious invasive noxious weed species, using a host of integrated management approaches that rely on strong partnerships between local, state, tribal, and national groups. The Dakota Prairie Grasslands (DPG) is an important leader in addressing the leafy spurge infestations in North Dakota, particularly with respect to infestations on the National Grasslands. The DPG has undertaken a comprehensive and collaborative program to fight leafy spurge infestations. This program relies on partnerships with local landowners, state and county governments, grazing associations, and other federal agencies. These partnerships are proving to be the most effective in fighting leafy spurge on public and private lands. The DPG has met often with local congressional staffs and county weed boards, other federal and state agencies and grazing association officers to plan a landscape-scale approach to the problem, and has developed cooperative agreements with the North Dakota Agriculture Department and several grazing associations for on-the-ground leafy spurge management operations.

The Forest Service appropriations in fiscal year 2003 contained an unrequested \$300,000 Congressional earmark for leafy spurge control. Our efforts will focus upon slowing infestations across the Dakota Prairie Grasslands and adjacent state and private property. A component of the approach provides about \$100,000 directly to the North Dakota Agriculture Department to assist the County Weed Boards, in counties where National Grasslands are located, for leafy spurge control operations on those National Grasslands and other nearby critical locations that threaten to spread to Forest Service lands. This program is augmented by roughly a 20 percent voluntary contribution from the non-federal partners to the projects. This non-federal contribution allows for the implementation of the Wyden Amendment for cooperative treatment of noxious weeds on both public and adjacent private property in Weed Management Areas. The cost share amount is based on the percentage of land ownership within these Weed Management Areas (private vs. federal or 20 percent and 80 percent).

The DPG is also leading cooperative treatment efforts with the grazing associations, including McKenzie County Grazing Association, Little Missouri Grazing Association, Horse Creek Grazing Association, and Sheyenne Valley Grazing Association, in leafy spurge management activities on National Grasslands. This effort will have the added benefit of 20 percent supplemental funding from the non-federal partners. The Dakota Prairie Grasslands will utilize about \$180,000 of the fiscal year 2003 appropriations to support these partnerships.

With the balance (\$20,000) of the fiscal year 2003 leafy spurge earmark, the DPG will hire a four-person seasonal management crew for treatment of leafy spurge in critical locations on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands with emphasis on biological control (Flea beetles). None of the earmark will fund permanent employees, overhead expenses, or other Forest Service operational costs. Many of the seasonal workers are from local colleges and high schools and work for the Forest Service during the summer.

All participating partners will record treatment and inventory activities utilizing global positioning system (GPS) equipment. Field data reporting, at minimum, will follow protocol required by North Dakota Department of Agriculture. The consolidation of field data will be coordinated between the USDA FS and ND Department of Agriculture for official records, mapping, and future planning and management.

GRASSLANDS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Question. What is the status of the Scientific Review Team that is reviewing and analyzing the 64 Allotment management Plans per the Record of Decision on the Grasslands Management Plan?

Answer. Regional Forester Brad Powell selected the Scientific Review Team (SRT) after consultation with North Dakota Governor John Hoeven. The SRT is comprised of Dr. Rod Heitschmidt, UDSA—Agricultural Research Service; Dr. Kevin Sedivec, NDSU Animal and Range Science Department; Jeff Printz, USDA—Natural Resources Conservation Service; Dr. Douglas Johnson, USGS—Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center; Karen Smith, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services; Kent Luttswagger, North Dakota Game and Fish Department; Dr. Harvey Peterson, Golden Valley County Extension Agent; and Dr. Don Kirby, NDSU Animal and Range Science Department.

The first meeting of the SRT, held on February 10, 2003, was designed to provide team members with information that they would need to perform their role as defined in the Record of Decision for the Dakota Prairie Grasslands (DPG) Plan. Their delineated role is “. . . to determine if the grazing portion of the plan can be implemented and to verify that grazing levels are similar to those projected in the Revised Grasslands Plan FEIS . . .” (Record of Decision DPG Plan page 5). The information presented to the SRT included Record of Decision, Dakota Prairie Grasslands Plan, Northern Great Plains Final Environmental Impact Statement, SRT Handbook and SRT Draft Charter.

The second SRT meeting was on April 15, 2003. At this meeting, the Dakota Prairie Grasslands staff presented information to the SRT for the Little Missouri National Grasslands Assessment and the first set of eight allotment management plans (AMPs). The information provided included background information for these allotments. Public notice for these meetings resulted in well attended sessions by those interested in the process. The next meeting, scheduled for June 16–18, will include a field trip to those allotments where plan development is occurring.

