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Our Dying National Forests; A Disaster of Perfect Opportunity for Bold Action By a New President

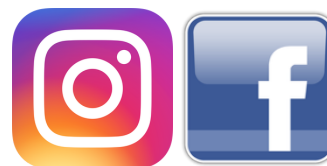
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The following white paper, prepared by the [National Wildfire Institute](#), explains their ideas for revitalizing our national forests through bold leadership and modernizing federal land management priorities.

OUR DYING NATIONAL FORESTS; A DISASTER OR PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR BOLD ACTION BY A NEW PRESIDENT

Prior to the 1980s, the U.S. Forest Service was a world leader and champion of forest science; the management of America's forests were widely acknowledged as the best managed Forests in the World.

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Active management of our nation's forests was mandated by the authorizing legislation that set aside our "Forest Reserves" in the Organic Act of 1897.

Specifically, the intention of the Forest Reserves was "to improve and protect the forest within the reservation... securing favorable conditions of water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States."

For nearly 100 years, the Forest Service managed the Forest Reserves (now the National Forest System) to meet the demand for housing products and aid in economic recoveries from domestic recessions by providing a stable supply of forest products.

Our timber output topped out at nearly 12 billion board feet in 1985, but a few timber sales were not well thought-out. A concerned Congress, fueled by newly formed environmental groups, mandated restrictive legislation to tightly regulate how our National Forests would be managed. Decisions once couched in sound science were now subject to often uninformed public opinion, illegitimate science and extreme political persuasion through the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Aided by the 1987 Salvage Rider, ensuing litigation through the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) sparked what is well known as the "War in the Woods" that continues to this day. Rural economies plummeted when decoupled from raw product removal and legal property tax offsets. Many mills have closed due to lack of wood to keep them in operation and the inability of the US Forest Service to guarantee supply.

The rise in green power groups as well as politically charged assertions about the government "raping the land" and "lawless logging" clouded the fact that nationally, high harvest levels in the 80s never exceeded 50% of forest growth. The timber harvests of the 80s helped lead this nation out of a deep economic recession. Today, forest growth far exceeds the ability to thin the overstocked trees because forests are not actively managed.

Since the passage of NEPA and its subsequent reinterpretation by judicial proceedings, our nation's forests suffer immeasurable



environmental degradation that threaten their very existence and those who live in close proximity to them. Insects, disease and wildfire consume forests at rates not present in the historic record. With a rapidly warming climate, this damage will increase every passing year.

The current framework of laws, rules and court decisions threatens clean water, local economies and preservation of our National Forests for future generations with the following results:

- Major curtailment of active management of the National Forests and hugely reduced amounts of forest projects for our nation's sawmills and forest products industries.
- The growth of a cottage industry that takes advantage of environmental conflicts using the "Equal Access to Justice Act" as a profitable tool to litigate forest projects for personal profit at the expense of the American people.
- Curtailment of Forest management has led to unnatural levels of number of trees per acre which are four times natural densities. This allows bugs to kill millions of acres of forest ripe for catastrophic wildfires.
- Regional timber industries have crashed due to lack of a reliable timber supply, with more than 60% of the nation's mills shut down. America's dying rural communities exhibit high unemployment, illicit drug use and reduced essential public services such as law enforcement. Timber companies which survive import unsustainably grown timber from countries such as Siberia and Canada to meet America's demand for forest products.
- There is reduced availability of clean water for cities, local communities and fisheries. Wildfires and forest densification have robbed water produced by National Forests in the arid west and threaten the life and productivity of irreplaceable upland streams.
- Outdated, misguided and ineffective management and legal policies

have led members of Congress to advocate selling or transferring National Forests to states or other groups. This would rob future generations of their birthright and end the US world leadership in forested lands. Such short-sighted decisions would be a disaster for rural communities, destroy public access to open landscapes and diminish recreational opportunities forever as states or other groups could not afford to manage our National Forests.

Bold leadership and modernizing policy and law could revitalize our National Forests, reenergize a sluggish economy and create high paying jobs. Existing gridlock cannot be eliminated by any management agency alone.

- New management strategies are emerging. Seral Stage Management encourages a mosaic of all stages of forest growth and provides rich and varied ecological niches. It mimics natural disturbance processes and restores full forest function which meet the needs of wildlife, fire and fuels management, recreation, water yield, and timber products. Active management by man with reliable and scientifically verified results can replace catastrophic processes of fire, insects and disease.
- Critical forest thinning can unleash an enormous economic engine. Creation of 6 billion board feet of natural forest byproducts would yield approximately \$18 billion dollars in raw product sales (25% of which is returned to counties for roads and schools as tax offsets). Local communities have documented that each \$1 spent in the timber products industry returns \$5 to the local economy.
- 21st Century forest management would improve water quality, water yield and groundwater recharge from our uplands. In the process, we could reduce catastrophic fire damage, wildfire suppression costs and release of airborne carcinogens caused by ever-escalating fire activity.
- By taking bold action to restore active forest management on our National Forests and by leading again in scientific achievement worldwide, we will regain world leadership in caring for the

environment and contribute to global health.

The following critical action items are offered to use with groups during the election process and for issuing policy direction after the election. These items will resonate with rural voters and forest-dependent communities and will enlighten urban citizens.

- Convene a National Forested Lands Committee who will offer proactive solutions for active management, with a focus on science, habitat improvement, economic viability and protection of communities from wildfire. This committee should be composed of true stakeholders who embrace the founding mission of the agencies. The committee should include scientists, conservationists, private and public forest managers at all levels and county officials with significant public land holdings within their boundaries.
- Request Congress to revisit the current practice of appealing specific projects which have already been approved in Land Management Plans. The two-tier process of NEPA allows discussion and direction for healthy forest and habitat management during development of the Land Management Plan.
- Selection of strong, proactive agency leaders is required to provide a clear vision of a renewed direction both internally and externally. Officials in the Department of Agriculture must support and provide a clear mandate to a new Forest Service Chief who will restore the function and mission of the Forest Service as defined in the original Organic Acts.
- Mandate agency heads to provide strong support for on-the-ground projects developed by community collaboratives. Ensure these collaboratives utilize local experts, ranchers, foresters, conservationists and community leaders who are dedicated to developing active and efficient projects.

- Stop the current land management policy of trying to burn our way out of years of ineffective forest management. Rather than returning the forests to a natural state, peer science has shown the current megafire regime instead leads to deforestation and long term conversion to unwanted vegetative species.
- Request Congress to define the end of a wildfire emergency from when the smoke is gone to when the landscape is restored, including restorative salvaging of dead timber and fuels.
- Request Congress to recognize the inability of the Forest Service to meet the goals of the Northwest Forest Plan due to restrictive environmental laws and litigation occurring after the plan's inception. The inability to utilize the plan has thwarted local forest projects and diminished project effects in communities and their economies. A one-size-fits-all forest management scheme results in harmful forest practices in many ecosystems.

You, as the next President of this great nation, have the opportunity and duty to restore the health and vitality of our National Forests.

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