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Statement of
Montana Governor Judy Martz

on behalf of the
Western Governors' Association
to the

House Government Reform Subcommittee
on Energy Policy, Natural Resources
and Regulatory Affairs

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Introduction and Background

Thank you Chairman Ose, Representative Tierney, and the other distinguished members of this Committee for the invitation to appear and to submit written testimony for today's hearing. I am Judy Martz, Governor of Montana and I submit this written testimony on behalf of the Western Governors' Association (WGA). WGA is an independent, non-partisan organization of Governors from 18 Western States and three U.S.-Flag Islands in the Pacific. We appreciate this opportunity to present the views of the Western Governors. I am the immediate past Chair of WGA and have testified before Congress a number of times on behalf of my Western Colleagues. I am honored to be here today to discuss this very important and timely subject. I commend the Chairman for tackling this crucial issue.

As you are all aware, we are once again facing and indeed already battling a wildfire season that is poised to sweep through much of the West. All of us have seen the devastation wrought by these catastrophic fires raging through many of our most precious forests and communities. Damage to public health and safety, loss of jobs and impacts to businesses, infrastructure destruction, and environmental effects combine with the threats of loss of life, property, and natural resources in the wildland/urban interface. The West has experienced warm temperatures with low humidity, prolonged drought periods, thick forest fuels left from a century of fire suppression, population growth, and residential development in wildland areas. While we are all hoping that this fire season will be less destructive than those of the past four years, it does not appear that the overall situation is yet getting better. Unless all levels of government and the public continue to work closely together, we may soon find that what would have been seen as an extraordinary fire season in the past will start to be considered routine.

The Vastness and Expense of the Challenge of Forest Health

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, an estimated 190 million acres of public lands are at an elevated risk of catastrophic wildfires. This figure does not include state and private lands that are also at risk. Imagine this, 190 million acres is equivalent to the entire land mass of the states of Utah, Arizona and Colorado combined and those are pretty big states even by Montana comparisons. For those of you that have never driven across the width of Montana or other large Western states, that 190 million acres is also equivalent to the landmass of the 12 states along the Atlantic seaboard from Virginia north to Maine and that includes Vermont too. We have got a heck of a problem in this country and the West is facing the brunt of it.

No level of government can successfully tackle this problem alone and that is why your hearing today is a timely one. Increased collaboration and cooperation between the federal government and the states is something the Governors have long called for and needs to be encouraged at every opportunity. We need to work together across geographic and political boundaries that otherwise hinder the overall effort. The State of Montana can make some progress on its own, but we can make so much more, and stretch public funding across more acres, if we can work closely with our neighboring landowners, and in most of the West that means the federal government. It also does little good in trying to improve forest health if a state is treating overgrown acres, or restoring watersheds and wildlife habitat on its lands without commensurate work from adjoining landowners; again, most often the federal government in the West. Without cooperation from local authorities and private landowners, we also cannot make important progress in overgrown forest areas near communities, also known as the wildland urban interface or the WUI.

Look at the devastation that is wrought if we cannot make progress on the ground. The 2003 fire season burned more than 3.7 million acres nationally, and cost $1.5 billion to suppress. This figure does not include the economic damage that goes along with these fires. For example, more than 3600 hundred homes were lost to the fires in Southern California last October representing an amount in real estate value that I will not try to estimate. Wildfires near small Western rural communities before and during the height of the tourist season can also be economically devastating. It is estimated that my "little" state of Montana lost over $27 million in tourism dollars in 2000 as a result of our fires that year as almost 300,000 potential tourists stayed home. These losses were concentrated in just a few of our western counties making the impacts that much more damaging. Imagine what the economic impacts could be if the upcoming Lewis and Clark bicentennial commemoration activities – which are likely to attract millions of visitors to the Trail States over the next couple of years – are affected by wildfires. It has also been conservatively estimated by the Northern Arizona School of Forestry that the 2002 Rodeo-Chedeski fire in Arizona caused about $250 million in economic damages over and above the suppression, emergency rehabilitation and timber costs directly attributable to the fire.

