

**STATEMENT OF  
TOM TIDWELL  
CHIEF  
U.S. FOREST SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BEFORE THE  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS AND MINING  
CONCERNING  
S.132, the “Oregon and California Land Grant Act of 2015”  
JULY 16, 2015**

Section 101 of S. 132 would require the transfer of 308,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) land to the Bureau of Land Management to be managed as covered O&C lands. That represents roughly half the size of the entire Siuslaw National Forest that would be transferred to the BLM. It is unclear exactly which lands from the NFS would be transferred – the referenced map is incomplete, and the bill provides that the first 102,000 acres must come from lands which are not “critical habitat,” which would be very difficult to find. However, all the lands to be transferred would have to come from national forests in western Oregon. This would, of course, have many significant effects on a broad range of the Agency’s conservation programs. While USDA is supportive of some of the technical changes outlined below, the Department has strong concerns about the loss of the commitment to the American public to manage these lands to provide the mix of multiple uses required under the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act. We would like to continue to work with the subcommittee on the language of this bill.

Section 102(b) would amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by adding additional segments in the Elk River watershed to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. These additions would increase the Elk’s designated wild and scenic river mileage from approximately 29 miles to 63.1 miles. The Department takes no position on these additional designated segments. None of the additional segments are currently identified as eligible or suitable for wild and scenic river designation under the 1990 Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. However, the Department would be happy to work with the Subcommittee to provide additional relevant information concerning the Elk River segments identified in this bill. The Department would also like to work with the Subcommittee to make some technical corrections in Section 102(c) to ensure consistency with the current provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Section 301(b) would expand the Wild Rogue Wilderness in Oregon by designating 56,100 acres of land currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service as wilderness. The “Proposed USFS Wilderness” identified in this section and on the referenced “Wild Rogue Wilderness Additions” map is located along a “cherry stem” into the existing wilderness area. The “cherry stem” originally allowed for the existence of a Level II Forest System Road, part of the designated “Grave Creek to Marial Back Country Byway,” and the continuation of the Marial Lodge, a permitted resort. Marial Lodge accommodates hikers in the spring, rafters through the summer and commercial fishing trips in the fall. Proposed boundary adjustments in this area appear to be consistent with the continuation of the present and current use of the existing facilities.

Section 301(b)(1)(A) also includes language that turns back administration of a portion of the existing Wild Rogue Wilderness from Forest Service to BLM management. The Forest Service is currently authorized to manage this BLM area through a Memorandum of Understanding. The Department does not see management issues of concern caused by the proposed legislation and is supportive of its intent. However, the addition of an enlarged “inset map” to the existing legislative map would help to provide additional clarity and avoid potential future confusion concerning the boundary of the “Proposed USFS Wilderness.”

Section 301(e) would designate additional wild and scenic river segments in the Rogue River watershed in Oregon. All of these additions flow on BLM lands and would be administered by the Secretary of the Interior. Therefore, the Department defers to Department of the Interior on these proposed designations. However, the Department has identified one technical correction in this section that it would be happy to share with the Subcommittee.

Section 312 would designate an area known as the “Devil’s Staircase” as wilderness under the National Wilderness Preservation System. The proposed wilderness encompasses approximately 30,520 acres of NFS and BLM lands. Approximately 7,800 acres of the NFS lands are within the Wasson Creek Undeveloped Area under the Forest Plan for the Siuslaw National Forest and were evaluated for wilderness characteristics in the 1990 Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The proposed Devil’s Staircase Wilderness provides an outstanding representation of the Oregon Coast Range and would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System. There is an existing road within the proposed boundary of this wilderness that would require decommissioning by heavy equipment prior to designation as wilderness or allowance for use of mechanized equipment for this purpose after the enactment. The Department supports the designation of the proposed Devil’s Staircase Wilderness.

Section 313 would designate approximately 10.4 miles of streams on National Forest System lands as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System: 5.9 miles of Wasson Creek and 4.5 miles of Franklin Creek, both on the Siuslaw National Forest. The Department defers to the

Department of the Interior in regard to the proposal to designate the 4.2-mile segment of Wasson Creek flowing on lands administered by BLM.

