



United States Senate Committee on  
**Energy & Natural Resources**



Senator Lisa Murkowski, Alaska, *Chairman*

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## **Sen. Murkowski: Federal Government Failing to Manage America's National Forests**

**Washington, D.C.** – U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, today criticized the Forest Service and Department of Agriculture for failing to actively manage federal forest lands in Alaska and across the West. Murkowski said the Forest Service's reluctance to issue timber sales has harmed local communities that depend on jobs in the industry and revenue from timber harvests to pay for schools and emergency services.



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“The federal government’s failure to manage our nation’s federal forests has resulted in a crisis of epic proportions for local communities,” Murkowski said. “Not only are wildfires, insects, and the spread of disease resulting from the federal government’s inaction, but annual timber cut has dropped by more than 80 percent, resulting in the loss of tens of thousands of timber jobs, closed schools, and local government budget shortfalls.”

Murkowski, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, highlighted the federal government’s lack of action in the 17-million-acre Tongass National Forest – which covers nearly all of Southeast Alaska – and the devastating economic impacts it has had on the region.

“The management of our national forests needs reform if we are ever going to address the forest health and socioeconomic crisis faced by our forested communities,” Murkowski said. “Fixing the fire borrowing problem is one part of the equation, but this is not just about wildfire suppression costs affecting budgets. The management structure itself is broken, strangled by an endless maze of process requirements and without clear direction or sense of how to prioritize work that is necessary to achieve real measurable gains on the ground.”



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The Forest Service manages 193 million acres of land nationwide, including nearly 30 million acres in Alaska. Eighty-seven percent of all national forests are located west of the Mississippi River.

“Every time this administration comes before this committee we hear the same buzzwords like ‘flexibility’ and ‘assistance,’ but in the meantime we continue to see our mills shuttered because they cannot obtain an adequate supply of timber,” Murkowski said. “The people of Southeast Alaska are tired of empty promises. They want a change in the Forest Service’s management practices that result in a higher timber cut up.”

Witnesses at Tuesday’s oversight hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee offered firsthand accounts of the impact of the federal government’s management of multi-use forest land.

**Brian Brown, director of Alcan Forest Products based in Ketchikan, Alaska,** told the committee that current federal forest policy has forced his company to depend on Canada for timber supplies, saying that our neighbor to the North “provides a business environment that encourages major investments in the forest products industry.” Brown added that “most of the local communities in our region have declined commensurate with the 90 percent decline in federal timber sales over the last 20-years. Government jobs and subsidized make-work projects have provided a minimal amount of economy for the region. But this is a false economy and is not sustainable particularly in light of the state of Alaska’s difficult budget situation.”

**Mark Peck, Commissioner in Lincoln County, Montana,** directly called for forest management. “We must fundamentally change how we look at resource management in this nation and that can only happen with a complete overhaul of our current structure of laws, rules and attitudes,” Peck told the committee.

**Duane Vaagan, President of Vaagen Brothers Lumber Co.,** said that over the past 15 years his Washington state-based company has “struggled to secure an adequate timber supply to ensure our continued operation. The primary reason for this shortage of raw materials is a lack of management and timber coming from the 1.1-million-acre Colville National Forest.” Vaagen added that despite agreement from organizations representing many facets of the forest and timber supply chain “we have not seen adequate progress from the Forest Service to restore the health of the forest or meet the needs of local industries and communities by offering an adequate supply of timber.”

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