We can put all the dollar figures out for your consumption, but I don't think any of us can actually understand the personal breadth of loss felt by a family or individual that sees their home or ranch or forest consumed by wildfire without it actually happening to us. This is a personal devastation that no dollar figure can do justice to. And it is a governmental failure of equally incalculable proportions if we do not work together to prevent these awful occurrences.

Addressing the Threat: The 10-Year Strategy

We have been encouraged by the broad bipartisan support expressed for the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan (together "the Strategy"), which, at Congress' direction, the Western Governors played a key role in creating in 2001 and 2002. As you may know, in the wake of the devastating 2000 fire season, the Conference

Report for the Fiscal Year 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (P.L. 106-291) required the development of a 10-year comprehensive strategy to address the threat of catastrophic wildfires. Specifically, the Conference Report stated that:

> "*The Secretaries [of the Interior and Agriculture] should also work with the Governors on a long-term strategy to deal with the wildland fire and hazardous fuels situation, as well as the needs for habitat restoration and rehabilitation in the Nation. The managers expect that a collaborative structure, with the States and local governments as full partners, will be the most efficient and effective way of implementing a long-term program.*
>
> *The managers are very concerned that the agencies [with wildfire fighting authorities at Interior and Agriculture, i.e., the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service and the Forest Service] need to work closely with the affected states, including Governors, county officials, and other citizens. Successful implementation of this program will require close collaboration among citizens and governments at all levels… The managers direct the Secretaries to engage Governors in a collaborative structure to cooperatively develop a coordinated, National ten-year comprehensive strategy with the States as full partners in the planning, decision-making, and implementation of the plan.*
>
> *Key decisions should be made at local levels."*

The Strategy was developed and endorsed by WGA and the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, the Southern Governors' Association, the Intertribal Timber Council, the National Association of Counties and the National Association of State Foresters. The Strategy was developed in a collaborative manner by those endorsees, as well as a range of stakeholder representatives. The stakeholders represent the spectrum of natural resources interests from environmental groups to industry. Their contribution to and support for the Strategy speak volumes about its value and to the process by which it was developed.

The Strategy was designed to implement the National Fire Plan in a comprehensive and collaborative manner with a contribution of resources from all levels of government, the private sector, communities and volunteers. It seeks to accomplish four goals across federal, state, tribal and private lands:

1. Improve Fire Prevention and Suppression;
2. Reduce Hazardous Fuels;
3. Restore Fire-Adapted Ecosystems; and,
4. Promote Community Assistance.

The Strategy sets forth a number of guiding principles to achieve these goals, including collaboration, priority setting and accountability. It establishes a results-based framework

for achieving its goals with performance measures and tasks to track progress over time. States, tribes and local governments are also full partners in its implementation. These partners strongly believe that the locally driven collaborative approach set forth in the Strategy will lead us to success in tackling the immense task we face. Governors have also been convinced that the collaborative processes established in the Strategy represent a significant, and positive, change in the way in which we manage our public lands and forests.

Western Governors have been very actively engaged in bringing stakeholders together to seek consensus solutions to our forest health crisis. The WGA sponsored a Forest Health Summit in Missoula, Montana in June 2003, that brought together over four hundred public officials, industry representatives, environmental groups, scientists, and other interested stakeholders. The participants reached consensus recommendations and WGA has formed a Forest Health Advisory Committee to assist us in implementing those actions. The recommendations focused on encouraging collaborative processes consistent with the 10-Year Strategy to address the hazardous fuels issue. Also stressed was the need to work with local communities to ensure they have the infrastructure and capacity to be partners in the implementation of the 10-Year Strategy and the National Fire Plan.