LEWIS & CLARK BICENTENNIAL ACTIVITIES

Question. I'm a big supporter of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial and I'm looking forward to helping the various bicentennial celebrations. I know the Forest Service is an important federal partner in this endeavor, and I'm interested in knowing how your budget supports the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. I know, for example, that there were plans to build an overlook and trail at Tobacco Gardens, in North Dakota, where Cruzat shot Merewether Lewis on August 11, 1806. It is my understanding that construction was scheduled to begin in 2003. Is that project still on schedule? And could you also tell us what the Forest Service is doing nationally to commemorate the bicentennial?

Answer. Forest Service field units, especially those in close proximity to the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail (LCNHT), continue to dedicate funding to accomplish the critical work to meet the agency's commitment to the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commemoration. Where possible, the Forest Service provides funding, technical assistance, or other in-kind assistance to mutually agreed to interagency projects. Four Regions have specific funding allocated for National Scenic and Historic Trails, with portions of the LCNHT, have an estimated \$66,000 available for trail management. Since 1999, the Forest Service has granted over a \$1.5 million to 27 state and community Lewis and Clark Bicentennial projects. Over the past few couple year, under the agency's constrained budget, about \$3 million has been allocated annually to Bicentennial activities, including the grants to state and community projects. The Dakota Prairies National Grassland has also worked in partnership with the Three Affiliated Tribes to provide interpretive programs to school children and as well as contributed funding to the North Dakota State Historic Museum for the development of a L&C Trail Travel Kit for North Dakota.

The overlook and interpretive signs for Tobacco Gardens are currently under construction. Construction for the connecting trail will be accomplished in 2004.

Nationally, the Forest Service has been working in partnership with the National Bicentennial Council, the Trail Heritage Foundation, federal interagency Memorandum of Understanding working group, and Tribes to ensure protection and interpretation of the historic trail, and to provide a coordinated effort for the Bicentennial.

The Forest Service created a national exhibit that was displayed at the first signature event, at Monticello in January 2003. The Forest Service is currently planning participation in the Signature Events at the Falls of the Ohio, Louisville, KY and Clarksville, IN and in the Big Sky Festival in Great Falls Montana. Plans to participate in other Signature Events, such as in North Dakota, are evolving. The

Forest Service is committed to our partnership with the National Park Service for Corps II, a traveling educational exhibit, and has designated an agency employee to be the liaison to the Corp II effort. Several Forest Service employees participated in giving presentations in the Tent of Many Voices at Monticello and on the National Mall.

Question. The bicentennial will also offer the Forest Service the opportunity to highlight recreational opportunities that are a bit off the Lewis and Clark Trail. The Forest Service has developed the Maah Daah Hey Trail, which allows for hiking and biking through the Dakota Badlands. With increased tourism expected during the upcoming Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, what is the Forest Service doing to promote the Maah Daah Hey Trail and other recreational activities it offers in North Dakota?

Answer. The Maah Daah Hey Trail has recently been designated a National Recreation Trail and will be formally dedicated on National Trails Day, June 7, 2003. The Maah Daah Hey Trail has also been an International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Epic Ride and remains listed on the IMBA website (<http://www.imba.com>). The Dakota Prairie Grasslands has developed brochures and maps about the Maah Daah Hey Trail as part of its public outreach effort. The Dakota Prairie National Grassland also has plans to develop and protect additional interpretive sites that commemorate other historical events that took place in North Dakota, in particular Custer's Initial Rock and other military history of that era.

There are several other venues for the public to receive information on recreation opportunities on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands. Medora is the focus of a major advertising campaign by North Dakota Tourism, which is being marketed nationally and internationally in major magazines and other tourism literature. The campaign includes information about the 96-mile long Maah Daah Hey Trail. Locally, informational kiosks display information on recreational opportunities and special events are publicized in the newspaper. Dakota Prairie Grasslands staff also provide information to the public both in person and over the phone. North Dakota recreational activities in the national grasslands are also available via the internet, and is maintained at the Forest Service website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/dakotaprairie/>) and through the interagency recreation website (<http://www.recreation.gov>).

GRASS BANKS

Question. Federal rangeland management is often made difficult during times of drought or other hardship. Already stressed ranchers experience shrinking resources. The Forest Service has the ability to work with local ranchers to establish alternative grazing "grass banks" and swing pastures to help during these hard times. What has the Forest Service done to promote the development of such tools?

