



THOMAS M. FRANKLIN

Wildlife Policy Director

The Wildlife Society

5410 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 200

Bethesda, MD 20814-2197

Telephone: (301)897-9770 FAX: (301)530-2471

Internet: tws@wildlife.org

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To: Eastside Forests Scientific Society Panel;  
Presidents of Washington, Oregon and Idaho Chapters  
President Northwest Section

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- Could we discuss?

The attached testimony is provided for your information. TWS collaborated with AFS on this statement regarding the Columbia Basin ecosystem study.

Thanks again for your efforts.

Tom



*American Fisheries Society*

5410 GROSVENOR LANE, SUITE 110 • BETHESDA, MARYLAND 20814-2199  
(301) 897-8616, 897-8621 • FAX (301) 897-8096

PAUL J. WINGATE  
*President 1995-1996*

PAUL BROUHA  
*Executive Director*

**Testimony of Paul Brouha**  
**Executive Director on behalf of the**  
**American Fisheries Society and The Wildlife Society**

**Regarding**

**The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem**  
**Management Project**

**Presented before**  
**The Interior Appropriations Subcommittee**

**May 7, 1996**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, the American Fisheries Society (AFS) appreciates your invitation to testify regarding the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project. The American Fisheries Society is an international organization of more than 9,000 fisheries and aquatic science professionals. Chartered in 1870, AFS is the world's oldest and largest scientific body dedicated to the advancement of fisheries science and the conservation of renewable aquatic resources. Our members come from colleges, universities, state and federal agencies, Tribes, and the Private sector. The Wildlife Society is the international association of over 9,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers.

The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project has come about as the result of the realization that large scale ecosystem planning and management on the basis of sound science is the only way to ensure our land management agencies discharge their public trust responsibilities to this and future generations of Americans. Scientists have come to realize that only by considering the variety of life and its processes at four levels in a biological hierarchy can we ensure the retention of the capacity to support and maintain a balanced, integrated, adaptive and productive biological community through time. Genetic, species, ecosystem, and landscape levels must be considered if we are to develop and implement ecologically sound management programs that will provide present and future generations with a sustainable suite of benefits (services and products) from forests and their associated resources. Looking at healthy aquatic and terrestrial systems we can readily see multiple benefits: clean water that requires less treatment for human use; naturally-controlled flooding that reduces damage to human developments in floodplains--roads, bridges, farmland, structures; deeper sediment-free waterways that need less dredging to maintain navigation; and productive naturally sustained subsistence, commercial, and recreational fisheries. Healthy wildlife habitat provides a multitude of wildlife oriented recreational opportunities such as hunting, viewing, and nature study. All these uses sustainably return enormous economic and social benefits to Americans.

For the past decade and a half the "big timber" forests of western Washington and Oregon have been a national focus because of their critical role in supporting the economic and ecological health of the Pacific Northwest. The debate resulted in the 1993 Northwest Forest Conference and the development for the first time of a planning framework that considered the four hierarchical levels mentioned above. The national forests and public lands east of the Cascade Crest are no less important, yet upon examination in 1992 we found no synthesis of scientific information about their status or the status of their biological resources was available. Our examination was occasioned by the request of a bipartisan group of seven members of the House of Representatives who approached several scientific societies to "initiate a review and report on the eastside forests of Washington and Oregon." The Eastside Forests Scientific Society Panel's mandate was to review the status of all eastside forests and their associated resources. The panel included aquatic, wildlife, and forest scientists. Their report was completed in 1994 and, without exception, I would like to offer it as an exhibit to accompany the record of this hearing.

From the review our panel learned that the extent of old-growth forest ecosystems has shrunk dramatically during the twentieth century. Forest harvest and other human actions have changed the character of many other components of eastside landscapes, including rivers and their populations of resident and migratory salmonid fishes. The combined effects of logging old growth and fire suppression have significantly increased the vulnerability of eastside landscapes to catastrophic fires and outbreaks of forest pests that have the potential to further threaten what are already severely reduced and degraded habitats.