Progress on the Ground

With the National Fire Plan and the Strategy as guidance, progress has begun to be made. The following figures, as of September 2003, are a snapshot of the proactive efforts undertaken by states, the federal government and other partners to reduce the threat of catastrophic fires: Accomplishments:

- 13,751 projects have been initiated under the Strategy and the National Fire Plan since their 2001 inception. Of those projects, 78% have been on-the-ground hazardous fuel and restoration projects.
- Nationally, 5.5 million acres since inception have been treated to reduce hazardous fuels and/or restore forest health. Treatments are split equally between the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and critical watersheds and habitats in the backcountry.
- Acres treated in Western states as of September 2003, under the National Fire Plan and the 10-Year Strategy:

State:	Acres:	State:	Acres:
AK	12,378	NE	8,300
AZ	383,970	NM	223,349
CA	315,017	NV	71,096
CO	89,017	OR	315,745
HI	504	Pacific Islands	N/A
ID	514,383	SD	146,248
KS	17,269	UT	138,374
MT	493,646	WA	82,724
ND	11,441	WY	31,905

- Western States have undertaken 7,300 treatments totaling 2.9 million acres. Most projects are collaborative, i.e., have a joint public sector/public component
- We understand that an additional 2.7 million acres will be reported as treated for all of 2003 with 59% of those in the wildland urban interface near communities.

Western Governors are active participants in the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), the interagency authority that is working to coordinate policy between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior with assistance from state, tribal and local governmental officials. WFLC has adopted field guidance for identifying and prioritizing communities at risk to catastrophic wildfire. This guidance was specifically called for in the 10-Year Strategy and was collaboratively developed by the National Association of State Foresters, the federal government and a number of other interests. The field guidance provides a process for state and locally driven collaborative efforts to make hazardous fuel projects prioritizations and selections that presents an alternative to top-down centralized management.

Using this guidance, federal, state and tribal officials have identified 3,100 treatments for hazardous fuel and restoration projects accounting for 1.9 million acres for Fiscal Year 2004. The actual target acres and treatments will depend on the Congressional appropriations received and not otherwise spent on suppression activities. The majority of these proposed treatments have two or more partners participating. Collaboratively developed fuel treatment projects for FY 2005 will be announced this month and we anticipate an increase in the number of projects selected and funded as a result of ever increasing collaboration.

The Healthy Forests Initiative and Restoration Act

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) (PL 108-148) signed into law by the President on December 3, 2003 codifies much of the Strategy's collaborative structure and process into statute. Although there was not complete agreement among the Western Governors on all of HFRA's provisions, all Western states will take advantage of parts, if not all of its provisions now that it is the law of the land. The legal and administrative changes have only very recently been enacted, relatively speaking, but we believe that these new authorities if implemented in close cooperation with states and local partners, as well as with sufficient levels of federal funding will be effective. We believe that was the intent of the new authorities, but it will be up to the local land managers to ensure that intent is fulfilled. With close collaboration, HFRA and its related administrative changes may help to successfully meet part of the forest health challenge we face in the West.

One demonstration of the need for continued collaboration on-the-ground, is illustrated by the work by WGA, the Society of American Foresters, The National Association of Counties, the National Association of State Foresters and the Communities Committee of the 7th American Forest Congress. Together with these organizations, we developed "PREPARING A COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN, A Handbook for Wildland-Urban Interface Communities."

The idea for community-based forest planning and prioritization is not new. Prior to HFRA, almost 1200 communities had already established wildfire plans. However, the incentive for communities to engage in comprehensive forest planning and prioritization was given new impetus with the enactment of the HFRA. This legislation includes meaningful statutory incentives for the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to give consideration to the priorities of local communities as they develop and implement forest management and hazardous fuel reduction projects.

In order for a community to take full advantage of this new opportunity, HFRA requires that a community must first prepare a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Local wildfire protection plans can take a variety of forms, based on the needs of the people involved in their development. CWPPs may address issues such as wildfire response, hazard mitigation, community preparedness, or structure protection—or all of the above. The process of developing a CWPP can help a community clarify and refine its priorities for the protection of life, property, and critical infrastructure in the wildland urban interface. It also can lead community members through valuable discussions regarding management options and implications for the surrounding watershed. HFRA provides maximum flexibility for communities to determine the substance and detail of their plans and the procedures they use to develop them. Because the legislation is general in nature, some communities may benefit from assistance on how to prepare such a plan. The *Handbook* is intended to provide communities with a concise, step-by-step guide to use in developing a CWPP and we commend it to all of those interested in mitigating the potential impact of catastrophic wildfires on communities.