Answer. The Forest Service actively seeks alternatives to provide for rest and rehabilitation of specifically identified rangelands. The term "grassbanks" is a registered trademark of the Malpais Borderlands Group, therefore the Agency prefers to use the term "forage reserves" when referring to this concept in a generic sense. One way the Forest Service is looking at establishing forage reserves is through acquisition of private land within the grasslands where the landowners want to sell to the federal government. If the Forest Service acquires these lands, both the acquired private land and the associated federal allotments could be included in a forage reserves allotment.

The Dakota Prairie Grasslands (DPG) is also a cooperating agency with the National Park Service on their environmental analysis to acquire the Ebert land located in the vicinity of the Elkhorn Ranch within the Little Missouri National Grassland. Much of the work with the Park Service has entailed looking at how this project can achieve the best land ownership pattern for the National Park Service, the Dakota Prairie Grasslands, and the involved private landowners. If the Park Service acquires the Ebert Ranch, the DPG would be interested in establishing a forage reserve on the associated allotment in cooperation with the Medora Grazing Association.

Under the current grazing agreements, the grazing associations have the authority to work with the district rangers to establish pastures which can serve as forage reserves or swing pastures, although at this point no action has taken place. Members of the grazing associations have often applied for and received approval for voluntary nonuse. However, rather than promoting the establishment of forage reserves or swing pastures in these areas, the associations have allowed others to use these nonuse pastures with their livestock on an annual basis.

Dakota Prairie Grasslands (DPG) Supervisor is currently working with the Partners for Grasslands Stewardship to develop forage reserve allotments or pastures within existing allotments. The DPG program has explored opportunities such as

land exchanges, land purchase (willing seller) and grazing system changes, to provide some of the flexibility needed by the ranching industry and to improve resource conditions. The Partners for Grasslands Stewardship includes several ranchers and local community leaders. One of their efforts has been to develop a better understanding and acceptance of forage reserves concepts and opportunities.

SHEYENNE VALLEY GRAZING ASSOCIATION

Question. The Sheyenne Valley Grazing Association's 10-year Grazing Agreement expires on March 23. Unless a new agreement is signed, or an extension granted, grazing will stop on these lands. The Forest Service is negotiating a new 10-year agreement with the Association, but the Association has raised several concerns. I've sent a letter to Mark Rey, the Natural Resources Under Secretary, spelling out these concerns, and asking for his cooperation in ensuring that the Forest Service continues to negotiate in good faith. In the meantime, I am concerned that, after March 23, grazing could come to a halt without a new agreement. That would be disastrous. Chief, I understand that you have the authority to extend the agreement for 2 or 3 months at a time as long as negotiations are continuing. I believe that would be in the best interests of all concerned. Can I have your assurance that that will happen?

Answer. Grasslands Supervisor Dave Pieper sent a letter to Senator Dorgan's office on March 10, 2003 detailing the actions that have taken place and discussions with your Legislative Assistant LaDeene Freimuth. The Dakota Prairie Grassland is continuing to work with the Sheyenne Valley Grazing Association (SVGA) to renew this Grazing Agreement. In the letter, Supervisor Pieper said he was "hopeful that a new grazing agreement will be developed and signed by the expiration date." He also included the following paragraph of assurance:

"In the event a new agreement is not signed by the expiration date, I will roll over the existing agreement for periods of three or more months until a new agreement is signed. This will allow permitted livestock grazing to continue unimpeded. I want to assure you that development of the new SVGA grazing agreement will be a cooperative effort between the Association and the Dakota Prairie Grasslands."

Supervisor Piper has tracked this process and has recently issued a letter officially extending the existing Grazing Agreement until July 1, 2003, while development of a new formal grazing agreement is continued.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ERNEST F. HOLLINGS

Question. The Forest Service is requiring states to identify potential tracts of land for acquisition up to two years in advance. It has also indicated a preference for identifying individual tracts instead of focusing on a strategy that emphasizes corridor area protection, a strategy that has proved very effective in South Carolina. The ACE Basin river corridor in South Carolina is a great example of success regarding this type of approach to land acquisition. Why has the Forest Service pushed for such early identification of potential land acquisitions? Why has the Forest Service chosen to push the identification of individual tracts of land as opposed to concentrating on corridor areas, specifically river corridor areas?

Answer. The federal acquisition process, as defined by laws, rules, regulations, and policy, and being subject to the annual appropriations process, makes purchasing a tract of land by the Forest Service much more complex and time consuming than occurs between two private individuals. In addition, much lead-time is required in order to get a project in the President's annual budget request to Congress.

