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10 AM Policy and "Let It Burn" Wildfires

I would like to give a little background on the 10 A.M. Policy. As Santana said, "those who don't learn from history are compelled to repeat it." 10 A.M. Policy originated in the early thirties and was formalized in 1935. The reason for it was that for years, when there was a relatively wet cycle the Forest Service, because of lack of funding, was allowing most fires to burn, thinking that they were beneficial.

The weather cycle changed, countryside warmed up, and by the thirties into 1935, they were spending more money and burning more acres than they wanted to. So the 10 A.M. Policy directed the Forest Service to plan to suppress all fires by 10 A. M. on the day following discovery -- and/or not being successful, to project then ahead to the following 10 A.M. by increasing resources and activities.

That was a very successful program for 35 years, until about 1970 -- was slowly abandoned because of a variety of factors, not the least of which was pressure from the environmental lobby to use fire as a management tool.

About 20 years ago the Forest Service decided to formally abandon the 10 A.M. Policy in the vehicle of their annual letter of intent, having to do with policies directed at fighting wildfires. From that position they began to establish a program of allowing fires to burn, and subsequently millions of acres have burned unnecessarily because of the abandonment of the 10 A.M. Policy,

To come to grips with that situation, a couple of years ago local Congressmen LaMalfa and McClintock authored a bill called H.R. 934. It's currently in the Farm Bill -- should come up shortly after the inauguration in the Senate, and amongst other things, it calls for every . . . establishment of the 10 A. M. Policy, to wit: put all fires out by 10 A.M. the following day, or each day thereafter by increasing resources if you're not successful.

It halts all efforts to allow any wildfire to burn for any reason. It also places stricter controls on prescribed fire because there's been a history recently of many prescribed fires escaping.

The downside of some of these things are alarming, to say the least. Number one: allowing a fire to burn is a violation of appropriation law. It's using funds not allocated for that activity, but merely to suppress fires. Further, the Forest Service is fraudulently claiming restoration credits for acres they burn.

The Forest Service has unfortunately moved from roughly . . . nine billion board feet . . . of an annual timber cut in fairly recent years. Over the last 15 years they've dropped that to less than . . . three billion board feet of timber taken from the National Forests.

Clearly, as the other speakers will indicate, significant health hazards have been created because of the excessive smoke. Major property damage to local communities . . . has been created.

A lot of the reasons for this is lack of proper leadership in the Forest Service, lack of the appropriate skill sets, and numbers, to do the job. And, of course, that all needs more appropriations. Currently, the Forest Service is below budget because of their inability to make a case for the budget they need to do the job. Assuming they knew what to do. I'm not convinced they do.

And I will close with an observation about satellite detection. Military had a program called CHIRP [Cyber Halo Innovation Research Program]. Many years ago I worked with the Space Science Lab at Cal, developing a satellite-based wildfire suppression system. [It] was introduced to the Forest Service on numerous occasions, and for all practical purposes they're not really fully utilizing it.

That's the key to getting on top of the wildfire crisis: early detection; immediate, aggressive suppression action; appropriate cleanup of the woods afterward; and restoring the land, is where we need to be. Thank you.

My name is William Durr. I was with the Forest Service for 38 years: 17 years in fire management and 21 years as a special agent; in the last 18 of those years as a special agent in charge [of the] California Region. During that time I was fortunate to be able to increase the law enforcement organization from three special agents to 50 special agents, and I added 150 law enforcement officers.

After retirement I participated in a review of the [2009] Station Fire in the

Angeles National Forest in consultation with the GAO [US Government Accountability Office], wherein the Forest Service had missed opportunities to extinguish the fire in the early stages.