Stewardship Contracting

Western Governors also believe that stewardship contracting can be a useful tool for accomplishing hazardous fuel reduction activities. Stewardship contracting allows a private entity undertaking forest health treatments to recoup some of the cost of that treatment by selling the byproducts produced thus offsetting costs charged to the federal government. We commend Congress for providing this authority in the FY 2003 Omnibus Appropriations Act. Congress should now authorize the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to enter into agreements with interested Governors for the state to work in partnership with federal officials to implement stewardship projects in appropriate locations throughout the state and across multiple ownerships. The state's role in each project would be negotiated, but could range from project planning and environmental assessment to community outreach and contracting for treatment. Federal personnel would retain the final decision-making authority on federal lands as required by law. Such a partnership between state and federal governments could accomplish vital proactive fuel treatment projects. Monitoring and adaptive management need to continue to be a part of the stewardship program to ensure accountability and public trust in the program.

Wildland Fire Suppression -- Pre-positioning of State Firefighting Resources
Title II of the proposed National Drought Preparedness Act of 2003

It is proven that both costs and acres damaged can be reduced when wildfire crews get a jump on fires and extinguish them while small. Coordination, partnering and positioning of resources are central to successful initial attack. Current legislative authorities that were intended to reimburse states for pre-positioning of personnel and equipment from outside their jurisdiction do not function properly, making a legislative solution vital. This issue was not addressed in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Currently the Federal Emergency Management Agency has authority to reimburse states for pre-positioning to combat wildfires on federal lands. Yet, this reimbursement is available for only two-weeks following a FEMA declaration and this authority actually acts as disincentive to states. When states proactively and effectively extinguish a fire before it becomes an emergency, they do not qualify for reimbursement. Conversely, when state efforts fail at initial containment and a large fire ensues, they are rewarded by FEMA.

Looking at wildfires from 1992-2001, 98% of wildfires were successfully extinguished during initial attack. Yet, from that 2% that escaped initial containment and grew into large fires consuming 94% of all acres burned, we incur 80% of wildfire suppression costs. In 2002, the Hayman fire in Colorado, the Rodeo-Chedeski fire in Arizona and the Biscuit fire in Oregon are poster-boy examples of large fires with large costs where initial attack efforts failed.

If we hope to improve initial attack success thereby drastically reducing the costs of suppression, we need to be sure that states are acting proactively with appropriate assistance to maximize their response success during periods of high fire danger. Congressional action is imperative. Title II of the National Drought Preparedness Act of 2003 (S. 1454 by Sen. Domenici and Baucus), contains language that would solve the problem by amending existing FEMA authority under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5131 et seq.). Under the Domenici-Baucus bill, the trigger for reimbursement would be based on the U.S. Forest Service severity indices (Forest Service handbook 5192.2) removing the need for an incident declaration. These rules govern how the Forest Service allocates and determines pre-positioning of its own resources. The House companion bill to S. 1454 (H.R. 2871 by Rep. Hastings and Rehberg) does not include the pre-positioning title due to jurisdictional concerns.

WGA has urged and continues to urge Congress to enact the National Drought Preparedness Act of 2003, including the pre-positioning title, in order to establish a national drought policy that supports states' efforts to become more proactive in responding to the threat of wildfires.