Some of these requirements involve the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Public Law 91-646) and the appraisal process, which can take from 6 to 8 months to contract for, produce an approvable report, and then complete agency review. Title issues, clearing of liens, surveys, hazmat investigation requirements, laws dealing with relocation assistance, negotiations, the phasing of projects, Congressional oversight, and specific requirements found in various appropriate authorizing legislation can all add to the time factor in processing a case.

The annual appropriations process begins with the individual forests submitting their priority projects to the regions and then to the Washington Office during the summer before the President's next year's budget is submitted to Congress. Forests cannot know what lands are available for purchase until much of the preliminary work mentioned above is completed.

The Forest Service is aware of and frequently uses the approach of “focusing on a strategy that emphasizes corridor area protection”, which the Senator suggests in his letter. That approach has been used successfully over the past 11 years on the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor, which involves Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Emphasis has been placed on acquiring high priority tracts located within those river corridor boundaries. We are currently working with The Conservation Fund for the definition of a corridor for the new Broad River acquisition program in South Carolina in order that our acquisition program there will be the most effective. We have frequently used defined corridor planning to focus our acquisition efforts in various wilderness areas, other congressionally authorized areas such as National Recreation Areas including the Sawtooth; the Columbia River Gorge; the Florida National Scenic Trail; and since 1978 on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

Question. Can you outline for me the guidelines the Forest Service follows in identifying and ranking projects selected in the Forest Legacy program? Why do different regions follow different guidelines? Why does the Forest Service insert itself so heavily into the selection process? Why have lead agencies in our states not been intensively involved in drafting new guidelines or been involved more heavily in the selection process?

Answer. The Forest Legacy Program operates under program implementation guidelines adopted in 1996. These guidelines are currently under review and are in the process of revision. The final revision will be released this year and is being amended to respond to program growth since 1996, findings expressed in the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations investigation report released in June 2002 and to meet fiscal year 2003 congressional direction on specific items to be included in the revision.

In keeping with the direction described in the above answer, the Forest Service engages in a project selection process that is articulated as direction to Forest Service Regional Foresters, Area and International Institute for Tropical Forestry Directors and State and Private Forestry Directors and Program Managers that includes a calendar of milestones and due dates. This is a five-step process that begins with submissions of project priorities from each participating State; receives Forest Service Regional input; undergoes a national review team process in which projects are scored using national criteria and selected for recommendation in a prioritized list; and are then submitted to the Office of Management and Budget for inclusion in the President’s Budget.

The Forest Service conducts this project selection process to comply with Congressional and Administration direction and to perform its oversight responsibilities to deliver this national program. Forest Service regions are allowed flexibility to develop mechanisms to assess and to recommend projects for selection. They must utilize the national criteria and provide information and input on individual projects to inform that process. The foundation for the entire project selection process is the process that participating State Lead Agencies perform with their State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees to review, approve and rank projects in their State. Only projects that are determined by the State-based process as priorities are considered for funding and recommended by the Forest Service.

The Forest Legacy Program Implementation Guidelines revision has been conducted through a State lead agency—Forest Service Team. The revision began in 2000 and has undergone numerous drafting rounds and open comment periods with input received from hundreds of groups and agency personnel from across the country. The Guidelines Revision Team is composed of nine members from State lead agencies and the Forest Service. Drafts of the guidelines have been presented at national meetings and for review with State program managers from all participating States.

Question. The regulations employed by the Forest Service for land appraisal in the states is overburdening. The process is inconsistent, especially with respect to projects in the Forest Legacy program. In a time of tight budgets and huge deficits, it is unwise to require 2 or 3 appraisals by certified appraisers at a high cost to the taxpayer. There has been more emphasis placed on the method of appraisals as opposed to the value of the land. What has the Forest Service done to improve and streamline this process? Why is it taking multiple appraisals in order to get Forest Service approval for new land acquisitions? Do I need to ask for a GAO review of the appraisal process to determine where the problem is?

Answer. The House Appropriations Committee reviewed the Forest Service Legacy Program and issued a report in June 2002. Among the findings of that investigation report were several related to appraisal and appraisal review. The report cited the requirement that Federal payments to landowners not exceed the market value of the property and that appraisals prepared to determine market value must be pre-

pared in conformance with the *Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions*. Many appraisals approved by States were later found not to comply with Federal appraisal standards and, in many cases, the value estimates were not supported.