The Forest Service conducted an evaluation of the Wasson and Franklin Creeks to determine their eligibility for wild and scenic river designation as part of the forest planning process for the Siuslaw National Forest. However, the Agency has not conducted a wild and scenic river suitability study, which provides the basis for determining whether to recommend a river as an addition to the National System. Wasson Creek was found eligible as it is both free-flowing and possesses outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational and ecological values. The Department supports designation of the 1.7 miles of the Wasson Creek on NFS lands based on the segment's eligibility. At the time of the evaluation in 1990, Franklin Creek, although free flowing, was found not to possess river-related values significant at a regional or national scale and was therefore determined ineligible for designation. However, the Department does not oppose Franklin Creek's designation. We would also like to work with the Subcommittee on some potential amendments and map revisions that we believe would improve this section of the bill.

Section 321(b) officially changes the name of "Squaw Creek" to "Whychus Creek" to better reflect local usage and current geographic nomenclature standards. This section also updates the location description in the existing designation in section 3(a)(102) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to incorporate several other name changes. The Department heartily supports the removal of offensive racial slurs from America's public lands.

Section 322 amends the existing designation in Section 3(a)(69) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to change the starting and ending points of the three main segments of the Chetco River. The total length of the Chetco Wild and Scenic River would remain 44.5 miles. In addition, Section 322 would effectuate a mineral withdrawal of the Federal land within the boundary of the segments of the Chetco River designated as a wild and scenic river. Under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, only Federal lands within segments designated as wild are subject to a mineral withdrawal.

The Department is supportive of these technical changes as they provide a more appropriate naming convention in the first case, and better reflect management classifications and direction for the Chetco River in the second case.

The Department also supports Subtitle D, which establishes the "Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary" and the USDA is supportive of this establishment. The area proposed for designation (Steamboat Creek) represents the major spawning tributary for wild steelhead in the North Umpqua River, and serves as an important sanctuary for conservation and long term persistence of this highly valued fisheries resource.

Scientific studies and data indicate this area provides an important thermal refuge for wild steelhead production in the basin. Its designation and associated watershed restoration activities will aid in promoting a resilient landscape for wild steelhead conservation into the future in the face of changing climate.

Frank Moore is a legendary fly angler, wild fish conservationist, and World War II veteran who stormed the beaches of Normandy, France in 1944 for the D-Day allied invasion. He survived and together with his wife of 70+ years, Jeanne, built and were the long-time proprietors of the world-renowned Steamboat Inn along the North Umpqua River. In 2010, Frank Moore was inducted into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame, and is also featured in the recent, critically acclaimed documentary “Mending The Line.”

This designation is a tribute to Frank Moore and his service to our country in more ways than one. In a TED Talk last year (TEDxPortland, May 15, 2014), one of the viewers commented: “Absolutely amazing... I am 19 and my generation needs role models like this man.”

Finally, the Department has concerns regarding the environmental reviews required under Title 1. For example, the Department believes that the mandated timber sale environmental impact statements (EISs) time periods would not provide for adequate consultation under the Endangered Species Act and would not allow sufficient flexibility to respond to large-scale, stochastic events such as fires. In addition, we have concerns with the time frames established in the bill for those EISs and whether we can meet the intent and comply with NEPA, the cornerstone law guiding environmental protection and public involvement in federal actions.

Many deadlines in the bill are not sufficient to allow for the necessary level of analysis, the public participation necessitated by the high level of public interest and involvement in these issues, the volume of pre-disturbance data that must be collected, and the complexity of the issues and information that must be analyzed. In our experience, mandatory deadlines can often result in incomplete or rushed analyses, increased litigation risk and delayed completion of final products.

More specifically, the Administration’s concerns with Title I of this bill include: (1) the temporal and spatial scale of the EIS, particularly given the mandated 5-year time period; (2) the requirement for the Department to select the EIS alternative with the highest timber production; (3) the limitation precluding consideration of impacts beyond specific authorized actions; (4) the limitations on the public’s ability to challenge the EISs and subsequent projects; and (5) the lack of clarity regarding the Landscape Prioritization Plan and project-specific environmental review. These concerns cut to the very core of the ability to prepare a reasoned and considered NEPA environmental review. We would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee to ensure

that implementation of the bill would still allow for the analyses and sequencing necessary to produce environmental reviews that lead to informed and defensible analyses and decisions.