Rural and Volunteer Fire Department Efforts

Often completely volunteer, rural and volunteer fire departments are frequently the first to respond to a fire start in both wildland and wildland-urban interface areas. The nation's rural fire departments provide front line protection to communities and natural resources threatened by wildland fire. The ability of these local firefighters to quickly and efficiently contain a fire start during their initial response can dramatically reduce damaging wildfire impacts and tremendous public costs. Fire suppression in the interface requires a unique combination of skills and a tremendous amount of interagency coordination to be effective. When even one member of this partnership is unable to coordinate their response actions, significant and unacceptable loses do occur.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, there are more than one million active firefighters serving in local fire departments across the nation. A significant portion of this community-based protection is provided by more than 24,000 rural fire departments with over 658,000 volunteer firefighters. This contrasts to the less than 16,000 full-time and seasonal wildland firefighters employed by the federal agencies.

As called for the 10-Year Strategy, a steering group on the readiness of rural and volunteer firefighters performed an assessment. The following critical issues and actions were brought forward and warrant Congressional attention:

Although assistance programs for local fire departments exist, few resources are focused on the specific needs of rural and volunteer firefighters in the wildland-urban interface. The authors of the report call for a public investment in firefighting preparedness and increased interagency coordination at the local level. They believe such an investment will ultimately strengthen all wildland firefighting and emergency response efforts.

The report titled *The Changing Role and Needs of Local, Rural, and Volunteer Fire Departments in the Wildland-Urban Interface* highlights the importance of community-based first responders in quickly and effectively containing wildland fire starts before they become damaging, large-scale wildfires. The organizations that drafted the report called on lawmakers to support implementation of key recommendations that focus on initial fire response, firefighter training, comprehensive community fire planning, better integration of local forces into large-scale suppression efforts, interagency communications and the establishment of a "reserve firefighter" program.

The WGA commends this report to your attention. I have included a copy with my oral testimony.

Strategic Issues Panel on Fire Suppression Costs

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council chartered an interagency Panel to examine how to contain the costs of large fires. The WGA is chairing this panel. The 2003 fire season burned more than 3.7 million acres nationally and cost $1.5 billion to suppress. Many factors contributed to the high cost of fire suppression in 2003, including prolonged drought in the West; the need for agencies to support each other in fighting fires, the hot,

dry conditions in northern Rocky Mountains; the concentration of 2003 fires in forested areas where fires are difficult and expensive to contain; the increased need to protect structures in the "wildland urban interface" areas, the need to protect local property and economic values, and the high cost of deploying resources to prevent the spread of large fires.

The Strategic Issues Panel is developing new recommendations and guidance on the implementation of existing ones, including those identified in the Governors' 10-year strategy. The Panel will explore the relationship of large fires to land management plans and practices and whether new strategies would improve forest health and contain fire suppression costs. The panel will take a collaborative approach in seeking information from a broad range of stakeholders and in developing its findings and recommendations.

The panel is expected to issue recommendations in late spring. The report, at a minimum, will include findings, specific actions and recommendations on:

- The barriers and obstacles to cost containment,
- The strategies for cost containment success,
- The impediments to equitable sharing of suppression and cost apportionment among all jurisdictions,
- The criteria to measure cost containment success, and
- The relationship of fire management plans and resource management plans to suppression costs.

States and local governments are doing everything in their power to address the problem on state and private lands, and are concerned about cost shifting onto the backs of state and local government. The majority of western forests are under federal ownership and management and the situation we face is a direct result of past management practices on these lands. Therefore, the responsibility to pay for fire suppression is largely a federal responsibility. Congress should pass legislation to prevent the current practice of "borrowing" from fuels reduction funding sources to pay for suppression. By fully funding HFRA at the promised level of $760 million in new monies, we can achieve a tremendous amount of work on the ground which will result in reduced costs in fire suppression for the future.

Congress should closely consider the recommendations that are developed. Any cost saving that can be wrung out of suppression efforts should be reallocated to increase appropriations for the proactive forest health work called for in the Strategy and the HFRA. The only way to permanently decrease the funding needed for suppression is to provide the long-term funding that the states believe is required for proactive thinning, restoration/rehabilitation of forested lands and community assistance. Only then will catastrophic fires begin to become a thing of the past.

Adequate Funding is a Necessary Ingredient

Western Governors have consistently advocated for sufficient federal funding to tackle this growing problem. Hopefully, my testimony has made clear that it is hard to conceive of any other issue which is of greater importance to our Western States than this one.