There are several reasons for a large number of unapproved appraisal reports. Federal oversight of the program was found to be inconsistent and States have hired appraisers and review appraisers not qualified to perform the appraisal and review assignments. States have been reluctant to impose uniform qualifications requirements for appraisers and review appraisers. Federal reviews of those appraisals in compliance with Forest Service oversight requirements have too often discovered these deficiencies after the fact. It often requires multiple appraisals to effect an acquisition when appraisers or reviewers are hired that are not qualified or who cannot support their value estimates.

In an effort to streamline the appraisal process and help ensure more effective use of public funds, the Forest Service is working with the States to involve the assigned review appraiser early in the acquisition process to help obviate later unpleasant surprises. The Forest Service is also working with the States to adopt standard implementation guidelines for appraisal and appraisal review. There are both industry and Federal appraisal standards that must be applied when public funds are expended. Appraisal reports failing to comply with those standards cannot be approved.

The Forest Service valuation function has been investigated and reviewed by GAO, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Inspector General (OIG), The Appraisal Foundation (TAF), and the aforementioned House Appropriations Committee. The Forest Service has made substantial changes in policy the past few years to comply with recommendations of those investigations and reviews.

In the Federal appraisal community, the Forest Service is now regarded as a yardstick by which other agencies measure their valuation function. For example, TAF also reviewed the Bureau of Land Management, Department of Interior, and issued a report in October 2002. That report recommended massive changes to the way BLM does its appraisal business and how it is organized. The Forest Service has been requested to assist the BLM in implementing some recommendations of TAF report, as well as OIG and GAO reviews and audits dating back to 1987. The Appraisal Work Group chartered by BLM has relied upon "the Forest Service model" for several appraisal organization recommendations. The Chief Appraiser, Department of Justice, recently reported that he has fewer litigation and standards compliance problems with Forest Service than any other agency with which he routinely works.

USDA FOREST SERVICE—FIRE & AVIATION OPERATIONS ACTION PLAN 2003

[Finalized 04/01/03]

INTRODUCTION

This plan establishes Chief's direction for the 2003 fire season. It responds to lessons learned, after-action assessments, and formal reviews following the 2002 fire season. It incorporates recommendations from the Line Officer's Team and Chief's taskings dealing with cost containment (Troyer-Mann Report and Cost Accountability Report). The plan is consistent with the 30-Mile Mitigation Plan, the 10-Year Comprehensive Plan and the National Fire Plan. This direction introduces operational expectations and clarifies existing policies and procedures. It reinforces performance expectations for Forest Service Line Officers and Fire & Aviation Management personnel.

The plan focuses attention on four areas:

- Preparedness
- Cost containment
- Hazardous fuel treatments
- Safety—ground and aviation operations

This plan is responsive to Administration goals of fiscal integrity and the Chief's goals to deliver a safe, effective Fire & Aviation Management program. It recognizes that large air tanker capacity is down from previous years and several cooperator programs are also below last year's levels.

The direction established in this plan reflect important performance measures for Line Officers, Incident—Area Command Teams, and fire management personnel in the conduct of operations.

Finally, this plan recognizes that, because of Forest Service capability and experience with emergency response, the agency will continue to be asked to respond to

incidents beyond the normal scope of business. The Forest Service is prepared to support missions that assist others in need, with focus on assisting others to build their capacity to respond. Management options for handling future all-risk workloads must be defined. In this context, the following priorities will guide the commitment of resources:

1. National security
2. Protection of life
3. Protection of property
4. Protection of natural resources

BACKGROUND

During the fire season of 2002, initial attack forces displayed remarkable success under extreme burning conditions by containing over 98 percent of all starts before they could become large fires. The fires that escaped initial or extended attack actions resulted in extraordinary costs, losses, and damages. Fires that grew above 300 acres accounted for over 95 percent of the total acres burned and nearly 85 percent of all suppression expenditures. Wildfires on National Forest System lands burned over 1.4 million acres or over twice the 10-year average. Suppression expenditures were \$1.2 billion; again twice the 10-year average.

Fireline operations were relatively safe, given the level of exposure. Vehicle accidents and aircraft accidents, however, exceeded past levels and accounted for 69 percent of all wildland fire-related fatalities in 2002.

SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Wildland Fire Outlook—March through August 2003. National and Geographic Predictive Service groups, climatologists, fuels specialists and fire behavior analysts convened for a seasonal assessment workshop in Mesa, Arizona during the week of February 24–28, 2003. Based on the analysis shared and assessments completed, it was determined that nationally, the 2003 fire season will not be as severe as 2002 (seasonal assessment <http://www.nifc.gov>). However, much of the interior West, south/central Alaska, western Great Lakes and northern Maine is expected to experience an above normal fire season for the following reasons:

- Long-term drought persists over much of the interior West with mountain snowpack and winter precipitation remaining below average to date.
- Drought stressed and/or insect damaged vegetation is becoming more prevalent across the western states and will increase the potential for large, destructive wildfires at mid to high elevations.
- Drought conditions are emerging in the Great Lake States leaving herbaceous fuels standing, uncompressed, and receptive to ignition. An early fire season is anticipated with peat fires in these areas being problematic due to dry conditions.
- Early snow melt is anticipated for Alaska, Pacific Northwest, Great Basin and Northeastern California which will cause large dead/downed fuel moistures to drop below critical values earlier than normal in the higher elevation areas, resulting in an early and extended fire season.
- The Southern Area is expecting a below normal spring fire season overall, however forecasts call for a very active tropical storm season which could result in an above average number of hurricanes that impact the area and diminish fire risk through the summer months.
- An early spring prescribed fire season is expected across many western states.
- State budget reductions are likely to result in reduced firefighting capacity from our State and local cooperators.

Unless weather patterns provide relief, 2003 has the potential for an above normal fire season with several areas experiencing significant wildfire activity simultaneously. In some parts of the country, fire season potential will likely be higher, as the result of several years of drought. Of particular significance is the potential for long-duration fires in higher elevation timber types in much of the interior West. Fires occurring in these types often prove to be difficult to suppress and very labor intensive. Historically, in the Northern Rockies and higher elevation sites elsewhere in the interior West, exponential acreage growth typically occurs very late in the season, as high velocity winds blow out unsecured perimeters.

PREPAREDNESS

Policy.—“Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost effective fire management programs in support of land and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.”

Principle.—Where hazardous fuels dominate the landscape, establishing a strong, decisive initial attack capability is a key component in minimizing large fire suppression costs. As fire danger levels increase and suppression resources become scarce, initial attack capacity must be maintained as the most certain means of preventing new costly wildfires.

Chief's Intent.—Extended attack and initial attack operations will be the number one mobilization priority. All efforts will be made to utilize predictive services, anticipate threats, and pre-position protection resources.

At National Planning Levels Four and Five, national shared resources (airtankers, hotshot crews, smokejumpers, etc.) will be allocated and re-allocated by National Multi-agency Coordination Group (NMAC), based on observed and predicted fire danger intelligence.

All units will be trained, staffed and ready to meet operational demands. Staffing levels will be adjusted, based on observed and predicted fire danger in order to maintain protection capabilities. Staffing levels will be coordinated with adjacent co-operators.

Personnel will be trained, qualified, and red-carded for the positions that they are assigned. Forest Service employees will be available to support fire emergencies to the best of their ability and capability.

Objective.—All level units will be staffed at the identical 2002 level. We are currently working with OMB to achieve this goal. (95 percent of planned NFMAS capability). A 98 percent initial/extended attack success rate remains our goal in 2003.

Chief's Direction

- Fire Management Plans will be updated utilizing the new interagency template (All plans must meet this new requirement no later than December, 2004).
- Effective organizational capability will be sustained by maintaining management, supervisory, and crew staffing skills. Coaches or mentors will be pre-identified for support, where they may be needed.
- Managers will assure personnel assigned to full duty will be appropriately trained and physically fit prior to their deployment.
- Staffing levels and drawdown plans will be adjusted, based on observed and predicted fire danger. Severity funding requests will be submitted and approved prior to the pay period for which they are planned. Severity requests will be coordinated with cooperators to most effectively maintain management oversight, supervisory controls, and crew capabilities in the critical area.
- Units will be prepared to hire and train AD employees and local/volunteer fire department personnel to meet local and, as appropriate, national needs. Training and availability of State and local fire departments, including volunteers, will be coordinated.
- Preparedness Plans, Mutual Threat Plans, Memorandums of Understanding, Cost Share Agreements, and other plans will be reviewed and updated prior to fire season.
- Multi-agency Coordinating Group (MAC) members will be pre-identified and Predictive Services support will be ready prior to the start of fire season. MAC Groups should include individuals with coordination and command experience. Prior to fire season, MAC Groups will establish prioritization criteria for incident allocation and re-allocation of resources. Line Officers will provide a formal Delegation of Authority to MAC Groups that include agency objectives and agency expectations. Prioritization criteria will be included in the Delegation of Authority.
- Service and Supply Plans will be completed and associated Emergency Equipment Rental Agreements (EERA) will be in place prior to fire season.
- Pre-season simulations, including Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) development, will be conducted on units.

