

Jim Petersen:

Editor, Evergreen Magazine

NWI/NWA Transcript: Statement Recorded November 20, 2024

Dalton Gardens, Idaho:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX5ZxskpD6U>

**First, Put Out the Fire!
and Restore Our Forests with Traditional Practices**

We are up to our eyeballs in an undeclared national emergency. More than half of the nation's Federal forest estate is dying, dead, or burnt to a crisp -- about 156,250 square miles, an area larger than all but two States, Alaska and California.

Here's hoping that the Trump Administration will declare a National Wildfire Emergency on Inauguration Day, January 20th. Westerners have been dealing with the root causes of this natural tragedy for decades.

First, our Federal forests hold too many trees for the carrying capacity of the land. Trees are dying annually by the millions. Mortality now exceeds growth in most of the National Forests in the 11 Western States.

Preservationists who oppose all forms of forest management routinely use, routinely block, the efforts of the few brave souls in the Forest Service that are still trying to rescue dying forests and threatened communities. These people have held Congress hostage for decades. Their weapon of choice has been the Equal Access to Justice Act -- a well-meaning law that these groups have been corrupting for decades. Until Congress revises the act, Federal agencies, no matter who they are or who works for them, will be hamstrung.

There are hundreds of peer reviewed papers, research papers, many written 20 and 30 years ago, that underscore the necessity of reversing course in our National Forests in the West before it's too late. Countless essays on our website, and many others by the way, echo the warnings of foresters, forest ecologists, wildfire experts, botanists, fish and wildlife biologists, zoologists, and herpetologists. And the list goes on.

Our federal lands are a national treasure. Our cultural, spiritual, historic, and economic roots are buried deep in the soil. When we leave these forests to nature, as so many people today seem to want to do, we get whatever nature serves up --

which can be pretty devastating at times. But with forestry we have options and a degree of predictability not found in nature.

The easiest science-based fix necessitates managing our forests and marineland in a way that looks quite similar to the way the Indian tribes that own land manage their land. To understand what this might look like, consider the wisdom of Oshkosh, Chief of the Menominee Tribe from 1827 to 1858. Here's what you said:

"Start with the rising sun and work toward the setting sun. Take only the mature trees, the sick trees, and the trees that have fallen. When you reach the end of the reservation, turn and cut from the setting sun to the rising sun, and the trees will last forever."

Thank you.

I'm Jim Peterson. I've been a working journalist for 62 years. I'm also the founder of the nonprofit Evergreen Foundation, which I started in 1985. For the last 39 years I've been the foundation's president.

I do most of the research and writing for the website and for our magazine content-wise. It looks as though our website is probably the largest forestry related website on Earth.

Evergreen's mission remains unchanged after nearly 40 years. We work to increase public understanding and support for science-based forestry, and forest policy.

I've written several books, most notably, *First, Put Out the Fire!* The book has become the script for several rural Western groups that are working to encourage Congress to revise environmental laws that make it nearly impossible for Federal resource management agencies to tackle the root causes of the West's wildfire pandemic: insect and disease infestations; flammable, woody debris; forest mortality; and, inevitably, wildfire.