To lead and assist communities in helping themselves, there are a number of tools available to the federal government. The USDA Forest Service and Department of Interior have a number of programs that fall under the broad category of community fire assistance. These Community Fire Assistance programs are designed to address wildfire response and hazard mitigation on non-federal lands. All of these programs leverage many times the level of federal investment and helps to spur communities in the direction of community wildfire protection.

- The cornerstone of these programs is the **State Fire Assistance** program. The program requires matching funds to deliver two primary objectives; improve state readiness and reduce hazardous fuel loads on non-federal lands.
- There are three programs that help rural and volunteer fire departments improve their wildland fire preparedness; **Volunteer Fire Assistance** (USFS), **Rural Fire Assistance** (BLM) and **Firefighter Assistance Grants** (FEMA). Taken together, these three federal programs provide fire departments essential wildland fire equipment and training as well as organizational assistance to form rural fire protection districts.
- The newest program, called the **Community & Private Land Fire Assistance** program, is designed specifically with communities in mind. It is meant to be a comprehensive, one-stop shop for all community fire assistance needs. From planning projects through the Community Wildfire Protection Plans under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to clearing defensible space, the CPLFA program is the one place communities can go to do it all.
- The **Economic Action Program** helps communities develop the market and business infrastructure necessary to treat and find uses for all the fiber being removed with fuel treatments. The results are more jobs in the local communities and reduced fuel treatment project costs as the biomass being removed can be utilized by the private sector.

All these community fire assistance programs encourage more federal, state and local relations and cooperation. They are a key ingredient in reducing the risk of wildfire to communities.

Select Western State Case Studies and Highlights on Collaboration

Montana

In Montana we have learned that there is common ground, and that there is opportunity for advancement. We proved we can move forward and we can make a difference. We can have exceptional water quality, abundant wildlife, flourishing fisheries and a host of other benefits, including economic opportunity through thoughtful forest management.

The Georgetown Lake Interagency Fuels Reduction Project is a partnership between the Georgetown Lake Volunteer Fire Department, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Headwaters RC&D, the US Forest Service, and homeowners living in the WUI. Treatments to reduce fuels have been performed across landownership that makes the best use of funding and resources. So far, 28 hazardous fuels contracts have been completed at an average cost per acre of $882. In all, 52 homesites have been treated along with fuel reduction on 60 acres, with plans to treat the adjacent federal lands. In the southwest part of the state, the DNRC is working with cooperators in administering 13 national Fire Plan Fuels Treatment Projects in eight communities resulting in 1,165 acres of treatment, and 1,070 homes made safer in the treatment area. Additionally, 70 acres of State lands within the WUI have been treated.

In partnership with the Bitterroot, Northwest, and Headwaters Resource Conservation and Development Councils, the tri-county fire council, and fire departments in Bigfork and the Missoula Valley, DNRC has nearly $3 million in fuel reduction projects beginning July 1, 2004 that will enable hundreds of forested homeowners to thin fuels around their homes, in locations spanning from Lincoln County to Missoula and Ravalli Counties in the north and southwest, to Lewis and Clark and Deer Lodge counties, to Carbon and Musselshell counties in the eastern part of the state..

DNRC participates in an interagency (BLM, USFS, DES, MACO, Fire Chiefs Assn., etc) group that is coordinating fuel reduction grants and projects around the state, in addition to facilitating the preparation of County Pre-disaster Mitigation Plans as required by FEMA in all Montana Counties by November 2004. They are working to ensure these PDM plans also meet the requirements of the Community Wildfire Protection Plans, which establish WUI boundaries as required by the HFRA for forest management projects to qualify as being in the interface, and may influence where federal funds are allocated for implementation on the National Forest System.

In Darby, Montana has the only Fuels for Schools Boiler currently operational in the western U.S., and has at least two more boilers at Philipsburg and Eureka that we expect to be operational within the next year. We have completed feasibility studies on approximately 20 additional schools, and identified the highest priority schools should additional funding become available.

New Mexico

In 2003, the New Mexico legislature created the New Mexico Fire Planning Task Force to work with local governments to reduce the threat of wildfires. The Task Force has membership from all levels of government and includes tribal participation as well. The Task Force has identified 220 communities within 18 Community Protection Zones in the state, and has indicated that 133 of those communities are at a high risk from wildfire. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, in consultation with tribal entities rated 34 communities at risk from wildfire. These communities at risk assessments will be updated annually. With this assessment in hand, New Mexico is in the midst of fuels treatment in the amount of 68, 918 acres including approximately 26,500 in the wildland urban interface.

Idaho

County planning effort across all of Idaho's counties are engaged. It is anticipated that every county in Idaho will have completed a collaboratively developed County Wildland Fire Assessment and Mitigation plan by the end of the 2004 calendar year. Wall-to-wall coverage in Idaho is a result of Governor Kempthorne's leadership in development of the Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan and excellent response and leadership at the local level by Idaho's counties and state and federal land management agencies).

- In essence, county plans contain not only the minimal requirements of the CWPP, but have far exceeded the minimum requirements in most cases, and therefore, will suffice as the CWPP for HFRA. There is some backing up to do in several counties in Northern and North Central Idaho where the federal projects were not initially included or consulted during the County planning process, and those efforts are on-going now. County plans have been developed collaboratively with open public processes and have been designed to satisfy:

    - The National Fire Plan/Western Governor's Collaborative Strategy/Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan
    - The FEMA/Bureau of Disaster Services wildfire chapter of the County all-hazard plans which are required by November 2004
    - The Healthy Forests Restoration Act's Community Wildfire Protection Plan

- $850,000 of Forest Service hazardous fuels dollars (Stevens authority) in partnership with the State Forester is being made available to Idaho's counties and communities for hazardous fuels reduction projects on non-federal lands in the wildland urban interface, adjacent to active Forest Service projects. The purpose of these projects is to minimize risk to communities from prescribed fire originating on the Forest Service lands. 1000-1500 acres will be thinned and treated to reduce risk over a three-year period. Project prioritization recommendations will be made by County Wildland Fire Interagency Groups, the Idaho Department of Lands, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group prior to a final selection of projects for funding by the Idaho State Forester in June of 2004.

    - Fuels for Schools – two pilot projects are underway in Idaho. The purpose of these projects is to expand the use of small-diameter trees removed in hazardous fuels reduction projects to heat local public schools. The two potential projects at Bonners Ferry and Council are expected to be operational by the fall of 2004. The Fuels For Schools program is a partnership program between the Region 1 and 4 Regional Foresters and the Idaho State Forester.

    - Wildland/Urban Interface Fuel Treatments - 3374 acres of hazardous fuels reduction work on non-federal land, i.e. homeowner and community defensible space projects have been accomplished by county and community partners of the Idaho Department of Lands and Forest Service since 2001.

Colorado

In Colorado, the Front Range Fuel Treatment Partnership (FRFTP) is the best example of cross-jurisdictional collaboration, planning and implementation on forest health. Efforts have begun in six high-priority landscape-scale areas. Work included planning and coordination of treatments between state and federal agencies, local governments and private landowners to address insect infestations, other forest health problems and fuels.

Collaboration on the science of fuel treatments is critical as well. Colorado has established The Wildland Fire Geo-Spatial Support Center on a cooperative basis with Environmental Systems Research Institute Inc., The US Forest Service and the Colorado State Forest Service to support fuel mitigation and fire protection in the FRFTP area. One of the proposed treatment projects, for example, covers 250 square miles of forest land and accurate geo-spatial data is imperative if treatments are to come up to scale. A FRFTP web site has been established at (http://www.rockymountainwildlandfire.info/frftp.htm) to aid in information dissemination to communities, landowners and partners.