COST CONTAINMENT

Policy.—“Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, consistent with resource objectives.”

Principle.—Line Officer oversight and involvement during the decision-making process is critical for containing suppression costs.

Chief's Intent.—In terms of implementation, this means that the primary criteria for choosing suppression strategies are to minimize costs without compromising safety. Planned and actual suppression costs must also be commensurate with the values to be protected. They must be included and displayed in the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA).

Under no circumstances are suppression strategies to be tailored to achieve resource benefit. Even though resource benefits may result in some areas of the fires,

it is inappropriate to expend suppression dollars with the explicit objective of achieving resource benefits.

Indirect suppression strategies (containing to natural barriers, etc.) are appropriate only if they are the safest or least cost option. When fire danger trends are rising, the selection of these strategies must be carefully scrutinized because escape potentials are greater. Long-duration, "siege-like" wildfires where high numbers of firefighting resources are being committed, need to be closely evaluated by standing cost containment teams to ensure that operations are not occurring beyond the point of diminishing returns.

Objective.—Expend only those funds required for the safe, cost-effective suppression of the incident.

Chief's Direction

- Line Officers are responsible for financial oversight. This responsibility cannot be delegated.
- Formulate two inter-agency Standing Suppression Cost Review Teams. Teams will be established by April 15.
- When fire danger trends are rising, the long-term consequences of indirect containment strategies, including final fire cost, will be considered in the initial action decision.
- The WFSA will include the least-suppression cost option. This option will serve as a way to describe the values to be protected and the context surrounding a suppression decision. If the least-suppression cost option is not chosen, the WFSA will include written rationale for not choosing it.
- A suppression cost objective will be included as an incident objective and included in the Delegation of Authority to the Incident Commander. These cost objectives must maintain safety considerations and be commensurate with the values to be protected. Revision of the WFSA is required if incident cost objectives are exceeded.
- Incident suppression cost objectives will be included as a performance measure in Incident Management Team evaluations.
- Suppression costs over \$2 million will require approval of the Forest Supervisor.
- Suppression costs over \$10 million require Regional Forester approval and costs exceeding \$50 million will require Chief's Office approval. It is understood that, in approving suppression costs, decision-makers at the higher organizational levels share the risks associated with outcomes.
- All incidents projected to exceed \$5 million will require assigning an Incident Business Advisor. The Incident Business Advisor reports directly to the responsible Line Officer/Agency Administrator.
- Wildfires involving multiple jurisdictions should require mutually agreed-upon Unified Commands. Commands should be unified as early in the incident as possible. The rapid exchange of information and coordinated tactics are a safety precaution, first, and a cost containment protocol, second. Cost apportionments will be based on mutually agreed upon criteria and reflected in the Delegation of Authority from Agency Administrators.

HAZARDOUS FUEL TREATMENTS

Policy.—Hazardous fuels are treated, using appropriate tools, to reduce the risk of unplanned and unwanted wildland fire to communities and the environment.

Principle.—The most effective means of reducing large fire suppression costs, protecting community values, restoring forest and grassland health, and improving firefighter safety, is an aggressive fuel treatment program. Treatments are particularly important in fire-dependent ecosystems, where prolonged fire exclusion has resulted in over-accumulated fuels. The Forest Service will continue to emphasize fuel treatments in high priority areas where communities, watersheds, and critical resources are at risk.

Chief's Intent.—The President's Healthy Forest Initiative, the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and the National Fire plan establish goals for reducing hazardous fuels. Reducing risk to our firefighters, communities, municipal watersheds and restoring the health of our forests and rangelands are the central themes of these initiatives.

The safest, most effective wildfire protection strategy is predicated on an aggressive fuels reduction program. In fire-dependent ecosystems, the use of prescribed fire, at ecologically appropriate intensities is an essential means of restoring forest health conditions. In Fire Regime I, Condition Class 3 forests, hazard mitigation treatments may often be required before prescribed fire projects can go forward within acceptable limits of social, economic, and ecological risk.

Prescribed fires and wildland fires that aim to achieve resource benefits must be accompanied by supporting NEPA compliant plans.

Objective.—Treat 1.6 million acres of hazardous fuels, service-wide.