The Service has a number of substantive and technical concerns, and would like to work with the sponsor on clarifying amendments.

This concludes my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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UNITED STATES SENATE  
JULY 16, 2015**

**CONCERNING**

**S. 1691, THE NATIONAL FOREST ECOSYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2015**

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the National Forest Ecosystem Improvement Act of 2015. With our many partners, Secretary Vilsack and the USDA Forest Service share your commitment to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and management in our National Forests. Restored acres and timber volume is up on the National Forests and we must continue to invest in current management regimes and not lose focus on legislative changes that may only polarize and create more conflict.

The greatest impediment to effective and efficient management of our nation's forest system is the continuing rise in budget resources dedicated to fighting wildfire. The FY 2016 President's Budget proposes a solution to this problem, and we urge the committee to work with us to provide this necessary fix to the ever-growing costs related to fighting wildfire.

As a general matter, the Forest Service welcomes legislation that incentivizes collaboration and expands the toolset we can use to complete critical work on our nation's forests, without overriding environmental laws. However, the Administration does not support bonding requirements, or provisions that would mandate harvest levels or elevate one use over another on these multiple-use lands. For these reasons and others cited below, USDA opposes the bill as it is currently written. We look forward to continuing to work with the committee to develop legislation that will help increase the scale and pace of restoration within the scope of existing environmental law.

***Brief Summary***

Section 104 of the bill requires a minimum of 2 million acres of the National Forest System to be treated annually. Of that number, 1 million acres must be completed through mechanical treatment, and the remaining 1 million must be completed through prescribed fire. This title

presents a number of challenges including agency and industry capacity, current market realities, and competing priorities for project implementation.

Section 105 of the bill requires an environmental assessment for all ecosystem restoration projects. The requirement to prepare an Environmental Assessment for each project may significantly increase the field's workload and could slow progress on restoration work. The Forest Service has seen success encouraging larger analysis areas, allowing multiple projects to be covered in a single analysis.

Section 105 also eliminates the opportunity to consider reasonable alternatives and requires the no-action alternative to always include a description of the environmental effects on forest health; habitat diversity; wildfire potential; insect and disease potential; municipal water supplies; and other economic and social factors. Such an approach limits opportunities for collaboration and community input, and could add additional time to complete analyses by requiring an analysis of effects that may not be necessary in every case. Section 105 also requires that EAs be completed no later than 180 days after public notice has been published. While the agency may be able to finish an EA in 180 days, managing multiple project analyses and other pressing business cannot guarantee that each EA can be completed in that timeframe.

Section 106 of the bill requires establishing an arbitration program in lieu of litigation. We are willing to explore the use of non-binding, reviewable arbitration (through a collaborative approach) on a trial basis before implementing such a change nationwide.

Section 107 requires a plaintiff or plaintiffs seeking judicial review of an ecosystem restoration project to post a bond or other security equal to the estimated costs of the court proceedings. The requirement to provide a bond or other security poses an inappropriate barrier to parties interested in bringing suit against the Agency if the party or parties do not have the financial resources available to provide the bond or other security and would limit public participation in decision-making.

Section 108 requires a yearly report to Congress on acres treated per section 104, as well as a yearly report on the number of projects that have undergone arbitration per section 106.

Title II of the bill authorizes several categorical exclusions. Section 202 provides a categorical exclusion for certain forest management activities that would affect fuel loadings, water sources, insect or disease infestations, or critical habitat. A forest management activity under this categorical exclusion may not contain harvest units exceeding a total of 5,000 acres of treatment, except that an activity may cover harvest units totaling up to 15,000 acres if it is developed through a collaborative process, is proposed by a RAC, or is covered by a community wildfire protection plan. Section 203 provides a categorical exclusion to develop and carry out a salvage operation as part of the restoration of National Forest System land in response to a catastrophic event. The salvage operation may not contain harvest units exceeding a total of 5,000 acres in size, result in no permanent road construction, comply with stream buffers, and have a

reforestation plan. Section 204 provides a categorical exclusion of less than 5,000 acres for forest management activity on National Forest System land in any case in which the primary purpose of the forest management activity is to modify, improve, enhance, or create early successional forests for wildlife habitat improvement and other purposes, in accordance with the applicable forest plan. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the appropriate design, scale, and use of categorical exclusions is important to our agency planning and decision-making given the ecological values we work to protect and the extensive work invested in collaboratively addressing the high public interest in them and these proposed as exceptions; consequently the department has substantial concerns with the categorical exclusions in Title II.

