



**Opening Statement  
Senator Maria Cantwell  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
U.S. Forest Service FY 2016 Budget Hearing  
February 26, 2015**

“Thank you Madam Chair, I want to thank Chief Tidwell for being here and Budget Director Dickson. I’m sure that any member that comes to participate in this morning’s hearing is going to have very detailed questions for you, given the nature of the areas that we represent. So, thank you for your budget proposal. It’s a pleasure to have you and the leadership of your team.

The health and vibrance of America’s national forests are of particular interest to the American. And as I’ve said, to the individual states that we represent. I believe the President’s budget is a strong proposal that will enable the Forest Service to fulfill its motto of “caring for the land and serving the people.”

This budget not only improves the health of our land but also continues your predecessors’ legacy of managing the forests to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people.

This proposal also demonstrates a strong commitment to the full range of National Forests’ ecosystem services, including:

- water quality improvement;
- recreational opportunities for the public;
- energy for the Nation;
- wildlife habitat; and
- timber and non-timber forest products.

But, as you know Chief, as we have discussed, there are particular issues that Washingtonians are worried about and I look forward to bringing some of those in the Q & A part of the hearing today.

Last year, the Pacific Northwest saw the number of acres destroyed by wildfire increase by 200 percent above the yearly average.

In Washington, we experienced the worst wildfire in our history. In 24 hours, the Carlton Complex burned 156,000 acres – and at its peak moved at FIVE acres PER SECOND. It destroyed over 300 homes and accounted for 7 percent of the total acres destroyed by wildfires in the United States last year.

Most of my Western colleagues have in recent hearings shared similar stories, and this is a problem we must confront immediately.

In this respect, I want to commend you on your budget's three-pronged approach to address our nation's wildfire problem.

Stable Funding – This budget would ensure the Forest Service would not have to transfer funding from its land management accounts to pay for fire suppression.

I support fixing the Forest Service's fire-transfer problem – which has placed enormous strain on its budget for more than a decade.

That is why I joined Senators Wyden and Crapo as an original co-sponsor of their Wildfire Disaster Funding Act – legislation endorsed by this budget.

Secondly, land management – I also support provisions in this budget that would increase land management activities that reduce fire risk, improve water quantity or quality, and enhance carbon sequestration.

And third, collaboration with private landowners. I appreciate your collaboration just this morning, on reviewing some of the activities that happened in the Carlton Fire Complex with one of our larger employers. Gebbers Farm, who were part of the response to that fire. I am also excited about the third prong of your approach, of engaging private landowners to take steps to reduce the risks posed by fires.

I would like to share a few important facts that demonstrate why this collaboration is so important.

- Today, 46 million homes (that's 40% of all of the houses in the US) are located in the Wildland-Urban Interface.
- In the 1990's, only 4% of homes were located in the WUI.
- Fire experts cite housing development in the Wildland-Urban Interface as the #1 reason firefighting costs have increased over the last 15 years.
- Only 16% of the Wildland-Urban Interface has been developed. When 50% is developed, suppression costs will rise to \$4-5 billion annually.

Given these facts, I am particularly interested in discussing the Forest Service's efforts to make prescribed fire a tool that is more accessible for private landowners.

I learned reading your budget that wildfires helped the forests conditions on 70 percent of the acres they burned last year. These were conditions the Forest Service planned to spend money to create.

The ARPS-Canopy model you developed in 2014, when deployed more broadly, will be a great example of using technology to help fire get reintroduced onto private land in a safe and effective manner.

Although there is a great deal to be pleased about in this year's budget, there are a few items that are confusing and in need of further explanation.

I am pleased to see that you still plan to reduce hazardous fuels on 1.73 million acres in the Wildland-Urban Interface. However, I am concerned about your intention to treat fewer areas that are supported by a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

- 70,000 communities are at risk of wildfire, but only 15,000 have a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

It appears that you intend to prioritize projects in places where local fire officials have not reached agreement on which treatments to use. This seems inconsistent with the Administration's emphasis on collaboration and rewarding Forests that get buy-in for their projects from local groups.

Similarly, I do not understand why the budget proposes a six percent cut in preparedness funding--\$63 million. Your own fire budget analysis tool concluded that every dollar cut from preparedness funding results in an increase of \$1.70 in the cost of suppression.

So, I look forward to discussing those issues further.

I would like to bring up in my statement the importance of recreation, the chairman just brought that up as well.

I'm pleased that this year's budget builds on our recent track record of success and proposes a modest increase of \$2 million for recreation.

Recreation on National Forests contributes \$13 Billion to the economy and 194,000 jobs (out of the total 450,000 jobs that are created from the National Forest System.) That's about 40% of the National Forests' contribution to our GDP.

The economic impact of recreation on National Forests is more than four times as large as harvesting timber – which provides 42,000 jobs and contributes \$2.7B annually.

- Actually, timber harvesting is among the lowest.
- It ranks right around livestock grazing on the National Forests, in terms of jobs impacts.

- Truthfully, today about 3% of the domestically produced timber comes from the National Forests.

Revitalizing and expanding recreation on our National Forests is an initiative that senators on both sides of the aisle can get behind.

Today youth spend 50% less time in natural areas than they did 20 years ago. So we certainly want to look at every way to increase that so we'll have some questions on that.

Investment in recreation is an investment in which we can get a high return.

The average age of a Forest Service facility is 39 years old and one third of its facilities are more than 50 years old. While it makes sense that you removed over 2,300 of these facilities in 2014, I'm pleased that the budget calls for a significant investment of \$33 million to address Deferred Maintenance.

- I am pleased to note, if I am reading your budget right, that about \$1 million of that investment would be specifically for work at Mt. St. Helens National Monument.

I would also like to commend the President for his strong commitment to fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund in this budget.

- 6,000 acres of open space are lost each day to development. That's about 4 acres per minute.

The Forest Service's Land and Water Conservation investments would permanently protect working forest lands, and help maintain rural jobs.

I just want to also mention that the people in my state expect public access to their lands.

The people in my State expect public access to their lands, so I am especially pleased to see your proposal for a \$5-million LWCF initiative focused on increasing public access.

And I am pleased to note the President's budget places emphasis on forest restoration. This is most clearly highlighted by the proposed \$822-million investment for Integrated Resource Restoration, or IRR, which would by itself improve 20 watersheds.

I also appreciate the way this Administration has viewed timber harvesting as a means for restoration.

- In this term alone, the President is bringing a 25% increase in timber harvesting; by focusing on timber harvesting that helps the Forests.
- This proposal calls for National Forests to produce 3.2 billion board feet of timber in FY 2016.
- This is 50% more timber than the 2.1 billion board foot-average of the Bush Administration.

This is how we can take care of the land and take care of the people.

Lastly, while I remain concerned about the sharp decline in the miles of streams that the Forest Service would restore under the budget proposal, I'm excited about the proposed increase in road decommissioning. The budget increases the miles of decommissioned roads to 2,000 miles in FY16 (a 25% increase).

I want to specifically thank Regional Forester Peña for working with me to secure a substantial increase in Legacy Roads and Trails for the state of Washington. Reducing our quantity of roads will allow the Forest Service to concentrate its limited resources on those roads is greatly appreciated.

I'm sure we'll have a lot more to say and our colleagues will on subjects like the reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools. As I said earlier, there are many things that my colleagues who are here this morning will have for the Forest Service. Because each of us represents states that have an integral relationship with the Forest Service. So again thank you and Budget Director Dickson for being here this morning.”

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