Present amounts of old-growth forest on the eastside are far below historic levels. Only from 8% (on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest) to 32% (on the Deschutes National Forest) of old growth is protected administratively. From 70 to 95% of the patches that remain cover less than 100 acres each--too small to provide for the basic needs of many old growth-associated species. Many areas set aside in current forest plans as "designated old growth" are not old growth. The overlap of actual and "designated" old growth varies significantly among national forests: in Winema National Forest, only 16% of designated old-growth patches contain more than 70% actual old-growth forest, but in Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, 70% of designated old growth patches do. Ponderosa pine forests have been especially hard hit by logging. Only 3-5% of the original ponderosa climax old growth remains in Deschutes National Forest, 2-8% in Fremont National Forest. At the regional scales, late successional/old growth comprises only 25% of forested lands in 8 eastside forests where data were available.

The impact of human actions in eastside forests goes well beyond logging. Road construction, grazing, mining, and fire control also degraded forests and associated resources.

What does all this alteration and disturbance of natural systems add up to? Aquatic systems have been compromised and large numbers of fishes and amphibians now face extinction in watersheds throughout the eastside. Salmon production in the Columbia Basin has declined to less than 5% of its historic levels. At least 106 major populations of migratory salmon and steelhead trout have been extirpated on the West Coast, many of these east of the Cascades. Resident fishes are also affected--24 of 25 at-risk species in Oregon occur exclusively in eastside waters. In Oregon and further east in Idaho and Montana resident native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout have been reduced to fragmented and isolated populations that are very susceptible to catastrophic natural events. Riparian corridors along rivers, streams, and lakes have been damaged by logging, road construction, and grazing throughout the interior Columbia Basin. In addition to threatening biological integrity, this destruction threatens the flow of high-quality sediment-free water for use by humans. In the uplands, wildlife species dependent on old growth--the pine marten, northern goshawk, pileated woodpecker, and flammulated owl have been jeopardized. Disturbed soils on steep slopes, especially pumice and granitic soils, have been eroded contributing to stream siltation and reduced soil fertility. Reestablishment of forest cover on such eroded areas may no longer be possible or may take longer than on stable sites where fertility has been maintained.

As a result of its evaluation the Eastside Scientific Panel made 12 interim recommendations to protect the remaining resources "until, and only until, a long term strategy of protection and restoration can be developed." The recommendations concentrate on remaining old-growth forests, aquatic diversity areas, roadless regions, riparian corridors, and soils because these elements are the basic building blocks for restoring the eastside landscape. In making the recommendations the Eastside Panel offered its best professional opinions and they also called for the creation of a second "...panel with broad expertise to develop long-term management guidelines for securing the ability of eastside forests to resist drought, crown fires, and catastrophic outbreaks of insects and pathogens." They also called for this panel to "develop a coordinated strategy for restoring the eastside landscape and its component ecosystems. Emphasize protecting the health and integrity of regional biological systems as well as the processes on which they depend." We expect the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project to provide much of the necessary analysis.

Did the Eastside Scientific Panel presume that "one size fits all" when it comes to the management of forests? No, they acknowledged existing forest plans are inadequate to address the complex ecological issues in eastside forests and to address how to restore, in an integrated fashion, the regional landscapes and their resources. Because federal lands are only a part

(about half) of interior Columbia Basin landscapes that contain significant private, state, and tribal holdings, regional programs must be grounded in cooperation among diverse groups. The future integrity and health of regional landscapes depends on protecting the elements and processes within them on public as well as private lands. Basin-wide standards and guidelines which reflect national policies must be tailored by these groups to the inventoried status of the natural resources across the landscapes on each forest and district. Future strategies must be developed by multidisciplinary teams and citizens who have excellent information about local resource conditions.

In closing let me address one other issue raised by the Subcommittee in its invitation to testify. That issue is the cost of the project. Chief Thomas and Director Dombeck will, I'm sure provide the exact figures, but the point I wish to make is that in wrangling over the spotted owl issue for more than a decade the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in California spent more than \$37 million. As a result of insufficient ecosystem-level analysis and inconsistent forest-by-forest direction the spotted owl controversy tied up the forests of the Pacific Northwest for more than a decade at untold cost. The alternative to basin-wide planning is to fight region-by-region, forest-by-forest, district-by-district, and project-by-project as we fritter away time and options to successfully manage these landscapes to sustainably produce the suites of products, services, and values humankind needs.

Political leaders have acknowledged the citizens of this country can't afford to live with deficit budgets and our national debt. Well, we can't afford to live with continued conservation deficits and the resulting natural resource debt that a piecemeal approach to Columbia Basin management will produce either. Whatever the cost, it is sure to be an acceptable price to pay to restore and maintain the predictable stream of conservation and economic benefits we must have if Americans are to sustain their quality of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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