The mandated acreage targets, the bonding requirements, and the design and scale of the categorical exclusions are of greatest concern to the department, resulting in our opposition to this legislation. However, we agree with the intent of this bill to increase the pace and scale of restoration on National Forest System lands and look forward to working with the committee to meet those objectives.

While USDA supports efforts to provide new tools to support improved forest management, capacity constraints due to the present approach to budgeting for wildfire continue to be the greatest impediment to further improving the health and resiliency of the nation's forests. In fiscal year 1995, the Forest Service spent 16 percent of its budget on firefighting. Today the agency spends nearly half of its budget in fire management activities and has seen a corresponding decline in non-fire staffing of 39 percent since 1998. This has enormous implications for how the agency carries out its mission, including taking funding from the very programs that help reduce catastrophic fire in the first place. Notwithstanding these challenges, through an emphasis on collaboration, the Forest Service has consistently increased both the number of acres treated annually to improve watershed resilience and timber production—increasing timber harvest by 18 percent since 2008.

The frequency and intensity of wildfire, the rising cost of assets needed to deploy against the spread of wildfire, and the way that fire suppression is paid for constrain the agency's capacity to realize additional gains through efficiencies and partnerships alone. The most important action Congress can make now in advancing the pace and scale of forest restoration is to fix the fire funding problem.

We are again proposing a revised funding strategy for wildfire suppression. The FY 2016 President's Budget proposes discretionary funding for suppression at a level represented by 70 percent of the 10-year average of fire suppression costs. This level of funding provides for suppression of 99 percent of the fires we fight. In addition, up to \$855 million would be made available under a disaster funding cap adjustment to meet funding needs for fire suppression above the base appropriation. This strategy would provide increased certainty in addressing growing needs for fire suppression funding while better protecting non-suppression programs

from funding transfers that diminish their effectiveness. Moreover, it would allow us to stabilize our investments in restoring forested landscapes, helping forests adapt to the growing effects of climate change, and preparing communities in the wildland/urban interface for future wildfires.

Our National Forests and Grasslands are national treasures and provide a broad range of values and benefits, including biodiversity, recreation, clean air and water, forest products, erosion control, soil renewal and more. Covering a third of the country's landmass, forests store and filter more than half of the nation's water supply and absorb approximately 12 percent of the country's carbon emissions. Our mission of sustaining the health, resilience and productivity of our nation's forests is critically important to maintaining these values and benefits.

In 2014, we exceeded our targets by producing 2.9 billion board feet of timber. Our timber harvest has increased 18 percent since 2008. The agency is achieving these results despite the fact that since 1998, National Forest System staff was reduced by well over a third. We have achieved much of this by investing in collaborative approaches to forest restoration across the country as a way to develop better projects, to work across larger landscapes, to build public support for forest restoration and management, and to reduce the risk from litigation. Dozens of collaboratives across the country are enabling the Forest Service and our partners to get more work done. These collaboratives are locally led groups from local communities, environmental groups, forest industry, and others and are designing projects that address forest restoration, supply wood to local mills, conserve watersheds and provide a range of other benefits.

The health of the national forests and the communities we serve are our shared priority. The Forest Service is accelerating restoration and management of the national forests through innovative approaches and increased collaboration, though it is clear that more work needs to be done, and we welcome practical legislation that provides for expedient and responsible efficiencies in the execution of that work.

### *Efficiencies*

In recent years, the Forest Service has made great strides in the pursuit of efficiencies, and we are generally supportive of provisions that will help us pursue treatment at the landscape scale quickly, efficiently, and in a reasonable time to address problems before they can worsen. We look forward to continuing to work with you on the language of this bill to find efficiencies within the scope of important existing environmental laws.