Funding has been approved for nine projects under the FRFTP that will improve forest health conditions, treat existing pest-infected trees, and reduce fuels on state and private lands. These projects are in the wildland-urban interface. Planning and pre-work are underway and full-scale operations have begun across project lands of more than 750 acres. In addition to the FRFTP-funded projects, 56 FY 2003 Competitive State Fire Assistance sub-grants totaling $2,137,550 have been approved for various entities within the FRFTP project area.

Arizona

The 2002 Rodeo-Chediski fire (462,000 acres; 426 structures lost) and the 2003 Aspen fire (84,750 acres; 333 structures lost) exemplify what is at stake in the wildland-urban interface for the state. As part of Governor Napolitano's comprehensive forest health and safety plan the Arizona State Land Department has prioritized wildfire mitigation efforts on protecting homes and communities in the wildland-urban interface. This does not preclude the need to restore all of Arizona's forests to a healthy condition, but ensures that limited state resources are directed to the highest priority areas and the protection of Arizona's citizens.

The results are notable. Since the inception of the National Fire Plan in 2001, the state has treated 29,355 acres within the wildland-urban interface, resulting in the protection of 12,145 homes. Further, federal community fire assistance investments have leveraged over $10 million from the local communities. The result of that federal investment has spurred local action and resulted in twice as much work getting done on the ground.

Through the collaborative processes set up by the Governor that involve federal, state and local stakeholders, the state is working to help communities write community wildfire plans. And with the state in an above average potential for wildfire for April through June this year, Arizona is facing a continued challenge in mitigating wildfire's impacts on communities.

California

In October 2003, Southern California experienced the most devastating wildland urban interface fire disaster in its history. A total of 739,597 acres were burned, 3,631 homes were destroyed, 36 commercial properties were incinerated, 1169 outbuildings destroyed, 246 people were injured and 24 lives were lost, including one firefighter. The aftermath of the fire saw even greater loss of life when 16 people perished in a flash flood/mudslide due to loss of vegetation impacted by the fires. The state established a Blue Ribbon Fire Commission that conducted a review of the efforts to fight these fires and present recommendations to lessen the vulnerability to such disasters in the future.

One of the key findings from the California report is that community involvement is essential to helping implement necessary fire prevention and fire safety programs at the local level. For example, during the Old Fire in California last fall, the San Bernardino County mountain communities surrounding the greater Lake Arrowhead area were threatened and mandatory evacuation orders were issued to all residents. Approximately 80,000 residents evacuated during this period. No one was trapped or injured in the Old Fire. Instrumental in the successful evacuation of the residents was the fire and disaster preparedness work of the partnerships of the Fire Safe Councils.

Arrowhead Communities Fire Safe Council, Mountain Rim Fire Safe Council, and the Big Bear Fire Safe Council worked directly with agencies of the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) to develop strategic evacuation pre-fire planning. Utilizing "town-hall meetings" with educational pamphlets, maps and news releases, these volunteer groups helped properly prepare residents well in advance of the 2003 wildfire siege. The pre-fire activities of the area helped to improve the ability of the people and homes to survive.

The Fire Safe Council program is one of the active partnerships by local communities with public agencies for the purpose of community education and fire safety practices. Major partners include the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), San Bernardino County Fire Department, US Forest Service, Cal Trans, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, Southern California Edison, the California Conservation Corps and several local fire districts. The Fire Safe Council fulfills its mission to preserve California's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe, by utilizing the combined expertise, resources and distribution channels of its members.

The Fire Safe Council and MAST programs are community-based programs that should be identified as "model programs" demonstrating best practices. They have proven to be an extremely beneficial partnership between the community residents, business owners and responsible governmental agencies.

Conclusions

Thank you again for holding this very important hearing. This is an issue of great importance to those of us from the West. We are hopeful, however, that in utilizing these new authorities; with continued attention by Congress; continued collaboration and cooperation between federal agencies, states, and local stakeholders; and with adequate funding, we will continue to make progress towards fixing this problem. As I noted earlier in my testimony, there are few issues which are of greater importance to the West and we urge Congress to continue to make forest health a priority.

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