Chief's Direction

- A high priority will be given to achieving fuels treatment projects through the fire season.
- Re-distribution of targets and funds between Regions may occur in order to maximize project accomplishments, service-wide.
- Identification on fiscal year 2004 hazardous fuels projects will be completed by May 1, 2003 (reference FSM 5100 letter, dated January 14, 2003, “fiscal year 2004 Fuel Treatment Program Priorities”).

SAFETY—GROUND AND AVIATION OPERATIONS

Policy.—“Firefighter safety is the first priority.” Fight fire aggressively, but provide for safety first!

Principles

- Firefighter safety comes first on every fire every time.
- The 10-Standard Firefighting Orders are firm; we don't break them, we don't bend them.
- Every firefighter has the right to a safe assignment.
- Every Line Officer, every Fire Manager, every fireline supervisor, and every firefighter is responsible to ensure that established safe practices are known and observed.

Chief's Intent.—Safety will not be compromised in the conduct of ground or air operations. However, safety decisions must be made in the context of probabilities, exposure, and consequence over the long-term, particularly as fire danger trends are rising. The selection of indirect containment strategies must be weighed against longer-term safety concerns that may result if the fire exceeds expected or planned perimeters. Likewise, nighttime operations that mitigate snags and other hazards may be the safer tactic when weighed against fire behavior dangers that often exist during active burning periods. When seasonal fire danger trends are rising, the small wildland fire kept small is generally the safer fire.

Proactive suppression tactics that can mitigate hazards and provide an operational advantage are favored over reactive or passive tactics that increase exposure to the firefighters over time. We all have a role in safety. In pre-season preparedness meetings, take the time to discuss the responsibilities and expectations that surround firefighting safety.

Objective.—Observe established safe practices on every fire this year.

Chief's Direction

- Continue the implementation of the Thirty mile Hazard Abatement Plan on all units.
- Unit preparedness—at management oversight, supervisory control, and crew levels—will be commensurate with observed and predicted fire danger.
- Managers and supervisors will be in compliance with the National Wildland Coordinating Group (NWCG) work rest guidelines (2003 National Interagency Mobilization Guide).
- Appropriate span of control will be maintained for managers, supervisors, and firefighters at a ratio commensurate to the complexities presented by the fireline operations at hand.
- Define control objectives (e.g. road, river, fuel type break, or other perimeter objective) on every initial attack incident. When control objectives are exceeded, immediately delay, modify, or abandon any firefighting action. Fireline Supervisors will assess the new situation, brief the firefighters on strategy/tactical change, and then implement appropriate actions.
- Airtankers airworthiness and maintenance status will be monitored as the fire season progresses. At appropriate intervals, required inspections and maintenance will be conducted.
- Airtankers will be pre-positioned, based on projected fire danger levels, in the context of values to be protected.
- Airtankers will be utilized primarily for initial and extended attack. Large fire airtanker use will be determined on a case-by-case basis, or when lives or communities are at risk.

Communicate.—Safety is a responsibility we all share.

See it—Say it—Fix it.—You owe it to yourself, your crew, and those around you.

SUMMARY

Dynamic tensions define today's Fire and Aviation Management Program. These tensions can only be managed successfully with adherence to established safe practices procedures, attention to critical fire behavior risk thresholds, and sound judgment.

At the highest levels of activity, when suppression demands are high and resources are scarce, Line Officers and Fire Managers must maintain a high level of situational awareness, anticipate needs, and proactively lead.

Paying attention to relationships and maintaining open lines of communication pay big dividends when people and organizations are under stress. We are stronger when we work together and more effective when we share information.

Early projections indicate that this fire season may be another difficult year for us. The steps outlined in this action plan are intended to increase margins of safety and preparedness with the aim of reducing the costs, losses, and damages that have become more common as fuels have built up in drought areas where people live.

However, over the long-term, an aggressive fuel treatment program is the surest means of ensuring firefighter and public safety, reversing wildfire costs, and restoring healthy, resilient forests and grasslands (*Wildfire Suppression: Strategies for Containing Costs, NAPA Report, 09/02*).

We will continue to pursue an accelerated fuel treatment program. Programs that focus on restoration of fire-dependent ecosystems and better integrate fuel management, forest health, wildlife, range, watershed, and other available dollars will be more aggressively explored.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECESS

Senator BURNS. Thank you all very much. The subcommittee will stand in recess to reconvene at 10 a.m., Thursday, April 10, in room SD-124. At that time we will hear testimony from the Honorable Gale A. Norton, Secretary of the Interior.

[Whereupon, at 11:36 a.m., Thursday, March 20, the subcommittee was recessed, to reconvene at 10 a.m., Thursday, April 10.]