An important way to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and management is to improve the efficiency of planning timber sales and stewardship contracts. We are working to identify and implement process improvements and efficiencies that help with increasing the pace

and scale of restoration, while also engaging the public and developing well-planned projects. Some strategies are discussed below.

The Forest Service is developing new approaches to NEPA in the wake of catastrophic fires. On the Rim Fire, which burned 257,000 acres in the summer of 2013, the Stanislaus National Forest finalized both an Environmental Assessment for hazard tree removal and an Environmental Impact Statement for restoration and salvage in one year. The EIS projects will lessen the potential for future catastrophic fire by reducing the fuel loading and, in addition, capture some of the perishable economic commodity value of the fire killed trees through timber salvage. The agency coordinated with the Council on Environmental Quality, which approved Alternative Arrangements to expedite the NEPA process. Overall, our partners and stakeholders appreciated the transparency while also enabling contracts to get awarded and work done on the ground.

Another innovative approach to environmental analysis under NEPA and stewardship contracting to increase the scale and pace of restoring forest health and to provide economic opportunities for local communities is the Mill Creek A to Z Stewardship Project on the Colville National Forest. This project was designed so that each step, from NEPA data collection to project implementation, where appropriate, will be performed and financed by the contractor, Vaagen Brother's Lumber Inc., under the supervision of the Forest Service. The Environmental Assessment for the first of the two planning areas was released for public comment recently. The contractor is planning vegetation treatments to begin after the decision is signed this fall.

The Forest Service is planning and implementing projects across larger areas, which increases NEPA efficiency and thereby spreads costs across more acres, and provides a longer term and more certain timber supply for local mills. For example, the Mountain Pine Beetle Response Project on the Black Hills National forest is implementing a landscape scale approach across 200,000 acres for treating current and future pine beetle outbreaks.

In the Southwest, the Forest Service signed the Final Record of Decision for the Four Forest Restoration Initiative's (4FRI) first EIS on April 17, which analyzed approximately one million acres in the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests. This project was one of the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Pilot Projects, which were projects nominated for employing innovative approaches to completing environmental reviews more efficiently and effectively. The Environmental Impact Statement covers approximately one million acres and proposes 586,110 acres of restoration activities: 355,708 acres on the Flagstaff, Mogollon, and Red Rock districts of the Coconino National Forest; and 230,402 acres on the Williams and Tusayan districts of the Kaibab National Forest.

4FRI involves the entire suite of restoration efforts including thinning; prescribed burning; watershed and road maintenance; grassland, spring, and stream channel restoration; and habitat

improvement. This milestone is the result of four national forests and more than 30 stakeholder groups joining together over five years to work on the largest landscape-scale restoration project ever analyzed in Forest Service history. 4FRI builds on many years of collaboration, research, and action since the mid-1990s. Over the past five years, the Forest Service has progressed toward accelerating restoration by implementing projects within the 4FRI landscape, using previous NEPA analyses. Progress continues with this final Record of Decision. The NEPA analyses for the Black Hills and 4FRI projects proceeded efficiently without limiting the alternatives considered to action / no action as the discussion draft would do.

The agency has established additional categorical exclusions for restoration work, has expanded the use of focused environmental assessments, is using adaptive management to allow our decisions to last longer, and is better training employees to take advantage of new efficiencies. The Forest Service is also developing efficiencies in NEPA through technology. For example, the Forest Service's investments in using electronic applications provide considerable cost and time savings, contributing to an efficient NEPA process by reducing the administrative workload in reporting, records management, electronic document filing, and managing public mailing lists, while making it easier for the public to comment on Forest Service projects.

### ***Promoting Collaboration***

The Forest Service generally supports legislation that incentivizes collaboration. Our emphasis on collaboration over the last decade has served us well. Simply put, collaboration works, and we have a number of collaborative projects and programs underway across the National Forest System that exemplify the success that can be achieved when diverse groups come together with a common cause of a healthy landscape.

#### ***Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program***

One way to support local collaboration has been through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), and we appreciate the Congress's support for this innovative program. The CFLRP encourages collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority landscapes. The program currently supports 23 large-scale projects with 10-year funding to implement priority restoration work on National Forest System lands while engaging local communities and leveraging partner resources through collaboration, implementation, and monitoring.

The CFLR program is on track to meeting its goals over its ten year timeframe, making substantial strides in the first five years to promote forest health and resilience and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. In the five years since initial program implementation, the 23 projects collectively have treated over 1.45 million acres to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, over 84,570 acres to improve forest health, over 1.33 million acres to improve wildlife habitat,



and over 73,600 acres to eradicate noxious weeds and invasive plants. In addition, these projects have exceeded their timber output goals, producing nearly 1.3 billion board feet.

These collaborative projects help rural communities by creating and maintaining jobs. Between 2011 and 2014 these projects generated \$661 million in local labor income and an average of 4,360 jobs per year. The FY 2016 President's Budget for the Forest Service includes a proposal to increase funding authority for the program from \$40 million to eventually \$80 million, with funding in FY 2016 requested at \$60 million. The funding increase will allow us to pursue up to 10 additional projects. Accordingly, the budget proposes extending authority for the program through 2024 to allow for full completion of new projects.

These collaboratives, and dozens of similar efforts, help maintain a robust forest industry with benefits flowing not only to local communities, but also to the Forest Service itself as the agency relies on local forest contractors and mills to provide the workforce to undertake a variety of restoration activities. A 2011 Forest Service study found that through work on National Forest System lands, the forest products industry supports about 42,000 jobs and contributes around \$2.7 billion to America's gross domestic product each year.

#### *Chiefs' Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership*

Our restoration efforts are not just confined to public lands. Recognizing that fire, insects, disease, wildlife and watersheds do not respect property lines, the Forest Service and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service are combining resources to expand our efforts across both public and private land. In FY 2014, Secretary Vilsack announced a multi-year partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve the health and resiliency of forest ecosystems where public and private lands meet across the nation. The Forest Service and NRCS Chiefs' Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership program aims to reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protect water quality and supply, and improve wildlife habitat for at-risk species. By leveraging technical and financial resources and coordinating activities on adjacent public and private lands, conservation work by NRCS and the Forest Service will be more efficient and effective in these watersheds.

In FY 2014, the Landscape Restoration Partnership invested \$30 million in 13 projects in 12 states across the country. The priority projects selected for FY 2014 are continuing in FY 2015. \$27 million will be provided to continue work on these projects in 2015. Fifteen additional projects were selected in FY 2015 totaling \$10 million. The 2015 projects are located where private and public lands meet, and where restoration objectives cross ownership boundaries. For example:

In the Middle Klamath River Communities of northern California, the Partnership helped support efforts by the Karuk Tribe, the Mid-Klamath Watershed Council, the Salmon River Restoration Council, several local Fire Safe Councils, and the Northwest Youth Corps who are working

together to increase community safety by reducing hazardous fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface adjacent to communities along the Klamath River.

As another example, in Colorado, the San Juan Project addresses fuel hazard in the project area which is considered moderate to extreme. Treatments would reduce dense shrub cover through mastication and reduce tree density through selective thinning in order to mitigate uncharacteristic wildfire behavior and improve forest health. Partners include the San Juan Conservation District, the Colorado State Forest Service, the Pagosa Lakes Property Owners Association, San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership, the Mountain Studies Institute, and Hidden Valley and Eagle Peak Ranch Subdivisions.

The watersheds of Lake Superior's coastal forests are home to tributaries that impact the water quality of The Great Lakes, among the most important natural resources in the world. With more than 20 percent of the earth's surface freshwater, they provide drinking water for 45 million people and habitat for a vast array of plants and wildlife, including more than 200 globally rare species. Spanning 295,000 square miles, the basin's immense network of streams, lakes, wetlands and forests provides critical ecological services, such as water filtration, flood control, and carbon storage. In addition, the region offers unmatched opportunities for industry, tourism and recreation. The Forest Service and NRCS are partnering with Sugarloaf: The North Shore Stewardship Association, Grand Portage Tribal Council, The Nature Conservancy, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the state to expand current restoration efforts to protect the water quality of Lake Superior, provide critical wildlife habitat and develop a resilient ecosystem for the future.

The USDA fully supports collaboration with our partners and stakeholders from all interest areas as one way to be more efficient, through a shared understanding of the desired condition, across the landscape.

This concludes my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions.