

Dale Bosworth

June 1966 - Graduated University of Idaho, BS Forestry

June 1966 – September 1969 -- GS 5/7 Forester, St. Joe NF, Avery RD, Avery, ID

September 1969 – September 1970 – GS 7 Forester, Kaniksu NF, Newport RD, Newport, WA

September 1970 – December 1973 – GS 9 Supervisory Forester, Colville NF, Republic RD, Republic, WA

December 1973 – October 1976 – GS 11 Timber Planner, Lolo NF, Missoula, MT

October 1976 – November 1979 – GS 12 District Ranger, Clearwater NF, Powell RD, Idaho

November 1979 – June 1983 – GS 13 Planning Staff Officer/ Deputy Forest Supervisor Flathead NF,
Kalispell, MT

June 1983 – August 1986 – GS 14 Deputy Director Planning, Programming and Budgeting Staff, Northern
Regional Office, Missoula, MT

August 1986 – February 1990 – GS 14 Forest Supervisor Wasatch-Cache NF, Salt Lake City, UT

February 1990 – May 1992 – GS 15 Deputy Director, Timber Management Staff, Washington, DC

May 1992 – May 1994 – GS 15 Deputy Regional Forester, Pacific Southwest Region, San Francisco, CA

May 1994 – October 1997 Regional Forester, Intermountain Region, Ogden, UT

October 1997 – April 2001 Regional Forester, Northern Region, Missoula, MT

April 2001 – February 2007 Chief, Washington, DC

DALE BOSWORTH

I worked for the California Division of Forestry on an engine crew for two summers when I was 17 and 18 years old. I worked one summer for the Forest Service, marking timber on the Payette National Forest in McCall, Idaho. Due to nepotism rules, I wasn't able to work for the Forest Service as a summer employee in 1964 and 1965, so I worked for the BLM doing timber inventory and timber cruising.

From June 1966 through December 1973, all jobs were associated with timber management. That included timber sale preparation and contract administration, reforestation, thinning, and slash disposal. I worked part time in other areas, including recreation, wildlife and prescribed burning. I was available for fire assignments and often called on for initial attack and project fires.

In 1974, I was responsible for conducting a timber inventory of the Lolo National Forest. I hired an 18 person summer crew and oversaw the field work. For the next two years, I completed the office work portion of the inventory in preparation for a timber management plan.

I was District Ranger on the Powell Ranger District, Clearwater National Forest from October 1976 to November 1979. The Powell Ranger District includes the headwaters of the Lochsa River. The ranger station is considered a remote location. The nearest large town is Missoula, Montana, which is over 50 miles away. The ranger station had a one room school providing education for first through eighth graders. The primary work on the District was timber management, recreation and wilderness management.

Forest Planning under the National Forest Management Act began around 1978. I was responsible for the preparation of the Flathead Forest Plan. During my time on the Flathead, we developed a proposed Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The plan was controversial, in that it reduced the timber harvest significantly.

My assignment in the Northern Regional Office as a planner was to assist forests in development of their plans, and to provide appropriate staff work for the Regional Forester to make final decisions on forest plans. During that time, I accompanied Chief Max Peterson at two hearings, one regarding a Montana wilderness bill, and the other an oversight hearing for the Greater Yellowstone Area.

The Wasatch-Cache National Forest is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. There are several major ski areas on the forest. During my time as Forest Supervisor, Utah made their first bid for the 2002 Winter Olympics. The forest had one of the heaviest recreation workloads in the country. Oil and gas development was very active on the north slope of the High Uinta Mountains, which was very controversial. The Snow Basin Ski Area proposed a large land exchange during that time and my decision to allow 230 acres, as opposed to the 1320 acres requested, was by far the most controversial decision I had been involved in up to that point in my career.

I became Deputy Director of Timber Management at Forest Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C. in early 1990. The spotted owl controversy was the major issue of the time. During the two years I was in that position, timber harvest dropped by about 50%.

Employee issues, salvage logging, California spotted owl, and fire were the major issues during my time as Deputy Regional Forester in the Pacific Southwest Region. Ron Stewart was Regional Forester during that time.

Jack Ward Thomas was Chief when I became Regional Forester for the Intermountain Region. The Snowbasin land exchange was still an issue. Utah won the bid for the Winter Olympics for 2002. The salvage rider was passed and implementation was controversial. The Interior Columbia Basin Environmental Impact Study began and I was a member of the executive steering committee. As Regional Forester, I was a member of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. Salmon and steelhead were major issues in the Idaho portion of the region. INFISH, a strategy for conservation of inland species of fish was developed. Bull trout became listed under the Endangered Species Act. The summers of 1994 and 1996 were very difficult fire seasons for the Intermountain Region. Salvage logging after the fires was controversial. The Carson City Ranger Station office and the District Ranger's home were bombed. Grazing issues in Nevada continued to be difficult, as ranchers refused to comply with grazing permits.

I became Regional Forester for the Northern Region in 1997. Mike Dombeck was Chief. Reintroduction of grizzly bears into the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness was being considered, and was extremely controversial. Wolves were reintroduced in central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park. I was chair for the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee for two years. The Canada Lynx became listed as a threatened species. Timber harvesting was a continuing issue. I was asked by Mike Dombeck to lead a team to develop a road policy and also recommend to him how to manage the roadless issue. I was on an advisory committee for the development of a new planning rule. The 2000 fire season was a benchmark year for fires in the nation, and much of that was in the Northern Region. Public hearings were held on the roadless rule and the entire process was extremely controversial in the Northern Region. The National Grasslands in North Dakota were separated from the Custer National Forest, and the Dakota Prairie Grassland unit was created to deal with the ongoing grazing controversy.



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Agencies release off-highway vehicle plan

By EVE BYRON Helena Independent Record

Motorized vehicles must stay on roads and trails on 16 million acres of federal lands in Montana and North and South Dakota, under a newly released plan.

Representatives of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management unveiled the plan in Helena. They called it the first step toward creating a designated road and trail route for four-wheelers and motorcycles.

The plan prohibits cross-country travel for off-highway motorized vehicles on public property in the three states. Travel on existing roads and trails will be allowed, but those routes will be evaluated during the next few years to assess which should remain open and which should be blocked.

"This decision is the first step toward our long-term goal of designating routes," said Regional Forester Dale Bosworth. "The second step is to set in motion site-specific planning for which of those existing roads and trails people will be able to use in the future."

The plan takes effect this week on Forest Service land and after a 30-day protest period on BLM property. It does not affect snowmobiling, which will be covered under individual travel plans.

Doug Abelin, who represents many of those who use motorized vehicles for recreation on public lands, heralded Friday's release of the final environmental impact statement as an "important and straightforward" document that his group strongly supports.

"We feel there's two, maybe three shortfalls in the document that we think site-specific management should address – like the definition of what will be a trail that's OK with both agencies and what is acceptable enforcement for both agencies – so users have a standard," Abelin said.

"I'm not speaking for all motorized users. But, for those of us involved with this, we support it adamantly."

John Gatchell, conservation director for the Montana Wilderness Association, called the plan "pretty pathetic."

"Every year, we're losing pack and saddle trails and foot trails to motorized vehicles. These trails are being destroyed," Gatchell said. "It's a boon to the ATV-ers, and the rest of Montanans are losing something that's irreplaceable."

A major flaw in the plan is that it will take years to evaluate each individual trail and road, Gatchell

said. In the meantime, motorized vehicle riders can continue to ride on – and denature – illegally created trails and roads.

For example, under the plan, it is legal for a motorcyclist to ride on a single-track trail, even if it's only a game trail with vegetation on it. Bosworth acknowledged that this could significantly damage the trail, but noted that the Forest Service already has the ability to close an area or specific road to traffic if it deems necessary.

"I admit there may be some gray areas," he said. "They need to be dealt with on a local travel planning basis."

The plan prohibits four-wheeled ATV's on single-track trails, but they're allowed on trails with two tracks. Trucks are not allowed on two-track trails when their wheel base is wider than the trail, but ATVs can go on roads that are wider than their wheel base.

If a trail is two tracks in some places but single-track in other sections, only motorcycles would be allowed on it.

Government vehicles also are affected by this plan, said Mat Millenbach, BLM state director. He said they also are prohibited from traveling off-road except for specific purposes, such as law enforcement, safety, search and rescue operations or surveying.

Millenbach noted that this final plan is different from the draft released last year in that it no longer allows for cross-country travel by motorized vehicle riders for game retrieval.

Regulation of off-highway vehicles on federal lands goes back to the early 1970s, when an executive order said it was acceptable to use them on public lands. But, between 1990 and 1998, ATV use increased by 92 percent on Forest Service and BLM property in the three-state area, Bosworth said.

"Most use occurs on trails and roads, but there's some cross-country use," he said. "And that's where our concerns are."

The two agencies got together to work on the off-highway-vehicle plan in 1998 and released their draft management proposal in October 1999. Shortly afterward, the BLM decided to craft a national policy on OHV use.

The draft policy, released in December, directed the agency to better enforce existing laws and improve communication between national and field offices.

Millenbach said the three-state policy complies with the direction laid out in the national policy.

April 13, 2001

Forest Service Choice Is Praised by Conservation and Timber Forces

By CHRISTOPHER MARQUIS

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today appointed Dale N. Bosworth, a career forestry official, as the new chief of the Forest Service.

The selection drew tentative praise from conservationists and representatives of the timber industry, who noted that the Bush administration was preparing to announce policy decisions that could affect the nation's forests for decades.

Mr. Bosworth, a regional forester who manages 12 national forests in northern Idaho, Montana and North and South Dakota, will oversee an organization of more than 30,000 employees and an annual budget of \$4.6 billion.

In announcing her choice, Ms. Veneman said Mr. Bosworth's "background and experience will make him a great addition to our team."

Mr. Bosworth, 57, will succeed Michael P. Dombeck, who was an architect of a number of Clinton administration initiatives to protect forests from development, including a ban on road building in about 60 million acres of federal land.

Mr. Dombeck resigned last month, after Bush administration officials told him they wanted to take policy in "a different direction," aides said.

Mr. Dombeck nevertheless praised the selection of Mr. Bosworth, who he said had played an important role in the road-building ban and in a strategy to place greater emphasis on ecological impact over commercial interests.

Mr. Bosworth is "a great choice," Mr. Dombeck said, adding, "Dale was instrumental in developing key parts of the Forest Service's natural resource agenda and led development of the roads rule."

The Bush administration is studying the road-building ban, and is expected to announce on May 4 or earlier whether it will keep the policy.

The ban has been strongly opposed by the timber industry and oil and gas interests, who accused the Clinton administration of seeking to lock up valuable resources. The Bush administration has not defended the ban, which has been challenged in court by the State of Idaho and the Boise Cascade timber company.

Mr. Bosworth will be called on to make his own recommendation on the policy almost immediately. The Clinton administration's rules would ban most timber cutting in the areas, which make up about one-third of the national forests. They would also bar most new oil, gas and mining operations in the areas.

Environmentalists and industry officials alike say it will be a litmus test on the direction in which Mr. Bosworth will lead the Forest Service. Each side voiced optimism that he would lean its way.

Michael Klein, a spokesman for the American Forest and Paper Association, a national trade group for forest products, predicted that Mr. Bosworth, as a former regional forester, would be sympathetic to the appeals of industry and local governments. Mr. Klein said the new chief was also very likely act to protect forests from catastrophic wildfires and disease and infestation by allowing for greater road access and controlled burns. "He inherits the worst forest health crisis in the history of the national forest service," Mr. Klein said.

But Michael A. Francis, the director of the national forest program at the Wilderness Society, said Mr. Bosworth had always been accessible and sensitive to the concerns of those who sought to keep forests pristine.

"We feel he has a conservationist ethic," Mr. Francis said. "It's a question whether he's going to be allowed to implement the new policy or will he have the forces of darkness in the Bush administration undermine the direction the Forest Service has taken in the last four years."



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Bosworth receives broad support

By **SABRA AYRES Medill News Service**

WASHINGTON —Montana environmental groups and timber industry representatives Friday said that they were encouraged by the Bush administration's choice of Dale Bosworth for Forest Service chief.

Citing Bosworth's long history with Montana wilderness, the two sides agreed that the choice, made by Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, would be successful in managing the state's forest.

"We have some special problems in Montana in terms of timber supplies," said Keith Olson, executive director of Montana Logging Association. "As a regional forester, Bosworth is intimately familiar with these problems."

Bob Ekey of the Wilderness Society's Bozeman office, said Bosworth had taken successful, new approaches to regional issues in the past. He was instrumental in establishing stewardship contracts to manage timber areas, Ekey said.

"We are hopeful that this appointment is an effort to depoliticize the Forest Service," Ekey said.

Montana lawmakers have also supported the new chief. Democratic Sen. Max Baucus said he was confident Bosworth would take "Montana's common-sense values with him to Washington."

"Dale has been a strong advocate for practices that protect forest health, our economy and jobs, and public access to our federal lands," Baucus said.

Rep. Denny Rehberg, a Republican, agreed and said Bosworth's efforts during last summer's severe forest fires helped bring Montana's communities together.

Bosworth, 57, has worked for the Forest Service for 35 years. Most recently, he was stationed in Missoula, where he was the regional forester. The position included overseeing 12 national forests and four national grasslands in Montana, Idaho, North Dakota and South Dakota. Bosworth will replace former chief Mike Dombeck, who was appointed during the Clinton administration. Dombeck called Bosworth's appointment "a great choice."

Dombeck said Bosworth played an important role in the 2000 ban on road building in national forests.

That policy has been criticized by the timber industry because of the limited access it creates. The Bush administration has said it will review the policy next month.

Olson, of the Montana Logging Association, and other forest products representatives, have urged the president to reverse the order

"We are coming out of an administration that was hostile to the timber industry," Olson said. "Bosworth can restore the public's faith. The bottom line is, his job is not to appeal to every group. His job is to be a steward of the forests."

Wilderness Society representative Ekey said Bosworth's reputation for balancing both sides of issues would be good for Montana forests. He said he hoped Bosworth would continue to pay attention to what he saw as America's growing interest in protecting national forests for its wildlife, recreational uses and ecological integrity.

"The issue is less about Bosworth and more about what the American public is calling for," Ekey said.

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Opinion: Bosworth pick good for the region and Forest Service

Gazette Opinion

A veteran forester with a strong background in Western natural resources will move from Missoula to Washington, D.C., to become the new chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Dale Bosworth's appointment to the top forest job drew praise from timber industry representatives as well as some conservationists and members of Congress – both Democratic and Republican.

The positive reaction bodes well for Bosworth and his leadership of an agency responsible for 192 million acres of national forest land, 30,000 employees and a \$4.6 billion budget. Bosworth, 57, has been with the Forest Service for 35 years.

As regional forester for the 12 forests of the Northern Region, which includes Montana, Bosworth has weathered many controversies in the past four years. His decisions have not always pleased environmentalists; they haven't always pleased forest developers. That balancing act is crucial to Forest Service leadership.

Last summer, Bosworth spoke on the roadless initiative that was the subject of numerous public hearings, adopted by the Clinton administration and now under consideration for elimination by the Bush administration. Bosworth said: "There's a reason why these areas are still roadless. If they had a lot of timber in them, and they were accessible, we would have build roads into them and logged them 30 years ago. ... One of my fears is that we would one day end up with everything being either roaded, or wilderness. I think these roadless areas provide something in between."

Last summer, Bosworth instituted efforts to repair fire damages from the huge blazes that burned millions of forest acres. He's approved mine cleanup plans. He's dealt with internal friction in USDA agencies. In September 1998, it was Bosworth who ceremoniously received the deed to the New World Mine site, the last act of settling the controversial plan for mining gold in the high country near Yellowstone National Park. In December 1998, Bosworth approved construction of a bison capture facility near West Yellowstone, saying: "We want to help the state minimized the number of disease-exposed bison that have to be killed in Montana."

In 1999, Bosworth began testing a new idea in timber sales, emphasizing the end condition of the land, not the board feet of wood provided. "This is an end-results approach," Bosworth said at the time. "The emphasis is on collaboration up front with the community."

Montana's entire congressional delegation applauded Bosworth's appointment last week. We agree with Denny Rehberg, Max Baucus and Conrad Burns. Bosworth's record shows he's a solid choice to head an agency responsible for millions of acres of public lands in Montana and Wyoming. He has a deep understanding of our region's forest issues. We look for Bosworth to continue to work for balance among the competing interests on our public lands.

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Bosworth won't forget where he came from

By SHERRY DEVLIN of the Missoulian

Here is what Dale Bosworth, the new chief of the U.S. Forest Service, wants the American people to know about him.

He will never say something that he does not believe.

He grew up in the Forest Service and has never worked anywhere else. When he got his first job, he just really, really hoped that someday he would be a district ranger. He got that chance on the Powell Ranger District, high on the Idaho side of the Bitterroot Mountains. It was a great job.

He never aspired to be the agency's chief, but he is humbled and flattered by the appointment. He really wants to make a difference.

He is afraid of overshooting his headlights – of believing that he can do more than is realistically or politically possible. He is afraid the big issues will be so divisive that they will overtake everything else.

He is 57 years old. His home is in Missoula, and his children graduated from high school and college here. When he finishes up in Washington, he is coming back to Missoula for the rest of his life.

But he's got a few things he wants to do first.

"It's really important to me to try and make a difference," said Bosworth, who until Friday was the regional forester responsible for the 13 national forests in Montana and northern Idaho – the Forest Service's Northern Region.

"Probably my biggest fear is I don't want to be naive in thinking I can make a bigger difference than I can," he said. "I don't want to end up after however long I'm chief, looking back and thinking that things have unraveled. I really want the Forest Service to be a highly respected, highly valued, trustworthy organization."

On Monday morning, when he walks into the chief's office as its 15th occupant, Bosworth will do so remembering the days he spent riding alongside his forest-supervisor father in a green Forest Service rig, taking notes as they inventoried national forests in northern California.

When young Bosworth announced he might go into forestry, his dad warned that the pay "wasn't real good" and the life none too easy. But Bosworth saw how much his dad loved the Forest Service, and how committed his co-workers were to what they were doing.

"It got me to thinking that it can't be a bad outfit if everybody who works there believes in it so much," he said.

So, too, does Bosworth believe in the agency where he has now spent 35 years – all his working life. "If we can get people working together, there just about isn't anything that this agency can't do," he said during a break from packing mementos in his Missoula office.

But the Forest Service needs to rebuild relationships both inside and outside of the agency, Bosworth said. "There's a real disconnect between the four levels of our organization, between our national headquarters, our regional offices, forest supervisors' offices and ranger districts. And we really need to rebuild that connection so we are all on the same page.

"People on the ranger districts, I don't know that they really clearly understand what the Washington office is trying to do, and I don't think the Washington office understands as well as they could the difficulty a district ranger has in getting the job done."

Does Bosworth – himself a former district ranger, forest supervisor and regional forester – know how to restore that connection? "Yes," he said, "I think I do."

"I think it's getting people to spend more time out on the ranger districts, talking to people and getting feedback about what's working and what's not. It's having more of an open door policy in Washington, so when a district ranger comes to Washington, they come and visit with the chief or the associate chiefs. That they are welcome to do that and encouraged to do that."

Bosworth intends to spend a good bit of time out on the national forests. So will the people who work for him in Washington. And he's going to bring forest-level folks to Washington on special assignment – to help write policies that make sense to those who do the implementation.

"I really think we've got to get our focus more to the ground," Bosworth said. "You can come up with a new policy or process, but if it doesn't end up getting work done on the ground – or in working for people in our communities – then it really isn't providing much."

Too many of the day-to-day decisions have been bumped up a level over the years, he said. Forest supervisors are making decisions that district rangers ought to make. Regional foresters are making decisions better suited to forest supervisors. And there 's too much policy coming out of Washington.

"It still makes sense to have national policy," Bosworth said. "But it ought to be more general policy."

Then folks in the Forest Service's Washington office could spend more of their time reviewing the work coming out of regions, forests and ranger districts. "You set a general kind of policy, and then you follow up with accountability," he said. "You have a team go out and do a review and find out whether the forests are following the policy. Then you hold people accountable for that."

"I think we've slipped up in the last several years in our review process," Bosworth said. "I mean, we have the Office of Inspector General and the General Accounting Office finding problems in the Forest Service that we ought to be finding ourselves. We ought to find those things and we ought to correct them, so that when the OIG comes out, they don't find anything."

Outside the agency, Bosworth wants to engage the American public in honest and straightforward talk about their national forests – and their national needs.

"It disappoints me if we're a country that believes we can just go to other countries and use their natural resources in a way that doesn't take care of their land," he said. "But because we're rich and because we're more powerful and because of the economic situation, we can go do that. Then we sit here sort of smugly and say we're protecting our forests. But what are we doing to the rest of the world?"

"It seems to me," Bosworth said, "that we ought to be putting more emphasis on how we can live within our means, how we can use our natural resources in a very environmentally sensitive way. Obviously, with our population, we are going to be exporting and importing and all those kind of things, but to just sit here and say we don't want to cut any trees on our national forests, we don't want to do any oil drilling, we don't want to do any mining anywhere in our country, that we want to get all that stuff from someplace else doesn't make sense to me."

"It doesn't seem ethical to me, and I would like to be able to start talking more about that."

Bosworth said he doubts that his tenure as chief will be marked by revolutionary change in national forest management. But he would like to encourage an evolution toward "balance and intelligent use."

"I really believe that rural America is an important part of the structure of our country," he said, "and I think that having healthy communities is important to all of us. That doesn't mean we have to go back to the days when we were cutting 11 billion board feet of timber off the national forests. It's not anything like that at all. It's more how do we balance the need to have a healthy environment with the need to use some of our natural resources in an intelligent way."

He has had but one half-hour meeting with Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, "about a month ago when they started thinking this stuff through." He's met several times with her acting deputy undersecretary.

But Bosworth's sense is that Veneman – an appointee of President George W. Bush – wants the chief to run the Forest Service, and that neither she nor her deputy want to micromanage the agency.

There are some policy issues that the administration wants to hold onto, Bosworth said. Bush has rolled back a number of controversial initiatives announced in the Clinton administration's final weeks – actions that prompted the resignation of Mike Dombeck, Bosworth's predecessor as Forest Service chief.

"There are political decisions and professional decisions, and there's a need for both," the new chief said. "It looks to me like a very positive kind of relationship. They want to hire a chief and let him run the Forest Service. Then the administration will do their part in setting policy. That's good. It fits well with the way I believe things ought to operate."

Likely the most controversial of the on-hold policies is Clinton's so-called roadless initiative, which prohibited road building or commercial logging on 43 million acres of roadless national forest land. Bosworth doesn't know what will happen with the roadless issue, but he was disappointed with the Clinton administration's final decision.

"I was disappointed with the ban on commercial timber sales," he said. "That wasn't in the draft proposal. I just thought we ended up going further than we should have. It just seemed to widen the chasm."

When the Forest Service asked the public for comment on the roadless initiative, Bosworth stood before a rally of nearly 3,000 loggers and millworkers in Missoula and promised them that his agency cared about what they had to say.

Then the agency broadened the initiative to include more – not less – of the prohibitions that angered the timber industry. And the workers got even angrier.

"You have to work within a framework of national desires and national policy, because national forests are owned by all of the American people," Bosworth said. "But a lot of times, people who are affected the most directly feel like they have the least to say about what happens. We've got to find some better ways of keeping those people engaged and involved."

Even though the Forest Service held hundreds of public meetings and received more than a million comments on the roadless initiative, the process felt rushed, Bosworth said. "When we move too quickly, we leave people in the dust. It's hard to have a lot of credibility when it feels like a policy was rushed through."

Whether it's a neighborhood timber sale or a new national policy, the Forest Service is better served if it takes a little longer and works more closely with local people, he said. "If we take the extra time to work through it, we can end up doing the same thing, but have an entirely different outcome in terms of the support and the commitment and the understanding of people."

There are places where the Forest Service should cut trees, he said. But they shouldn't do so without first going out on the land and talking with people about what the end result should be. And they shouldn't do so without listening to what the people have to say.

"We're not the only ones who come up with ideas," he said. "In a lot of cases, people have solutions that we never thought of."

No, the Forest Service will never satisfy everyone, Bosworth said. "It's just impossible. But we have to really try to engage people in our work. In a lot of cases, how we go about making the decision is as important as what we come up with in the end."

"When I was a district ranger, I could talk to people and develop their trust," he said. "Most of the time, people understand that I believe what I say. If I'm always trying to be as honest and open as I can, it doesn't take too long and people believe that and trust that."

When he was a forest supervisor, the approach was the same – "just with a little more people." Then he became a regional forester, first in Ogden, Utah, then in Missoula for the past 4 1/2 years. That was harder.

"There are 3,500 or so employees in the region and I don't get to talk to all of them every day," Bosworth said. "And there's this public that comes from all sorts of different places and I can't talk to all of them. All I can do is try to earn a reputation that says I am an honest person who will say what I think."

"I don't know yet how you do that when you're the chief and you've got 35,000 employees and all the people across the country who you'll never see and never know. I've just got to be very, very careful that I always try to be straightforward and honest and open, and maybe over time people will start believing how much I believe in what I say."

Reporter Sherry Devlin can be reached at 523-5268 or atsdevlin@missoulian.com.



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Agency's new chief moves in, makes changes

By KATHERINE PFLEGER Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) – The double doors to the Forest Service chief's office are gone, their removal one of Dale Bosworth's first acts after he took over the agency.

To some, the move symbolizes a return to tradition, with the chief communicating directly with local officials around the country. But it's not clear yet how much the veteran forester – whose forest career started in 1966 – will listen to environmentalists, who are already taking aim at his policies.

Bosworth, 57, says he plans more than cosmetic changes at his agency, which oversees about 192 million acres of national forests and grasslands.

He said he's comfortable with the direction taken in the past 10 to 15 years toward improving ecosystems and watersheds and away from big timber sales, which have declined more than 80 percent since 1990.

But Bosworth wants agency employees and citizens who live near forests to have a greater say on forest management.

And he sees room to offer more timber from federal forests for sale, though he won't talk numbers.

In perhaps his most high-profile undertaking, he is working with Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman to revise the "roadless rule" – a Clinton administration ban on logging and road-building on a third of the nation's most pristine federal forests.

Bosworth wants to ensure that people who live in remote places and know about roadless areas have a voice in crafting the policy.

"I generally support protecting roadless values," he said in his office across the street from the Washington Monument. "My big concern is that we'll end up with all of the national forest either wilderness or roaded, and we won't have the country that's in between."

The administration is on course to offer amendments to the rule in June and then allow more public comment.

The Bush administration has defended the roadless policy against court challenges, including one in Idaho. But environmentalists say the federal attorneys did such a bad job arguing the case that the Idaho judge used their language when he blocked the ban from taking effect earlier this month.

The administration hasn't decided if it will appeal, as environmental groups have, Bosworth said.

People who know Bosworth call him a listener – to loggers, ranchers, conservationists and others.

But environmentalists who initially celebrated his selection in April now say their optimism has dimmed as he revamps the road ban and suggests increases in the timber harvest.

"We hoped the job of the chief was to stand up to the political masters," said Michael Francis, national forest

program director for The Wilderness Society.

Timber industry groups, meanwhile, are heartened.

"In the Clinton era ... we saw all sorts of new people that didn't have a relationship with the forest," said Chris West, vice president of the industry's American Forest Resource Council.

Bosworth, he said, "has experience on the ground."

Internally, some of Bosworth's early changes are symbolic ones.

For instance, there are those who find meaning in the removal of the glass doors and his decision to use the desk of the agency's legendary first leader, Gifford Pinchot, a conservationist who established scientific, sustainable use of forests. Some stop in just to see him – and the desk.

"Dale made it clear from the day he accepted the job ... that when folks come into the Washington office, that folks come in and see him," said Kathleen McAllister, the acting regional forester for the Northern Rockies, who has worked under Bosworth for more than three years and counting.

Bosworth could face a tough trial during this summer's wildfire season. Last year's blazes charred more than 7 million acres, and experts don't expect this year to be markedly better – especially given drought in much of the country.

Congress roughly doubled the agency's wildfire funding for this year to \$1.9 billion, to rehabilitate burned land and to undertake efforts such as forest thinning to reduce wildfire fuels.

Bosworth sees thinning and other forest health work as a good way to increase the amount of timber offered for sale. But it will be difficult to lay the groundwork – hiring people, buying equipment – in time, he said.

"It's a big job, but if we don't perform in the end, we won't get to keep those dollars," he said.

Bosworth started with the agency as a forester on the St. Joe National Forest near Avery, Idaho, in 1966 and later moved around the country, per agency tradition. His father was a forest supervisor and his son is an agency forester.

Before coming to Washington, Bosworth lived in Missoula, Mont., overseeing a region that included 12 forests and four grasslands in the Northern Rockies.

What's different in the nation's capital?

"Not having quiet," he said as a motorcycle roared past his office.

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SPOKESMANREVIEW.COM

Sunday, June 17, 2001

Forest chief an old hand

Bosworth

Dan Hansen - Staff writer

Dale Bosworth used to quiz his children about trees.

"Is that a Douglas fir or a true fir?" his daughter remembers him asking while on outings in Washington, Idaho and Montana. "What kind of birch? What kind of pine?"

The second-generation forester, who raised a third, knew all the answers when it came to trees.

Now the questions are tougher, and it's Bosworth who will be tested, as the 15th chief of the U.S. Forest Service.

How many trees should the nation fell, and where? How can we prevent disastrous fires? How can ill forests be made well again?

Considering the deep divisions over such issues, Bosworth will need the balance of a log-roller as he answers those questions in the coming years. He's getting off to a smooth start.

Keith Olson, executive director of the Montana Logging Association, said he was "thrilled" by Bush's choice for chief. Olson represents 550 independent loggers and log-haulers.

Pat Williams, a former Democratic congressman from Montana, called Bosworth's appointment "unusually green, coming as it does from a brown administration."

"I was frankly surprised by it," said Williams, a professor and commentator on forestry and environmental issues at the Center for the Rocky Mountain West in Missoula.

Those assessments may change. No modern chief has been able to please environmentalists and industry both -- at least not for long.

Conservation groups already are concerned that Bosworth is backing away from supporting a plan to keep roadless areas roadless. But Bosworth says he foresees little logging or road-building in the disputed areas, even if the policy is changed.

And while he won't say exactly where, Bosworth said there is room in the Northwest for more federally protected wilderness areas. That prospect probably will not please industry.

Leading the agency is a challenge for which Bosworth has been preparing all his life, including career-building years in the Inland Northwest.

"I never thought of doing anything different" than working for the Forest Service, said Bosworth, 57, who became chief in April.

Delivering the goods

The second of three siblings, Bosworth was raised in northern California logging towns.

His late father was supervisor of the Lassen and Eldorado national forests in the northern Sierra Nevada, where chaparral slopes give way to a logger's dream of softwood forests.

"You knew you were going to deliver the goods with Erwin Bosworth or you were not going to last long," said Doug Leisz, a

retired forester who worked with the elder Bosworth in the 1950s. "Dale grew up with that strong ethic."

Dale Bosworth played football. He was not an enthusiastic student, said his mother, Mary Ellen Bosworth.

"When he was just a little kid, he used to ride around with his dad in a Forest Service truck," she said. "He decided that's what he wanted to be."

So Bosworth pushed himself through the University of Idaho, earning a forestry degree in 1966. A year earlier, he had married Carma Dopp, an artistic farm girl from Council, Idaho.

"She's the type of person you could drop off in the middle of nowhere and she could find her way out," said the couple's daughter, Kristy Bosworth.

After graduation, the newlyweds moved to Avery, Idaho, where Bosworth started his career as a forester for the St. Joe National Forest.

Kristy Bosworth was born during the three years her parents spent in Avery. That was followed by a short assignment in Newport, Wash. Then three years in Republic, Wash., the birthplace of Bosworth's son, Neil.

The Bosworth offspring both have followed their father into natural resources work. Kristy is donations manager for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in Missoula. Neil is a forester in South Dakota's Black Hills National Forest.

Republic was followed by Missoula, then the Powell Ranger Station in Idaho, where Bosworth was district ranger. Then Kalispell, Mont. Then back to Missoula. Then to Salt Lake City, where Bosworth was supervisor of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest.

"When we talk about why maybe we were tighter than some families, I think it's because we moved around so much," Kristy Bosworth said.

For a time, the family had a cabin on Montana's Flathead Lake, where they'd challenge each other to be the first in the water in spring, the last before winter. At night, Dale Bosworth sometimes would read aloud Pat McManus' outlandish tales of hunting, fishing and growing up in North Idaho.

Moving up

In 1990, Bosworth was named deputy director for timber management at Forest Service headquarters in Washington, D.C. When he left after two years, one former colleague remembers Bosworth writing a "hilarious" poem noting that he'd never seen a sight so lovely as the capital city in his rear-view mirror.

Next, he was deputy regional forester for all of California.

By then, California logging was declining to protect the Northern spotted owl. To compensate, loggers and some Forest Service officials wanted to increase the cut in the range of the California spotted owl, a separate subspecies. Bosworth argued that such a move would boost chances that the California subspecies would gain federal protection, a step advocated by environmentalists.

It was "a pivotal moment in history," said Matt Mathes, Forest Service regional press officer in San Francisco. "And he was right on the front lines."

Under Bosworth's leadership, logging was curtailed gradually in the range of the California spotted owl, Mathes said. He credits Bosworth with convincing environmentalists and loggers of the wisdom of the plan, which kept the owl off the endangered species list and prevented a collapse of the state's timber economy.

Mathes said Bosworth also changed the way the agency treated wilderness in California, instituting a permit system to control crowds, limiting camping that was damaging the shorelines of alpine lakes, and pushing for more backcountry rangers.

"He felt we weren't taking good enough care of our wilderness areas," Mathes said. "He thought we should return them to a more pristine manner."

Jay Watson, southwestern director for the Wilderness Society, respected Bosworth's work in California.

"Knowing the man as I did, I was pleasantly surprised with his being named (Forest Service) chief, rather than someone more old-school and more of a timber-first mentality," Watson said.

Bosworth's rise to deputy regional forester in California came under Chief Dale Robinson, a Reagan appointee. His next promotion was made by Jack Ward Thomas, a Clinton appointee whom environmentalists considered an ally.

Thomas made Bosworth the regional forester of the Ogden-based Intermountain Region, which includes southern Idaho forests. He held the position from 1994 until 1997, when he returned to Missoula to be regional forester for North Idaho, Montana and the Dakotas.

The Bosworths bought a home at the edge of town, overlooking the Bitterroot and Clark Fork rivers. They plan to return to that home, and its woodshop, when his stint as chief is finished.

"There's some really pretty country here in the East. I'm looking forward to getting out to see some of that," said Bosworth. "But my heart will probably always be in Western Montana, Northern Idaho, Eastern Washington."

Bosworth stepped into controversy in Missoula, as he had in California.

Under chief Mike Dombeck, he led a team that rewrote the agency's policy for roads. Few new logging roads will ever be needed, Bosworth said at the time; the agency can't begin to maintain the 440,000 miles of roads it has.

What resulted was a proposal from the Clinton administration to severely limit roads and logging in areas that haven't been cut in the past.

A year ago this month, loggers held a mass protest against such restrictions during a hearing in Missoula. According to a story in The Missoulian newspaper, Bosworth spoke at the rally, convincing some loggers to go with him to the hearing, which they had intended to boycott.

The plan "still allows commercial logging. It still allows motorized access. And it leaves the hard decisions to the local level, where they belong," Bosworth told the loggers. "But if you think it's a bunch of garbage, then tell us it's a bunch of garbage."

The roadless rules released last year by Clinton don't allow the local input Bosworth promised the loggers. He wants that changed, a prospect that worries environmentalists, who fear that "local involvement" means industry influence. Bosworth said he doesn't think amending the rules would mean more development.

"I don't think there are a lot of people who want to see the bulk of these roadless areas roaded and logged," he said. "I certainly don't want to see that."⁹

No question

Perhaps the most immediate issue Bosworth faces is preventing catastrophic fires like those that burned 6 million acres and destroyed homes throughout the West last year.

Western Republicans, and many residents of rural communities, contend the national forests need to be thinned to make them healthier and reduce the danger. Bosworth has said repeatedly that some areas need thinning.

Environmentalists say the real problem is people making their homes in fire-prone areas. Bosworth said his agency couldn't prevent the migration to the woods, even if it were appropriate. It's up to local governments to set land-use regulations, he said.

"I think the job the Forest Service has is to make sure people understand the consequences of that" move to the country, he

said.

No one could step into Bosworth's job and please everyone, said Orville Daniels, a retired Lolo National Forest supervisor, management consultant and longtime Bosworth family friend.

If environmentalists expect Bosworth to fight President Bush over the roadless initiative, "that's an expectation that doesn't fit the reality of the world," said Daniels.

If the timber industry expects a return to the large harvests of the pre-Clinton era, "he's not going to do that either."

What Bosworth will do, Daniels said, is listen to everybody, then speak his mind, even to the president.

"There's no question in my mind that he'll leave the job before he'll do something he thinks is wrong," Daniels said. "No question."



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New ban on roads effective Saturday

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) – A ban on road-building in a third of the nation's forests will go into effect Saturday, even as the administration works to revise the rule, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth told senators Tuesday.

The administration announced last week that it would implement the Clinton-era policy that would prohibit logging and road-building, except in rare circumstances, on 58.5 million acres of federal forest land. But the administration also promised that it would amend the rule to allow more local input in the process.

Bosworth told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that he envisioned an opportunity for people with local knowledge to make adjustments, including on some maps.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., asked Bosworth how revising the rule – and the public comment period that then will be required – would affect implementation.

"We'll have to see what kind of comments we get back on our proposal to amend the rule to see what kind of adjustments we make," Bosworth said.

The rule, unveiled by President Clinton in early January, is facing legal challenges across the country, including in Idaho where the state and timber company Boise Cascade have asked a federal court to block the policy. The judge could rule as early as this week.

Conservationists, who greeted the decision to implement the ban with skepticism and cautious optimism, have expressed concerns that the proposed changes, expected in June, could weaken the policy.

Meanwhile, Western Republicans and the timber industry have been critical of the rule, which they considered a blanket mandate from Washington rather than an approach that considers specific forests. Generally, they hailed the administration's decision to revise the rule, though some weren't entirely pleased that it would take effect.

"We need to take a long, hard look obviously at these roadless protections," said Sen. Craig Thomas, R-Wyo.

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Forest Service chief takes control of road decisions on pristine lands

By KATHERINE PFLEGER Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Forest Service chief Dale Bosworth is assuming authority over road-building and logging in a third of the national forests while the Bush administration revises a Clinton-era ban on those activities.

In a memo issued Thursday, Bosworth instructed Forest Service officials to consider long-term protection of roadless areas as they make scheduled revisions to the forests' management plans.

Bosworth will have authority over timber harvests and road construction in roadless areas until officials overseeing forests have a chance to map existing roads and get approval for possible revisions to the management plans, the memo said.

This could mean that some roadless areas become permanent wilderness, Bosworth wrote.

But one environmental group active in forest protection interpreted the memo as a go-ahead to the logging industry to begin commercial logging and road construction in the national forests. It blamed the White House.

"The president has made clear he wants to exploit these lands for more logging, mining and oil and gas drilling," said Steve Holmer, campaign coordinator for American Lands Alliance.

Administration officials are grappling with a Clinton-era ban on almost all logging and road-building on 58.5 million acres of national forests, an area more than twice the size of Ohio. Some call it the "roadless rule."

The Bush administration suspended implementation of the rule shortly after President Bush's inauguration and promised in May to revise it to allow local officials more say in decisions. Bosworth has said decisions should be on a forest-by-forest basis.

Also in May, when the Clinton rule was to have taken effect, a federal judge in Idaho blocked it.

Bosworth wrote that he offered the direction in the memo because the policy is the subject of eight lawsuits in seven states.

"It is necessary for the agency to act decisively, proactively, and with common sense to ensure that our efforts to protect roadless values will not be confined to legal proceedings in courtrooms scattered throughout the country," he said.

David Tenny, acting deputy undersecretary for the Agriculture Department, said the memo speaks for itself and would not elaborate.

"He (Bosworth) says he is trying to do something proactive because the outcome of the litigation is uncertain," Tenny said, adding that he expects that the Forest Service still would offer revisions to the policy. The agency is part of the Agriculture

on the web [Forest Service's Roadless Plan](#)

Department.

Some other environmentalists said this could be viewed as a setback because it puts decisions back in the hands of local officials.

"The roadless rule was developed and put into effect precisely because the forest planning process led to the devastation of so many wild forest areas. Returning to that process does not bode well for our national forests," said Jane Danowitz, director of the Heritage Forests Campaign.

Some in the timber industry were heartened that the memo means the agency is on a path the industry likes. The industry wants decisions to be made at the local level, rather than through a sweeping national policy.

But, said Chris West, vice president of the American Forest Resource Council, the administration still has not officially revised the roadless rule.

"They still have to do something to get the rule to go away," he added.

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Off-road restrictions go into effect July 1

By EVE BYRON Helena Independent Record

HELENA — As of July 1, any vehicles traveling through National Forest or Bureau of Land Management property must stay on existing roads and trails, or their drivers could face some stiff fines and even jail time.

July 1 is when the federal agencies will begin implementing the new cross-country travel policy, which is an interim measure while more long-term travel plans are created. The new rules apply to 16 million acres of Forest Service and BLM lands in Montana and parts of North and South Dakota.

Former Regional Forest Supervisor Dale Bosworth — who now heads the entire agency in Washington, D.C. — signed the new policy in January. It was supposed to take effect within a week.

However, it's taken the past six months to work out details of the policy and to produce and install signs explaining the changes, according to forest officials. Brochures now are available outlining the guidelines. The signs should be in place by next week, designating which trails are open to all-terrain vehicles and other motorized means of transportation.

Generally speaking, the new policy requires drivers to use routes that are appropriate to individual vehicles. For example, motorcycles may use a single-track trail or road if it is open to motorized vehicles, but ATVs and other four-wheeled vehicles can't use that single-track pathway.

"If your vehicle is wider than the route is, that route isn't for you," said Kathleen McAllister, acting regional forester for the Northern Region.

Initially, the Forest Service probably will only issue warnings to violators, according to Charlie McKenna, forest engineer. However, those who repeatedly or knowingly flout the law can be fined anywhere from \$100 to \$5,000 and face up to six months in jail.

"Our emphasis this first summer will be education," McKenna said. "That's not to say that someone won't get hit with a fine if they know what they're doing is wrong."

Some exceptions to the new plan apply, including cross-country vehicular travel for military needs, fire suppression, and search and rescue or law enforcement emergencies. Forest users also can drive cross-country to campsites within 300 feet of existing roads or trails.

The new policy also doesn't affect snowmobiles, which will be covered under upcoming, updated area-specific travel plans.

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Landowners propose management alternative for Thunder Basin

The Associated Press

A group of landowners has asked the federal government to manage the Thunder Basin National Grassland as an ecosystem rather than focus on one species.

Members of the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association discussed their proposal with state and federal land management officials in Washington D.C. on Tuesday.

The group, made up of 23 landowners, formed in 1999 in response to efforts to reintroduce the endangered black-footed ferret in the northeastern Wyoming grasslands.

At issue is the management of prairie dogs, which federal officials want to preserve because they are a key food source for the ferrets.

The group has proposed committing 150,000 acres of private land around the grasslands to a management agreement that involves federal, state and private acreage.

The group has said it wants to raise \$2.3 million to study the needs of the ecosystem.

The changing conditions of the grasslands and diseased prairie dog colonies warrant swift action on the study, group members said.

Recently some prairie dogs have been confirmed to have the sylvatic plague.

U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., said he arranged the meeting to work out any possible conflicts between private and public concerns relating to prairie dog management on about 585,000 acres of federal and private land.

The U.S. Forest Service has agreed to consider the group's proposal.

"Conceptually this is a good idea," said Dale Bosworth, chief of the Forest Service. "I want decisions made as close to the ground as possible."

Those attending the meeting included officials from the Wyoming Public Lands Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Department of Interior.

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Idaho asks help with Rainbows

The Associated Press

IDAHO CITY, Idaho (AP) — Idaho's congressional delegation asked Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth on Tuesday to provide additional resources immediately to deal with the annual gathering of the counterculture Rainbow Family.

With as many as 20,000 followers expected to converge on Bear Valley by the Fourth of July peak of the 10-day gathering, the delegation told Bosworth that "it is unreasonable to expect these local entities to bear the additional costs associated with this event."

The delegation petition came as Boise County officials asked the state for assistance with medical response, policing, traffic management and fuel costs for the gathering in the Boise National Forest, about 75 miles northeast of Boise.

Gov. Dirk Kempthorne will make the final decision on state aid once he receives the application, spokesman Mark Snider said.

The governor did provide some state assistance last year to Twin Falls County over the Fourth of July weekend when the so-called Shovel Brigade descended on Elko, Nev., just across the Idaho border in a face-off with the Forest Service over closing a road along the Jarbidge River.

Boise County officials fear the addition of the Rainbow Family gathering to the traditional Fourth of July tourists and recreationists will overwhelm their capabilities.

More than 2,600 gatherers had already arrived at the meadow on the Lowman Ranger District for the event that officially begins Thursday. On spokesman said gatherers are arriving in central Idaho at a slower pace than they have for gatherings in the past.

The event is still viewed as illegal because it has no permit, but Acting Boise National Forest Supervisor Anne Archie said "we have to do our best to cope with this group, trying to limit resource damages and threats to public safety and health."

So far, the forest has issued more than 300 warnings and over 120 citations for safety, traffic, alcohol, drug and other violations. Two people have been arrested, one on felony drug charges.

Forest officials are working with the gatherers to find suitable camping and meeting locations that will not endangered already threatened salmon. But the hallmark of the Rainbow Family is that it is not organized and has no leaders, spokesmen or representatives.

The Rainbow Family Internet site has posted warnings about the salmon habitat and expressed confidence the areas will be respected.

A veteran of the gatherings, Barry Adams, who said he lives in Montana in a town called Jens, sued the Forest Service in federal court this week for refusing to issue a permit for the gathering.

Adams, who is representing himself in the lawsuit, said the permit process does not allow for gatherings like the Rainbow Family.

The Forest Service denied Adams' application for a permit along with another because they were not signed. It denied a third signed application because there was no appropriate site for the gathering.

Adams, 55, is one of three men sentenced in federal court at Great Falls, Mont., for their part in organizing the Rainbow Family gathering in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest last year. He received a 90-day sentence but indicated he would appeal, as did the others.

Forest Service and local authorities in Montana said the group left behind problems ranging from a buildup of human waste to unpaid medical bills.

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Administration reopens forest policy deliberations

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration Friday formally reopened deliberations over a new regulation protecting nearly 60 million acres of national forests from logging and road construction, amid growing signs the measure will be scaled back to satisfy the paper industry and western governors who have waged an effective legal challenge.

The Department of Agriculture announced that it would seek public comment over the coming two months as part of an effort to craft an alternative approach that passes muster with opponents while affording reasonable protection to more than a quarter of federal forests.

A federal judge in Idaho temporarily blocked the rule May 10, saying that it could cause "irreparable long-term harm" to local communities. Environmental groups have appealed the ruling to the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and in the interim the administration has begun taking steps to revise the rule.

"This public comment period is an effort to be responsive to the concerns raised by local communities, states, tribes and other stakeholders," said Dale Bosworth, chief of the U.S. Forest Service. "It is important to give people additional time to express their views on how best to move this process forward."

But environmental leaders said the renewed rule making is a clear sign the administration intends to roll back protections of roadless areas in national forests that emerged from more than a year of public hearings and review during the Clinton administration.

"This is their next step in gutting the roadless policy," said Marty Hayden, legislative director for Earthjustice. Jane Danowitz, director of the Heritage Forests Campaign, said, "This just looks like a page right out of Big Timber's playbook."

At stake is a long-term effort by former president Clinton and environmentalists to protect vast sections of federal forests — including large tracts of Alaska's Tongass National Forest — from most commercial logging, road construction and mining.

The regulation, announced by the Clinton administration Jan. 5, was the culmination of a process that included public comments from 1.6 million Americans, most of which were positive. The Bush administration put the rule on hold upon taking office as part of a larger review of Clinton regulations.

Boise Cascade Corp., the timber company, Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne, a Republican, and other western state officials filed suit in federal court in Boise, challenging the rule on the grounds that it violated the National Environmental Policy Act and would harm local economies. The Bush administration filed briefs with the court, arguing that while the regulation is flawed and needs to be amended on a forest-by-forest basis, the court should not intervene and block its implementation.

Seizing on the administration's own words, U.S. District Judge Edward Lodge concluded there was ample evidence of potential harm to warrant an injunction. Bosworth, the Forest Service chief, subsequently announced June 7 that he would decide on logging and road building in the affected areas pending resolution of eight lawsuits involving seven states.

Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, Friday commended the administration for initiating new rule making. "It's the first step toward a solution to the roadless controversy that rests on a sound legal footing and has a better than even chance of being sustained by the courts and accepted by the public," he said.

However, Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said that "while I'm not opposed to additional public comment, I will be opposed to actions to undo or undermine the rule."

In southeast Alaska, where the Tongass National Forest covers an area the size of West Virginia, timber supporters praised a review of the roadless policy.

"I would encourage the Forest Service to listen a lot more to the local people, the people most affected by their decisions, people who are dependent on the forests" for timber, jobs, hunting or recreation," said Owen Graham, executive director of the Alaska Forest Association, a industry support group based in Ketchikan.

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New roadless review ordered

By **JEFF TOLLEFSON** Gazette Wyoming Bureau

The U.S. Forest Service wants to know, again, what you think about managing roadless areas in the national forest system.

The Bush administration on Tuesday kicked off its review of the Clinton administration's roadless protection rule. Published Jan. 12, after more than three years of consideration, the rule protected 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless areas from new roads, commercial logging and mineral development.

Resource industry officials and many Western Republicans are pleased that the agency is rethinking its management of roadless areas. Environmentalists say it's another rollback of popular Clinton-era environmental policies.

Dale Bosworth, chief of the Forest Service and formerly a regional forester in Montana, is heading up the review effort. In a notice filed in the Federal Register on Tuesday, Bosworth listed 10 questions to help the agency reconsider the issue.

The questions focus on the role of local planning efforts; methods for ensuring that the federal government works with local interests "through a fair and open process;" wildfire, insect and disease management; private property rights; and values that need to be considered in evaluating roadless areas.

The roadless rule is subject to a federal court injunction barring its implementation. A federal judge in Idaho ruled that the public comment period was "grossly inadequate and thus deprived the public of any meaningful dialogue" regarding the proposed rule. The injunction specifically allows the Forest Service to review and amend the roadless rule, as proposed by the Bush administration.

Environmentalists who intervened on the federal government's behalf have appealed the decision out of Idaho to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, arguing that the public process used to create the roadless rule was one of the most comprehensive federal planning efforts ever conducted. They believe that the Bush administration canned the roadless rule by failing to defend it in court.

The national forest system comprises 192 million acres, or 8.5 percent of land within the United States. Of that, 34.7 million acres are managed under strict wilderness guidelines; 58.5 million acres are inventoried roadless areas; and 4.2 million acres have other congressional designations such as national recreation areas.

The remaining lands, totaling 94.9 million acres, may be roaded and bear no specific congressional designation.

Reactions Tim Stevens of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition said the Clinton administration's rule drew praise from the public, including residents of Montana and Wyoming, for protecting water, wildlife and recreational opportunities.

Stevens said the document published Tuesday suggests that the Bush review is aimed at reversing the roadless rule.

"Clearly, they are laying the groundwork to ignore the comments from 1.6 million Americans who said, 'We want our wildlands and the tremendous values that they hold protected,' " he said. "It seems that from these biased questions that the only values that the administration wants to put on these lands are in terms of what we can extract from them."

Kathleen Jachowski, public relations and government liaison for Cody Lumber, said she is still reviewing the document, but she is pleased that the administration is taking another look at the issue.

"I think that's certainly necessary. ... It has to be done to bring any kind of a reasonable look at this thing," she said.

The timber industry filed a lawsuit charging that the roadless rule violated the 1984 Wyoming Wilderness Act, which established the last wilderness areas in Wyoming. Jachowski believes that the act, in creating wilderness areas, released other national forest land for multiple use.

"The purpose of that entire act ... was to settle the wilderness debate once and for all," she said, noting that the roadless rule was an attempt to create de facto wilderness areas. "It is our contention that this is illegal."

The questionsFollowing are the Bush administrations questions regarding management of inventoried roadless areas:

What is the appropriate role of local forest planning ... in evaluating protection and management of inventoried roadless areas?

What is the best way for the Forest Service to work with the variety of states, tribes, local communities, other organizations and individuals in a collaborative manner to ensure that concerns about roadless values are heard and addressed through a fair and open process?

How should inventoried roadless areas be managed to provide for healthy forests, including protection from severe wildfires and the buildup of hazardous fuels as well as to provide for the detection and prevention of insect and disease outbreaks?

How should communities and private property near inventoried roadless areas be protected from the risks associated with natural events, such as major wildfires that may occur on adjacent federal lands?

What is the best way to implement the laws that ensure states, tribes, organizations and private citizens have reasonable access to property they own within inventoried roadless areas?

What are the characteristics, environmental values, social and economic considerations and other factors the Forest Service should consider as it evaluates inventoried roadless areas?

Are there specific activities that should be expressly allowed for inventoried roadless areas through forest plan revisions or amendments?

Should inventoried roadless areas selected for future roadless protection through the local forest plan revision process be proposed to Congress for wilderness designation, or should they be maintained under a specific designation for roadless area management under the forest plan?

How can the Forest Service work effectively with individuals and groups with strongly competing views, values and beliefs in evaluating and managing public lands and resources, recognizing that the agency cannot meet all of the desires of all of the parties?

What other concerns, comments or interests relating to the protection and management of inventoried roadless areas are important?

Comments on the roadless rule review must be received by Sept. 10 and may be sent to USDA Forest Service CAT, Attn: Roadless ANPR comments, P.O. Box 221090, Salt Lake City, Utah 84122; e-mailroadless_anpr@fs.fed.us – fax (801) 296-4090, Attn: Roadless ANPR comments.



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Grazing permit sparks suit over bison

By JEFF TOLLEFSON Gazette Wyoming Bureau

Several environmental groups are suing the U.S. Forest Service to force the agency to conduct a full environmental analysis of a cattle grazing allotment where Yellowstone bison migrate in search of food each winter.

Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund and other groups allege that the Gallatin National Forest in December rubber-stamped a grazing permit that lies at the heart of the bison conflicts west of Yellowstone National Park. The agency violated federal law by putting off environmental analysis of Horse Butte Allotment for more than three years, according to the lawsuit.

Forest Service officials say a 1995 law requires the agency to approve grazing permits if environmental analysis hasn't been completed. Tim Preso, of Earthjustice, says that same law requires the agency to adhere to a schedule and does not allow the agency to procrastinate indefinitely.

The Horse Butte Allotment includes about 2,200 acres of federal land on a peninsula that stretches west into Hebgen Lake. That area is the primary focus of bison hazing efforts each winter, and environmentalists believe a proper environmental analysis would show that cattle grazing is an improper use of those public lands.

Preso said the Horse Butte allotment near Hebgen Lake should be managed for bison and other public wildlife rather than private profits. The allotment brings in about \$1,200 annually, while the federal government spends about \$1.7 million annually managing bison to reduce conflicts with cattle, he said.

Other groups involved in the lawsuit are the InterTribal Bison Cooperative, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation, Wyoming Wildlife Federation and the Gallatin Wildlife Association.

"Reallocating this allotment to wildlife and allowing bison to use it isn't going to solve the problem, but it will be a step in the right direction," said Michael Scott of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, noting that the Gallatin's decision to continue grazing on the area perpetuates the problem.

Marion Cherry, a biologist for the Gallatin National Forest, said the 1995 Rescissions Act gave the Forest Service 15 years to complete a backlog of analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for all of its grazing permits.

"It also said if you can't get NEPA done during a certain time period ... you must reissue that permit," she said. "The schedule was never hard wired. ... Things get postponed at times, and that's what happened here."

The agency has had some staffing problems and hasn't been able to complete the analysis for the Horse Butte permit but plans to begin the process later this year, she said. Once the process is complete, possibly in 2002 or 2003, the agency's decision will be implemented immediately rather than when the permit expires 10 years from now, she said.

Cherry said the Horse Butte allotment receives the most pressure from bison each winter, but the agency believes closing the allotment wouldn't solve the problem.

"The way we look at it is the fellow that grazes cattle on this allotment also grazes cattle on private land adjacent to the allotment," she said.

Dellas Munns, of Rexburg, Idaho, one member of the family that grazes cattle on the Horse Butte allotment, said he uses the land to graze 142 cattle and their calves as well as 30 horses. He said believes that bison belong in Yellowstone National Park, where they won't damage his fences or threaten his cattle with brucellosis.

Even if he lost the grazing allotment, Munns said he would maintain cattle on his private lands. Moreover, other ranchers have livestock in the area around the lake, "and it's just a short distance across that lake," he said.

"I have cattle, and I have to keep them where they ought to be," he added. "Those bison are supposed to be in the park. ... I don't see why I should have to put up with them on my private ground."

GYC's Scott said environmentalists have worked with the Forest Service for years to try to find an alternative, knowing that when bison leave Yellowstone "they head right for Horse Butte."

Scott said GYC offered to pay for an another grazing allotment in Idaho, the Munns turned that offer down. GYC also met with Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth when Bosworth was a regional forester in Montana to find an alternate grazing allotment.

Preso said a multi-agency bison management plan approved Dec. 20 specifically says Gallatin National Forest will complete environmental analysis prior to issuing another grazing permit for the Horse Butte allotment.

"On Dec. 19, which was the day before that document was issued, they had already reissued that permit without NEPA analysis," he said. "The agency has made numerous statements that they were going to conduct NEPA analysis, and they have not done it."

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Fire crews fight winds, fatigue

The Associated Press

JACKSON, Wyo. (AP) — With the weather worsening and fatigue setting in, firefighters battled for a seventh straight day Saturday to keep a forest blaze away from upscale mountain homes.

In the face of a constantly shifting, unpredictable fire, crews were holding on. Through early evening, no structures had been lost despite hundreds of small new fires caused by embers drifting north and east of the main blaze.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth, who toured the area by air and visited with crews on the ground, said he was satisfied everything possible was being done to extinguish the wildfire, which officials said was started a week ago by an "escaped" campfire.

"Since this is the top priority fire for the Forest Service, they're able to get the resources they need," he said.

So far, the 4,800-acre fire has cost \$6 million to fight. It was 50 percent contained.

Bosworth said he told crews to emphasize safety to avoid a repeat of the July 10 tragedy in which four firefighters perished in Washington.

Although all houses were still standing, fire managers felt they still had not turned the corner, and that the danger would remain for several more days.

The 1,300 residents of Wilson, where a few flakes of ash fell, were told to brace for the worst and prepare for possible evacuation. The fire had crept to within two miles of their community about five miles west of Jackson.

A passing thunderstorm dropped a few sprinkles but fanned the flames with 40 mph winds, spreading the growth.

For the third time in four days, officials ordered evacuations as flying embers ignited trees east of Fall Creek Road about three miles south of Wilson. That was the farthest eastern arm of the blaze.

Residents of about six homes were told to leave, joining 120 residents of Crescent H and Indian Paintbrush subdivisions who were evacuated Wednesday, and another 30 from adjacent areas ordered out Friday.

Ground crews reacted quickly to douse new starts. Firefighters rigged high-powered sprinklers and sprayed fire retardant gel on homes.

"They're waging a valiant effort to save structures," fire spokeswoman Joan Anzelmo said late Saturday afternoon.

Flames had burned up to a lawn in the Indian Paintbrush subdivision, where homes average about \$1 million, and small fires were also close to \$5 million homes in Crescent H.

The subdivisions, nearly hidden in the bone-dry forest, are adjacent to each other about five miles southwest of

Jackson. Many homes have flammable, wooden-shingle roofs and can be reached only by narrow, winding roads, limiting the number of fire engines that can defend them.

Homeowners Don and Diane Damon were trying to remain calm.

"A home is a thing. Say it 100 times. A home is a thing," Mr. Damon said. "You don't get too attached to it."

The Forest Service marshaled about 1,000 firefighters, 12 helicopters, 12 air tankers — one-quarter of the nation's air tanker force — and other planes to battle the blaze.

So far, 1.3 million gallons of retardant and 549,000 gallons of water have been dropped.

Fire incident commander Joe Carvelho worried about the condition of his troops, especially the pilots.

"That aircraft is flying lots and lots of hours, and that bothers me," he said. The pilots are to shut down if they become too tired, he said.

Wyoming Senate Vice President Grant Larson, R-Jackson, who visited the fire Saturday, said he was in touch with Gov. Jim Geringer's office to make certain the state is doing all it can to help. Larson said he is exploring the merits of having a disaster declared.

on the web [Teton area fire updates](#)
[National Interagency Fire Center](#)
[Montanafires.com](#)

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Forest Service prepares changes to deal with roadless rule; environmentalists say they're worried

By **KATHERINE PFLEGER** Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) – Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth would get more authority to allow logging or road-building in national forests under a draft plan crafted by agency officials.

The plan, circulated Tuesday by the environmentalist Heritage Forests Campaign, would formalize the way the Forest Service handles a Clinton-era plan to protect a third of all national forest lands.

Environmentalists view the draft as a way to chip away at the "roadless rule" and reopen national forests to logging. But Forest Service spokeswoman Heidi Valetkevitch said that's not the case.

"There are some slight changes," she said.

The Clinton administration rule protected 58.5 million acres of national forest land from development, and was hailed by most environmental groups. But some timber industry and off-road vehicle groups said the policy was too restrictive.

The Bush administration also considered the policy flawed, and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman in May promised to amend it, specifically to allow more local ideas. Veneman oversees the Forest Service.

A short time later, a federal judge blocked implementation of the amended policy, saying it would cause "irreparable harm" to federal forests. Last month the Bush administration opened a 60-day public comment period, after which it will issue revisions.

In a June memo, Bosworth said he would take responsibility for decisions on timber harvests and road construction, giving the officials who oversee individual forests a chance to map existing roads and determine appropriate protections. Once local officials get approval for plans to enforce those protections, Bosworth will no longer make the decisions from the top.

The draft plan mirrors that language.

Environmentalists are concerned the timber industry and other groups will have unfair influence over local officials, and that the Bush administration is predisposed to side with them over conservationists.

"This seems to really solidify the administration's intent to scuttle the national forest protections and revert back to a piecemeal approach that gives the timber industry the upper hand in determining the fate of our forests," said Jane Danowitz, director of the Heritage Forests Campaign.

She also is concerned about the amount of time the draft indicates the interim process will be in place – 21/2 years. But Valetkevitch said she expects the timetable was established only to be on the "safe side."

"We are trying to get roadless (areas) dealt with as quickly as possible," she said.

onthenet

Forest Service's Roadless Plan: <http://www.roadless.fs.fed.us>

Heritage Forests Campaign: <http://www.ourforests.org/>

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Officials reject firefighting management charges

By CHRIS PORTER Medill News Service

WASHINGTON — Forest Service and Interior Department officials this week disputed a report concluding that the agencies in charge of managing wildfires have failed to coordinate their efforts as Congress intended.

The report, from the General Accounting Office, stated that the five federal land management agencies, brought together in a National Fire Plan, "have been reluctant to change their traditional organizational structures of federal wildland fire management."

The plan, for which Congress provided an unprecedented \$1.8 billion, was created after more than seven million acres burned in the summer and fall of 2000. It involves the Forest Service and four Interior Department units: the National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Dale Bosworth, the chief of the Forest Service, told the House Forests and Forest Health Subcommittee on Tuesday that he recognized shortcomings in implementing the plan but said the agencies had made significant progress in the last nine months.

Bosworth praised the plan as an important turning point in preventing and suppressing forest fires.

Tim Hartzell, director of the Interior Department's Wildland Fire Coordination office, said the country had suffered from a period of inactive land management, but he also said significant progress had been made.

In the last six months, he said, his department had seen increased collaboration with state, local and tribal officials and had improved its working relationship with the Forest Service, adding that the two departments were working closer than ever before.

The hearing followed a proposal by subcommittee Chairman Scott McInnis, R-Colo., for a national fire czar to coordinate the agencies' efforts. McInnis said he wasn't sure that a fire czar was the answer to the problem but that there should be an overseer to improve communication and make quick decisions in emergencies.

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Secretary of Interior lauds Arizona forest thinning project; protesters call it logging

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press Writer

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) – Interior Secretary Gale Norton on Wednesday praised an experimental forestry program designed to make forests healthy by thinning out young pines and burning the ground to restore grass.

The thinning helps protect forests from catastrophic fires and will make them more robust in the long term, Norton said during a visit to the Fort Valley Experimental Forest, where workers are thinning trees as part of a joint project between government and private groups.

Critics say the thinning is tantamount to logging and is detrimental to the forest. Outside the project area, about 30 environmentalists protested Norton's visit and the Bush administration's environmental policies. One protester held a rain-soaked sign, "More trees, less Bush."

"I think nature knows what to do with the forest," said Earth First! member Jasper Shields. "When we see trees as resources, we're missing the point."

But Norton, standing under a group of 300-year-old Ponderosa pines, said it was necessary to thin out younger trees that could become fuel for major fires.

"Last year was one of the worst fire seasons ever and we need to look at fire suppression, but we also want to take a step toward a long-term solution," Norton said.

The Fort Valley Restoration Project is an effort by the Grand Canyon Forest Partnership, a coalition of government and private organizations. The project covers about 1,900 acres in the Coconino National Forest, which has lost about 60,000 acres to fire in the past decade.

U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said forests across the West need to be thinned of trees that have grown since the late 19th Century. He also called for controlled burns about every three years to remove pine needles that prevent grass from growing.

onthenet

Ecological Restoration Institute: <http://www.eri.nau.edu>

Department of the Interior: <http://www.doi.gov/>

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Governors, Cabinet bosses agree to cooperate on fires

Associated Press

With memories fresh with images from a huge Montana fire season last summer and containment continuing on fires around Yellowstone National Park, Western governors and Cabinet secretaries agreed Monday to help implement a national plan aimed at reducing wildfires in the future.

The memorandum of understanding is a centerpiece of the Western Governors' Association annual summer meeting here.

Governors from 14 states and U.S. territories, and premiers of six Canadian provinces were meeting to discuss common issues, such as wildfires and electricity transmission. The governors also pleaded with Bush administration officials attending the meeting for a cohesive energy policy that will make it easier to build needed new transmission lines quickly.

Jim Connaugh of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, Bob Card of the Department of Energy and Federal Energy Regulatory Commissioner Nora Brownell told the governors that President Bush's executive order on energy production will move the process along.

The governors were briefed on the association's recent study of the Western electricity interconnection.

It estimates that it will cost \$2 billion to more than \$12 billion to build enough transmission capacity to move electricity efficiently across the West.

The cheapest option envisions more natural gas-fueled power plants being built near population centers, reducing the need for long-range transmission lines.

But less reliance on natural gas and more use of alternative fuel sources could cost as much as \$8 billion to \$12 billion for adequate transmission lines, the report found.

The 10-year plan calls for improved prevention and suppression of wildfires, particularly those near populated areas, by reducing brush and debris that can fuel catastrophic blazes. It also seeks a long-term solution for wildlife habitat restoration and rehabilitation.

Last August, in the midst of one of the most disastrous wildland fire seasons in 50 years, President Clinton directed the secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to develop what became known as the National Fire Plan.

More than 8 million acres were scorched last year, most of them in the arid West. That compares to about 1.9 million acres that have burned so far this fire season, which ends in October.

When funding the 2001 appropriations, which led to the hiring this summer of more than 5,000 additional firefighters, Congress called for a strategy for reducing wildfire risks over the next decade.

The memorandum of understanding signed by leaders of the western governor's group and by Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman and Interior Secretary Gale Norton promises a detailed roadmap by May 1, 2002 for

implementing the plan.

The price tag for thinning forests to reduce the amount of fuel fires can burn, and for teaching landowners about reducing fire risks will be "a very significant increase" over current funding, Norton said.

Lyle Laverty, U.S. Forest Service national fire plan coordinator, said Agriculture and Interior got about \$1.7 billion more this year than the previous year to carry out provisions of the national fire plan.

"We continue to evaluate what the appropriate level of funding is going to be," Norton said.

Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, who chaired the governors' committee that drew up the collaborative approach to reducing wildland fire risks, said Congress will have to be persuaded to increase funding every year for a decade so the fuel reduction projects can be completed.

Sluggish federal environmental reviews will need to be sped up to allow the projects to be completed, without sacrificing environmental considerations, Kitzhaber said.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said he was "quite nervous" about the amount of dead wood, brush and debris in the forests that could lead to catastrophic wildfires.

"The longer we wait, the more difficult it will be" to clear forests of fire fuels, he said. "This is going to be a 10-, 15-, 20-year effort and how well we do will depend upon whether we get the funding to do it."

Bosworth's boss Veneman, and Norton, who oversees Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs firefighting efforts, said Congress has supported funding the national fire plan.

"Congress was very receptive and has included, essentially, the levels we requested in our budgets," Norton said. "It was because we had this collaborative process showing an agreement on what the level of need would be."

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30-Mile Fire

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Safety violations blamed for 4 deaths

YAKIMA, Wash. (AP) – Four firefighters were killed by a forest fire in the Cascade Range because basic safety rules weren't followed, according to a Forest Service report issued Wednesday.

Procedures that firefighters and managers failed to follow at the time of the July 10 deaths included identifying escape routes, being aware of weather forecasts and posting lookouts, said the report, which Forest Service chief Dale Bosworth released at a news conference.

At critical times, fire managers and forest personnel also failed to accurately assess fire behavior, the potential for the fire to get out of control and the flammability of the vegetation in the Okanogan National Forest, the report said.

The four victims of the fire were among 21 firefighters on mop-up duty who were trapped when stiff wind stoked the blaze and it exploded from 25 acres to 2,500 acres in less than three hours.

Tom Craven, 30, Devin Weaver, 21, Jessica Johnson, 19, and Karen FitzPatrick, 18, were killed by inhaling superheated air when the fire burned through an area where they had deployed their emergency heat-resistant fire shelters. It was the country's deadliest wildfire since 1994.

Another firefighter survived with serious burns.

The report also said work and rest cycles for fire managers were disregarded, resulting in mental fatigue that "significantly degraded the vigilance and decision-making ability of those involved."

Investigators say the Forest Service should have closed the narrow road where 14 firefighters were trapped to civilians. Two civilians became trapped with the firefighters because the area was not evacuated, the report said. The couple lived because one firefighter shared her one-person tent with them.

The report also said fire safety equipment was improperly used, contributing to injuries. One crew member did not have gloves, and others did not wear them. Some gear left close to the emergency fire shelters ignited, and vegetation burned close to and under the shelters.

"They put them down a dead-end road, in front of an out-of-control fire, with (only) hand tools," Weaver's father, Ken, said earlier this week. Devin Weaver, FitzPatrick and Johnson were rookies.

"They had kids with 21 days' experience. They'd fought one tiny, little fire before that – their experience in fighting a fire was maybe five days."

The fire started as an abandoned campfire about 1 1/2 miles south of the site where the firefighters died. A search is under way for the person or people who started the fire to cook hot dogs and then left it, without any apparent attempts to snuff it out.

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State officials assail Forest Service wilderness burn strategy

Associated Press

HELENA (AP) – The Forest Service should immediately change its policy and start fighting any new fires that erupt in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, state officials urged the agency's leader Wednesday.

Gov. Judy Martz and Bud Clinch, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation director, told Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth they fear the unusually warm, dry conditions are ripe for winds to push the fires onto private lands and toward surrounding communities.

"The let-it-burn is going to kill Montana," Martz said in a phone call with Bosworth.

She said the Forest Service should commit crews to any fresh fire in the wilderness area, where seven fires now are burning on about 30,000 acres.

"I think you should put it out when it starts," she said. "Do something with them before they have the opportunity to get away."

Bosworth said he understood the state's concerns, but was noncommittal. He said he would confer with regional Forest Service officials on a possible change of policy to ease the concern of state officials.

"I still think we've got to figure out some way that we can allow fires to burn in conditions that are the lowest risk, so we don't end up having those things burn out during a year like we had last year," he said.

Clinch said the fear is that the arrival of more autumn-like weather will be accompanied by strong winds that could fan the wilderness fires into areas where property and lives are endangered.

He said the state is not challenging the Forest Service's policy of allowing fires to burn as a means dealing with fuel accumulation in forests. It's a matter of timing, he said.

"We just question the wisdom of trying to implement that strategy during a year of drought conditions and on the heels of the year we had last year," Clinch said, referring to the fires of 2000 that charred almost 1 million acres in Montana.

"We find it increasingly difficult to be on the same page with you this season and under these conditions," Clinch told Bosworth.

The wilderness blaze of greatest concern is the 3,000-acre Biggs Flat fire about 35 miles west of Choteau.

Bosworth said the Forest Service usually permits fires late in the year to burn because the season is so short by this time, with rain or snow normally on the horizon.

"Normal only works in normal conditions,, and we're not in normal conditions when we're back to back with several years of drought," Clinch replied.

He said state residents are nervous about what could happen if typical high winds this time of year transform a relatively harmless wilderness fire into a threat to the town of Choteau.

"We don't have enough forces if Mother Nature really turns against us to really stop that fire," Clinch said.

"We could see a run of a couple hundred thousand acres in two days if we end up with an unpredictable weather pattern," he said. "We just question whether we should be setting ourselves up for that luck of the draw."

Martz said Montana cannot afford such a development. It spent \$17 million to fight fires last year and already has spent \$8.1 million this year.

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Few appeals to USFS bring change

Associated Press

MISSOULA (AP) – Ninety percent of the projects covered by citizen appeals to the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Region since 1994 were not changed because of the appeal, but the agency says the appeal process is useful nonetheless.

That process is in the spotlight as the Forest Service seeks U.S. Department of Agriculture approval of a plan to salvage burned trees on thousands of acres burned by the 2000 wildfires in the Bitterroot National Forest. USDA signing of the plan would exempt it from administrative appeals.

Of 553 appeals reviewed by the regional office over the past eight years, 497 ended with affirmation of the original decision, the Forest Service said. Appeals resulted in orders for further analysis or revision of 56 projects.

"The original intent of the appeals process was to give people another chance to express their concerns without going to court," said Maggie Pittman, public affairs officer at the regional office in Missoula.

That is a valid purpose, but there are times when appeals do not add to the quality of the final decision about a project, she said.

The need for "urgent action" to cut burned Bitterroot timber while it still has market value outweighs any potential benefit from another 120 days of debate tied to administrative appeals over plans to log 46,000 acres, Forest Chief Dale Bosworth said.

That is especially so given that critics already have promised lawsuits if the Bitterroot plan includes any commercial logging, Bosworth said.

Environmental groups are likely to file suit over both the logging plan and the prohibition on appeals.

"I see very little downside to the appeals process," said Sierra Club President Jennifer Ferenstein, who lives in Missoula.

"If you read through a project and see something you disagree with or that doesn't make sense, you can file a protest. It's a legitimate means of public participation."

Because of appeals, the Forest Service does a better job of reviewing projects, Ferenstein said.

The Sierra Club is concerned that the no-appeals position on the Bitterroot plan will set a dangerous precedent.

"My sense is that the law was meant to be abided by all the time, not just when it's convenient," Ferenstein said.

Supporters of the Forest Service position believe environmentalists merely hope to delay work in the burned forest until the timber has no market value.

"The appeals from environmental groups have hung us all up in the past," said Debra Walker, secretary of Timber Workers United. "They threaten to sue the Forest Service every time they turn around. That's intimidating."

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Audit finds Forest Service misspent fire plan money

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) – The Agriculture Department's inspector general has questioned how the Forest Service spent \$2.5 million in restoration funds from a billion-dollar national wildfire plan.

The audit report looked at a sample of forests in the West to see how the unprecedented federal wildfire spending package was managed. The report concluded that the agency isn't providing adequate oversight to ensure funds intended to restore forest habitats are being spent appropriately.

Mark Rey, the Agriculture undersecretary who oversees the Forest Service, said the agency has fixed most of the problems since the inspector general raised them in the report last month.

The Forest Service couldn't provide officials to comment on specific issues last week.

The report questioned the propriety of spending restoration funds for planning timber sales in Montana and providing permits to harvest mushrooms at six national forests in the West. Mushrooms sometimes grow abundantly after fires.

Additionally, funds that were supposed to be used for restoration projects after fires in 2000 instead were spent on projects from the 1998 blazes in Montana's Lolo National Forest. In the report, the Forest Service said necessary accounting adjustments remedied the problem.

Congress approved the national fire plan in the fall of 2000, after wildfires charred more than 7 million acres of public and private lands, an area roughly the size of Maryland.

The Forest Service received \$1.1 billion for the 2001 budget year and had to move quickly to handle the influx of new money. The dollars went to a host of uses, including hiring more personnel, buying equipment, removing hazardous fuels from forests and completing restoration work after fires.

Taxpayers for Common Sense, a watchdog group, said the findings in the inspector general's report outline another instance of the Forest Service trying to pull the wool over taxpayers' eyes.

"In this one case, the (inspector general) was there to raise the flag," said Jonathan Oppenheimer, the group's forest analyst. "It raises the question of how many other cases there are."

The example that particularly troubled him involved Montana's Bitterroot National Forest, where managers planned to use part of a \$1.8 million fund from the national fire plan's restoration accounts to set up commercial timber sales. The report concluded that didn't qualify as restoration.

The forest's staffers said they were borrowing the money from the accounts until they received funding to set up the timber sales. However, the inspector general said the staff didn't keep track of how much of the money went toward timber sales.

In responding to the report, the Forest Service said it will review a sample of rehabilitation and restoration projects paid for under the national fire plan to make sure they meet the plan's criteria. It will also clarify the criteria for projects that can receive fire plan money.

For instance, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth told the inspector general's office that he would consider changing the criteria to allow mushroom harvest permits to be included as restoration work since the size of the crop is sometimes a significant management problem.

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Timber salvage plan approved

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) – The Bush administration approved a controversial plan to salvage dead and dying trees from the Bitterroot National Forest, blistered in the summer wildfires of 2000.

Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey signed the decision Sunday, with U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth. Aides to Rey said the plan took effect Monday.

Rey's signature shields the timber plan from a months-long administrative appeals process granted by Congress in 1992, but in a telephone interview he defended the move as legal.

"I fundamentally disagree that we are going around the appeals process," Rey said. "We are using mechanisms included in the appeals process, as they have been used before, in what I view to be a rare circumstance where that's justified."

Now, instead of making their case directly to other Forest Service supervisors, critics of the plan must file a lawsuit if they wish to press for changes

Opponents of the Bitterroot National Forest plan include conservationists and environmental groups, some of whom said Monday they intend to move quickly to challenge the Forest Service in court.

In a written statement, Rey said immediately starting work on the Forest Service's plan to restore the Bitterroot National Forest posed little risk to the health of the forest's ecosystem.

Last Friday, Rey had said workers were prepared to begin as soon as the record was signed.

Citing threats of litigation from environmental groups, Bosworth had said earlier that he saw little need for the internal appeal.

"That's the issue we're prepared to go to court over, because we think the right to an administrative appeal is really a fundamental right," said Doug Honnold, a Bozeman lawyer who works for Earthjustice, a legal defense fund.

"Our response is that Congress has already told the Forest Service, in no uncertain terms, that they cannot take that approach, that the appeal is mandatory," Honnold said.

Jennifer Ferenstein, president of the Montana chapter of the Sierra Club, said she is disappointed by Rey's decision, but not surprised. She cited Rey's former position as a timber lobbyist. President Bush appointed him to his current post overseeing the Forest Service.

Rey, Bosworth and others described the plan for the Bitterroot National Forest as a restoration effort because it includes measures such as planting trees, closing some forest roads and restoring streambeds.

Conservationists say the "restoration" label masks the plan's greater purpose: to cull 181 million board feet of lumber over three years from more than 46,000 acres of charred ponderosa pine trees.

The timber sale does represent a significant increase over previous timber sales from the Bitterroot, where 83 million board feet of timber were harvested from 1990 to 1999.

Fires during the summer of 2000 consumed more than 307,000 acres of the Bitterroot National Forest, a sprawling 1.6 million-acre area considered one of the largest stretches of American wilderness outside of Alaska.

The Forest Service said its logging plan will reduce the number of dead or dying trees that could fuel fires.

Conservationists fear logging the burned forest will create increase sediment in streams that are home to endangered fish, such as the bull trout.

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Forest chief seeks to end impasse

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) – Environmentalists and the timber industry tend to be two bookends on a long shelf. Rarely do they meet, particularly now, as the Forest Service changes three key policies put in place by the Clinton administration.

While environmentalists believe President Bush's team is chipping away at hard-won forest safeguards, timber industry representatives welcome relief from what they saw as an overzealous bureaucracy.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth finds himself caught between the two, each with a passionate interest in the 192 million acres of federal forest and grasslands, used for everything from fishing to producing timber to sheltering wildlife.

There are so many confusing regulations, the national forests are in a state of "analysis paralysis" – lots of planning and evaluating, but little action, Bosworth said in an interview after eight months on the job.

He wants to make policies clear and regulations easier to understand.

"I don't want them to add so much more process that they add to the ... gridlock that we are in already," he said.

But, in Bosworth's changes, environmentalists see an erosion of former Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck's natural resources agenda and new favor for boosting timber sales and developing pristine areas.

Mike Anderson, forest analyst for the Wilderness Society, says analysis paralysis happens when the Forest Service re-enters environmentally sensitive areas, such as habitat for endangered species.

"Public opposition does lead to paralysis. We think that if they were to choose less controversial activities ... they will have broad public support," he said.

Bosworth and the Bush administration are reviewing and revising three major policies:

The roadless rule, which roped off 58.5 million acres of forest, free of most logging and road construction.

A transportation policy that outlined the management of more than 383,000 miles of forest roads to reduce a maintenance backlog and protect undeveloped areas.

A set of regulations that provided local officials with guidance for writing 10- to 15-year forest management plans that could limit logging, skiing and other activities to protect ecosystems.

In each case, conservation groups contend, the changes being made undermine important forest protections.

Bosworth says the policies didn't work.

"Those things got all intertwined, and our folks in the field had an awful time trying to understand what it is we

really wanted," he said.

The timber industry, on the other hand, is encouraged that the administration is listening to its complaints. During the 2000 presidential campaign, industry executives got the Republican Party's attention with a \$1.5 million fund-raiser in Portland, Ore.

This month in Aurora, Ore., about a dozen timber company and industry association executives met with some of Bush's key natural resource officials to talk about land management policies.

The industry's message that day echoed Bosworth's on analysis paralysis: "Get us off of the total dead stop," says Chris West, vice president of the American Forest Resource Council in Portland. "Right now, the system is broken."

The issues are not new. Under a 1960 federal law, the Forest Service must manage the land for many uses, including timber production, conservation and recreation.

Under Dombeck, the Forest Service received national direction from headquarters as to the proper balance of uses. Bosworth – and the timber industry – believe such decisions are best made at the local level.

Chris Wood, a former top aide to Dombeck, sees the agency moving away from an "outward-looking" conservation agenda.

However, "different and controversial issues over public lands don't get any easier through delay or neglect or trying to push them down into the organization," he said. "They just fester."

Consider the ongoing fight over the roadless rule, which was designed to end a 30-year debate on the suitable protections for generally remote, undeveloped areas.

A federal court temporarily blocked the roadless rule from taking effect in May, and the administration began to revise it with more local input.

Since then, Bosworth has issued a directive saying that he would handle all decisions about roadless area development until each forest comes up with its own plan. He hasn't received a single request.

However, environmentalists complain about a cutoff date in the directive that allowed lower-level agency officials to sign off on some logging, most notably in Alaska's Tongass National Forest.

Ron Olsen, spokesman for the Alaska Rainforest Campaign, says those officials are making the wrong decisions and portions of about 8.5 million acres of roadless areas in the Tongass rain forest are in jeopardy – with six timber sales being planned.

"We went back to where we were prior to the roadless rule being signed in January," Olsen said.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., believes the challenge is finding practical solutions to natural resource issues that aren't "bureaucratic water torture" – a lesson he's learned on the Energy and Natural Resources' forests subcommittee, which he now chairs.

Under President Clinton, "not enough was done in those eight years to make balanced progress on either front" – to promote environmental protections or help timber-dependent communities, Wyden said.

"The premium is not just saying you disagree. The premium is on saying what you are going to do."

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Judge to hear Bitterroot fire-salvage logging case

MISSOULA (AP) – Opponents of a U.S. Forest Service plan to log charred trees from the Bitterroot National Forest told a federal judge Thursday that the agency is overstating the cost involved if the project is delayed.

Federal lawyers contend any delay in the harvest could cost as much as \$11 million in revenue to the Forest Service, as well as lost local jobs.

However, attorneys for a coalition of environmental groups suing the Forest Service over the timber harvest said the agency's estimate is overblown.

U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy is considering a request for an injunction to halt the project while a lawsuit by opponents of the timber harvest moves through court. It's not known when Molloy is expected to rule on the request.

Several groups, including The Wilderness Society and American Wildlands, sued the federal government Dec. 19, accusing the Bush administration of breaking the law when it by-passed an internal appeals process and approved the forest management plan.

The plan would allow the harvest of about 46,000 acres of burned timber in the Bitterroot National Forest, 307,000 acres of which was scorched during the 2000 fire season.

The agency maintains its proposal is an effort to restore the forest, by closing logging roads, replanting trees and removing dead trees that could fuel later fires.

The Forest Service argues that the longer the court waits to allow the work to begin, the more the charred trees will rot and become useless as lumber.

But Michael Power, chairman of the University of Montana Economics Department, said in court documents that the cool, dry environment of the Bitterroot Valley will allow the dead timber to remain standing for long periods of time with little rot or defect.

Environmental groups oppose the harvest, but the heart of their lawsuit is opposition to the Dec. 17 decision by Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey to bypass the agency's internal appeal process.

Rey has said that by signing the plan, no appeal would be necessary, because the Forest Service went to the top of the administrative chain of command for approval.

Rey, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth and other Forest Service officials reasoned that the issue would end up in court anyway, regardless of whether they allowed a time-consuming administrative appeal.

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We all lose as lawyers argue about logging

By LINDA PLATTS

The stand-off between the environmental community and the Forest Service over salvage logging on the Bitterroot National Forest in Western Montana demonstrates yet again that neither the land nor the public is well served by this ongoing battle of wills.

Elimination of the public appeals process by the Forest Service, threats of lawsuits by environmental groups and, most importantly, a great void where there should be stewardship for one of the nation's most wild and remote forests could have tragic consequences for the Bitterroot. Is this the future of national forest management?

For those who have witnessed past squabbles between the Forest Service and environmental groups, this one is all too familiar. It differs only in the enormity of the landscape and the fervor of the rhetoric. Restoration plan In the summer of 2000, wildfires exploded through the 1.6 million-acre Bitterroot National Forest, leaving behind 307,000 scorched acres. In the months that followed, the Forest Service worked with dozens of scientists and other experts, reviewed thousands of public comments and put together a restoration plan. Stream bank restoration, road repair, road obliteration, replanting and harvesting of burned and dead trees were all part of the plan.

As the planning moved forward, environmental groups came out against salvage logging and threatened lawsuits. Thinking it was better to be sued sooner than later, Chief of the Forest Service Dale Bosworth decided to skip the public appeals process. And so the environmentalists filed suit and a federal judge placed a moratorium on all Bitterroot logging and set a court date, no doubt the first of many.

The environmentalists have built a solid case for hands-off management of the burned forest and have scientific experts to back them up. For evidence, they point to Yellowstone National Park, which is rising from the ashes of the 1988 wildfires. On the other hand the Forest Service can make a case for hands-on management and hold up Montana's Sula State Forest as an example.

The same wildfires that rolled through the Bitterroot burned 12,021 acres of the 13,798-acre Sula Forest. However, because state lands in Montana are mandated to generate revenues for schools, state foresters immediately started the restoration process and the recovery of revenues. By spring, 21 million board feet of timber had been taken off the Sula and \$3.7 million deposited in the school trust.

Even then, some trees were left standing for habitat and others used for erosion control. Replanting, tending and time – 60 to 80 years – will get the Sula back on its feet according to forest managers. It might be a telling tale to compare similar sections of the Sula and the Bitterroot sometime in that far future. Rapidly losing value Right now the environmentalists seem to be in charge of the Bitterroot, as nothing will happen until the lawsuits have played themselves out. Meanwhile, we are well into the second winter following the wildfires, and time is fast running out for forest managers to carry out any restoration work. Dead trees rapidly lose their commercial value. As they do so, the public loses benefits, too. When there is a harvest, about 25 percent of the revenues from the timber sales remain with the forest for restoration projects. Timber industry workers are deprived of any economic benefits when a harvest is foregone. Furthermore, as the dead wood decays, it provides fuel for new wildfires and increased risks of insect infestations that could spread to healthy trees.

So there they stand toe to toe; two immovable objects clog the court calendars and consume mountains of tax dollars for the purpose of arguing the same points over and over again. The public watches and wonders how their needs are being served with either clean water, recreational access, scenic views, wildlife or wood products.

And yet meeting in the middle is the way that most things get done in a free and democratic society. Our tax dollars continue to flow to the Forest Service for forest management, but instead we get legal representation. This is not a rational way to manage public lands. We need forest managers with the authority and the incentives to provide the best stewardship for our public lands. The team of lawyers, we can do without. *Linda Platts is an editorial associate with PERC, the Center for Free Market Environmentalism, in Bozeman.*

February 8, 2002

Forest Service and Environmentalists Settle Logging Dispute

By JIM ROBBINS

After nearly three days of court-ordered negotiations, the United States Forest Service agreed to reduce substantially the size of a timber sale on large tracts of the Bitterroot National Forest that burned in wildfires in 2000. In exchange, environmentalists agreed to end their appeals on the remaining acreage and allow logging to take place.

"We are going to move ahead immediately," and allow local companies to start cutting timber, said Rodd Richardson, the Bitterroot forest supervisor.

United States Attorney Bill Mercer, who defended the government and took part in the negotiations, said, "The ability to immediately harvest dead trees and pursue forest restoration" would bring certainty to the people of Western Montana.

Tim Preso, a lawyer for EarthJustice in Bozeman, Mont., who negotiated for environmental groups, said the outcome should show the Forest Service that "we will fight for every acre on these wildlands."

Under the agreement, about 14,000 acres will be logged. The Forest Service originally sought to allow logging on 41,000 acres.

The Forest Service said the timber sale was secondary to the larger goal of helping the land heal after the fires and heading off the potential of widespread erosion and more fires as the burned trees fell and became fuel again. Environmentalists said the logging would cause widespread erosion and damage to streams that are home to the federally protected bull trout. They said the sales were evidence of the Bush administration's appeasement of industry with publicly owned resources.

In seeking to sell timber from 41,000 acres of forest that had burned, the agency said the timber needed to be cut before it lost its value and while the ground was frozen to minimize damage to forest soils during logging, so they tried to hasten the sale by skipping an administrative appeal.

Environmentalists sued, saying that skipping the appeals process was illegal. Judge Donald Molloy of Federal District Court granted their request for a restraining order in December.

After the Forest Service asked the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to allow five emergency timber sales, Judge Molloy ordered mediation, which was overseen by Chief Judge Michael Hogan of Oregon. Participants included Mark Rey, under secretary for the Agriculture Department; Dale Bosworth, the Forest Service chief; Mr. Richardson; and representatives for the Wilderness Society, EarthJustice and other environmental groups.

In the end, the Forest Service agreed to remove most of the roadless land from logging. It also removed areas that environmentalists said were important habitat for the bull trout and the west slope cutthroat trout. That reduced the the amount of timber cut to about 60 million board feet from 176 million board feet.

Federal officials said they were pleased with the outcome. "No one got everything they wanted," Mr. Richardson said, "but everybody got some of what they wanted."

Mr. Preso, of EarthJustice, said, "This was a test case on the nature of an appropriate response to a large-scale wildfire." He added, "Roadless areas are off the table as far as we're concerned."



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FS slowly developing wild areas, coalition says

By SHERRY DEVLIN *Of The Missoulian*

Piece by piece, a timber sale at a time, the U.S. Forest Service is developing the wild places that Americans want to protect, a coalition of environmental groups warned Thursday.

In western Montana, the Flathead National Forest wants to log trees on 600 acres burned last summer in the Standard Peak roadless area just west of Glacier National Park. The nearby Big Creek and Coal Creek drainages are spawning grounds for bull trout.

In far northwestern Montana, developers want to carve a ski area on the East Face of the Cabinet Mountains, a reserve harboring some of the state's last remaining stands of western hemlock, cedar and western white pine.

And in Idaho, foresters on the Panhandle National Forest are looking at 12,000 acres near Lake Pend Oreille for possible logging and burning.

Month by month, since George W. Bush won the presidency, the pace of development - or the potential for development - has accelerated, said Bob Ekey, northern Rockies representative for The Wilderness Society.

"They are going to chip away at these places until there is nothing left," he said. "And then where will we be?"

In a report called "Our Nation's Wild Forests at Risk," 28 environmental groups accused the Forest Service of "stealth maneuvers" intended to develop forests listed for protection during the Clinton administration.

Clinton's so-called "roadless initiative" would have protected 58.5 million acres of pristine national forests, including 6.4 million acres in Montana, from development. At first, the Bush administration promised to uphold the historic conservation measure. Then officials delayed the rule's implementation, failed to defend it against a court challenge and, last fall, vowed to revise it.

On Thursday, the Forest Service's regional planner in Missoula said some roadless areas are proposed for timber cutting or other development, but none have yet been entered.

"It is clear," said planner Tom Rhode, "that if one of the concerns is timber harvesting, even if it is to restore the composition and structure of the forest, if this is not something that people want to see, then certainly these type of projects will not meet those people's needs."

The analysis continues on about 725,000 comments submitted last summer after Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said the agency will write a new roadless rule - one presumably more palatable to timber companies and communities in the West.

So far, Rhode said, the comments seem to fall into two broad categories: one supporting the protection of roadless areas from development, the other saying the decision should be made at the local level.

"The current administration thinks these decisions ought to be made locally," he said. "I think that's the real issue they are wrestling with - whether this is a national issue or a local issue. That's what they will have to analyze."

In the meantime, the Forest Service is following interim rules that prohibit most kinds of development in roadless areas, according to Rhode. There are exceptions, though, for the logging of small diameter timber needed to restore a forest ecosystem or to enhance the habitat of an endangered species.

Any plan to develop a roadless area needs - at the minimum - the approval of a regional forester, he said. And in most cases, Bosworth also must agree.

So far, one 600-acre timber sale has been approved in a roadless area outside Thompson Falls. The logging will take only small-diameter trees and will restore the forest's historic composition, Rhode said. "We told them to go ahead."

Other projects have been proposed, but are still being studied: 1,000 acres of salvage logging in burned - but also roadless - areas of the Flathead forest; development of the Treasure Mountain ski area in the Kootenai National Forest; logging in a roadless area north of Clark Fork, Idaho, not far from Lake Pend Oreille.

Still, he said, the intent is to protect most areas until the Forest Service resolves the roadless issue.

"It's just not true," came the counter from Ekey, at The Wilderness Society. "They are chipping away at these places right now."

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Veneman troubled by red tape

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - Describing an agency paralyzed by litigation and paperwork, the heads of the U.S. Forest Service told Congress Wednesday that managing national forests is getting harder - raising the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman testified that Forest Service managers spend about half their time meeting burdensome regulations created by acts of Congress and court order.

"Frequently, this onerous process does little to improve the quality of agency decisions," Veneman told the House Resources Committee.

And that does not include the time spent on the approximately 5,000 legal actions filed against the Forest Service involving timber sales, water rights and claims under the National Environmental Protection Act, Undersecretary Mark Rey said.

The Forest Service is writing a report, which Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth is expected to present to Congress May 16, examining internal procedures that contribute to gridlock and what he has called "analysis paralysis."

The hearing was called for lawmakers to hear Veneman's views on the state of the Forest Service, which manages 192 million acres of land, including 155 national forests. The agency is a branch of the Agriculture Department.

Republican lawmakers generally criticized the agency for elevating the priorities of hikers and campers, for example, over the rights of logging, mining and drilling companies.

"The Forest Service has replaced management of timber, once thought of as a commodity and a renewable resource, with recreation management," said Rep. James Hansen, R-Utah, Resources Committee chairman. "We're concerned. This must be changed."

Veneman linked the burden of regulation to greater fire risk and unhealthy trees, and said many timber sales - which she sees as a tool to thin unhealthy trees or forests clogged by wildfire-feeding underbrush - have been stopped by environmental lawsuits.

She said there are 73 million acres of national forest at moderate to high risk from serious wildfire, and 70 million acres of forest facing destruction from insects and disease.

"Management by doing nothing is not an option," Veneman said. Timber from national forests, she said, must be considered a commodity to be harvested and sold.

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Public lands conference today

Gazette Staff

Public lands concerns will be featured when as many as 500 county officials from 17 Western states gather in Billings this week.

As part of its agenda, the National Association of Counties Western Interstate Region Conference will hear the national directors of the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service discuss the coming wildfire season.

National BLM Director Kathleen Clarke and Dale Bosworth, chief of the Forest Service, will speak at 8:45 a.m. Friday at the Holiday Inn Grand Montana Billings, 5500 Midland Road.

The National Fire Plan, enacted after the devastating wildfires of 2000, boosted funding to fight, prevent and restore fire-damaged lands, but since then the plan has come under heavy criticism. But the General Accounting Office issued a report in February that says the fire plan is doing little to protect local communities from wildfire.

The convention's general session begins at 8:15 a.m. today. Dan Kemmis, a former Missoula mayor and director of the University of Montana's O'Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West, will speak.

Conference attendees will gather tonight at the Billings Depot for a street dance. Montana Avenue will be closed between 25th Street and 23rd Street from 6 to 10:30 p.m.

At 10 a.m. Saturday, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., will hold a public hearing on reauthorization of the federal transportation bill.

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Local role in fire efforts emphasized

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Greater use of public lands, coupled with poor range and forest health, have helped create serious fire risks in parts of the West, federal land managers said Friday.

And they said it will take considerable participation between state, local and federal agencies to reduce threats to communities.

"We are together in this," Kathleen Clarke, director of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, told a National Association of Counties conference in Billings for leaders from 15 Western states.

Clarke and U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said healthy range and forests achieved through prescribed burns, thinning or other management tools are key to reducing wildfire risk. The officials also noted the importance of education, particularly as more people build homes in or near forested areas and more explore on public lands.

Local governments can help land managers set priorities for "treating" forests, such as cutting down excess vegetation, Bosworth said.

A renewed emphasis on such management and extra resources for firefighting were credited with helping temper last year's fire season, which was less severe than in 2000.

Drought grips parts of the West, where fires are now burning, and efforts to reduce what Bosworth calls "hazardous fuels" on public and private lands will take a long time.

These factors contribute to what Clarke said "no doubt will prove to be a very challenging fire season."

Robert Cope, a commissioner from Lemhi County, Idaho, said he's "scared to death" about what the next few months hold. He said he hopes the lines of communication between local, state and federal officials will be open, and that the emphasis will remain on improving forest health through such activities as clearing dead and dying trees.

"We're going to burn again. I'm amazed we didn't last year," he said.

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National Digest

Associated Press

News briefs

Chief postpones hearing on USFS's burden WASHINGTON - A congressional hearing to address what Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth has called an "analysis paralysis" within his agency was postponed Monday after Bosworth said he had not been able to complete his report.

Bosworth was to testify Thursday before the House Resources Committee about environmental regulations that he has said made it nearly impossible to make decisions on logging sales on Forest Service land.

It is the second time Bosworth's report to Congress has been postponed. He had first promised to have it ready by May 15, but that was delayed at the request of House members.

This time, staff with the GOP-controlled House Resources Committee said Bosworth informed them he hadn't completed the report.

A spokesman for Bosworth did not respond Monday to telephone messages asking about the status of the report. Committee staff referred questions to the Forest Service.

Former nurse charged with 10 deaths COLUMBIA, Mo. - A former nurse at a Veterans' Affairs hospital was arrested Monday and charged with murder in the deaths of 10 patients in 1992.

More than 40 patients on Ward 4 East at Truman Memorial Veterans Hospital in Columbia died that year while under the care of Richard Williams, authorities said.

Williams, 36, has denied wrongdoing. He was arrested without incident in suburban St. Louis and taken to the Boone County jail, where he was held without bond. His arraignment was scheduled for today.

Old-style movie mogul Wasserman dies at 89 BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. - Lew Wasserman, one of the last old-time movie moguls who helped build an entertainment empire while keeping company with presidents and the most glittering of Hollywood stars, died Monday. He was 89.

Wasserman died at home from complications of a stroke, said Susan Fleishman, a spokeswoman for Vivendi Universal Entertainment, which now owns Universal Studios.

As chairman and chief executive, Wasserman was the undisputed ruler of MCA Inc., then parent of

June 23, 2002

Era of the Big Fire Is Kindled at West's Doors

This article was reported by Timothy Egan, Michael Janofsky, Andrew C. Revkin and James Sterngold and written by Mr. Egan.

The fires came early this year to the West, chasing people out of valleys in Colorado, rousting animals from late slumber in Alaska, choking the sky with smoke in Arizona woods that have so little moisture they seem kiln-dried.

The price of holding back nature has come home, fire officials say. A century-long policy of knocking down all fires has created fuel-filled forests that burn hotter and faster than ever. The era of big fires -- and with it, the need for big government to contain them -- is at hand, many firefighters say. Already, with 1.9 million acres burned by the first day of summer, wildfires across the West are burning twice the acreage of the 10-year average for this time of year.

A convergence of events -- drier forests, higher temperatures, a yearslong drought and more people living in places where fire has long made a home -- is likely to keep armies of yellow-shirted firefighters busier than ever, at a cost to taxpayers of \$2 billion a year.

"We've got the equivalent of the perfect storm," said Stephen J. Pyne, an Arizona State University fire historian who has written many books on the subject.

Forest Service officials say 73 million acres, about 40 percent of all Forest Service land, are at risk of severe fires in coming years.

Since four firefighters choked to death on superheated gas in this Eastern Washington valley last year, government strategy for fighting fires has changed, with new rules that will slow response in the woods.

Smoke jumpers will not always be in Westerners' backyards at a moment's notice.

"Some citizens may resent any delay when they know there is a fire burning in the forest," said Sonny J. O'Neal, supervisor of the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests.

In Arizona tonight, two major fires that have been burning all week were about to connect, and officials told residents of the area's largest town, Show Low, to evacuate.

"We're at the mercy of Mother Nature right now," said Larry Humphrey, incident commander of the Rodeo fire, Arizona's largest. "There's not a whole lot we can do."

Some say the fires are a harbinger. "These catastrophic fire seasons are going to become the norm," said Bruce Babbitt, the former Interior secretary and Arizona governor. "The question is, what are we going to do about it? Can we learn to live in the woods, when in most of these areas there aren't even building codes?"

One central question is whether the government should be more willing to start controlled fires, to burn off built-up fuels. But the policy is vexed, in part because some of the biggest recent fires were government-started blazes that got out of control -- and because growing numbers of people and homes are in harm's way if controlled burns jump the rails.

The fires this time are also prompting calls to enact a new social contract. People living in fire zones would have to do preventive maintenance to expect government help when the woods catch fire. The insurance industry, which has forced a change among home developers by making it more costly to live in flood zones, is considering similar rules for fire areas.

In Alaska, where a half-million acres have burned this year and the fire season came earlier than anyone can remember, insurers have already stopped offering policies to homeowners who refuse to remove fire hazards from their houses in areas where dead spruce trees are likely to burn.

But changing fire policy is slow, subject to partisan fluctuations and interest-group pressure and fraught with technical questions. "Reinstating fire is like reinstating a lost species," Dr. Pyne said. Republicans blame environmentalists, arguing that stepped-up logging is the answer, to clear the forests of the trees most likely to burn. Democrats argue that the timber industry is using fire as an excuse to cut down trees.

The Bush administration has no plans to change fire policy, said Mark E. Rey, who oversees the Forest Service. It will try to reduce the "process paralysis" that has kept land agencies from taking big new steps to clear out fuel in the forests, he said, and to encourage people in fire zones to be aware of the constant threat.

On the fire front lines in Colorado and Arizona, the message is starting to get through. But for many, it is too late.

The Battleground

On the Front Lines, The Urban Interface

After deciding to leave Las Vegas, Nancy and Steve Smith looked at nearly 40 houses before finding the 3,200-square-foot home they bought last March in the Colorado Rockies.

"We knew this was the house we had been looking for," Mrs. Smith said. "It was on top of a wooded ridge overlooking a valley with horse ranches. To the west we had beautiful views of Thunder Butte. Our property bordered Pike National Forest on one side."

They came to the mountains, like most urban exiles, seeking clean air, solitude, a closeness to nature.

"I had no idea until mid-April that we were in an area that was considered high risk for fire," Mrs. Smith said. "When we moved in, there was snow on the ground. And it snowed every week for a month."

On May 19, barely a few weeks after that last snow, the Smith family was told to evacuate because of a growing wildfire. Then came the Hayman wildfire, Colorado's biggest blaze, which the authorities say was started by a seasonal Forest Service worker. In days, the fire covered 20 miles, spreading to within five miles of the Smiths' house.

Last Monday, the Smiths had two hours to retrieve more possessions. On Wednesday, their dream house was destroyed.

Whether the fire was natural or not will be debated for years. But the Smiths' story is more common across the West as more people move into what used to be wilderness.

Experts call the zone where homes meet forest the "urban-wildland interface." That is where most fires are being fought.

Ten times as many homes are now in areas prone to wildfire as there were 25 years ago, said Don Smurthwaite, a spokesman for the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

In Colorado, the number of people living in areas at risk of fire increased 30 percent during the 1990's, said James E. Hubbard, the state forester. Nearly a million people in Colorado now live in the fire zone, state and federal demographers said.

Demography and nature collided in Colorado this spring when wildfires broke out in the Rockies, where a drought meant there was little snowpack to provide moisture.

"Usually, the fires don't start until June in this part of the world," said Gordon Koenig, a pilot who has been dumping fire retardant on Colorado six days a week since April. Mr. Koenig said the season had doubled in length in the 13 years he has been fighting fires.

A half-century ago, the strategy of fighting nearly every fire was easier. But the era when smoke jumpers would drop into uninhabited valleys is gone, Forest Service officials say. Its end is complicated because the new generation of Westerners has not learned how to live in the red zone safely.

"While Westerners are getting more educated about fire, there is still a kind of dangerous independence, one that resists all zoning and regulation, that exists among people who live in the fire zone," said Pat Williams, a former Montana congressman.

Others agree. "I think the public has accepted the fact that fire has a natural place," said Dr. Pyne, the Arizona State fire historian. "People are starting to get it. But it will take another 10 years or so to work out. Unfortunately, that means the peak of wildfires and homes destroyed will be in the next five years."

The Policy

When to Fight And What to Risk

Smokey Bear came of age in an era that was haunted by a single summer, 1910, a year that still hangs over all Forest Service decisions about fire. In that year, it seemed as if all of the West was on fire. Three million acres burned in Montana and Idaho alone, and 87 people died. "Thousands of people thought the world was coming to an end," wrote Norman Maclean, the author of "Young Men and Fire," a story of one of the worst calamities in firefighting history.

The deaths, and the apocalyptic images of valleys where daylight had turned to darkness, prompted the fledgling group of government foresters to adopt a new policy. From then on, every fire would be fought, quickly.

But even by midcentury, some foresters were beginning to argue that the policy was misguided and that by snuffing out all fires, the Forest Service was only delaying the inevitable big fires.

A 1999 report by the General Accounting Office blamed a century of putting out all fires for "an increasing number of large, intense, uncontrollable and catastrophically destructive wildfires." The agency said forests in the West would be at risk of big fires through 2015.

The government has made various attempts to change its policy. One of its most notable experiments was in 1988, when some natural fires that consumed more than half of Yellowstone National Park were allowed to burn.

Though the policy angered some Western senators at the time, the now-green park seems to vindicate the National Park Service's decision.

But the issue of allowing fires to burn becomes infinitely more complex when the fire is raging not in a park or a wilderness but near a neighborhood.

"People will simply not tolerate that," Mr. Babbitt said.

The government's ability to make the case for controlled burns has also been severely hampered by its own missteps. In 2000, for example, a fire started by the Park Service in New Mexico raged out of control and destroyed hundreds of houses and thousands of acres, ultimately costing the government far more than it ever would have paid to fight a natural fire in the area.

Fires become politicized, too. In 1988, some people blamed the Reagan administration for letting Yellowstone burn. In 2000, George W. Bush implied that President Bill Clinton's policies were to blame for Montana fires.

"The only thing that burns hotter than a wildfire in the West is the demagoguery of some politicians trying to take advantage of it," said Mr. Williams, the former Montana congressman.

The Clinton and Bush administrations have pushed for some logging of dead or dying forests in particularly vulnerable areas, but have been stymied by lawsuits and protests from environmental groups.

Last week, in testimony before Congress, Dale Bosworth, the chief of the Forest Service, said "analysis paralysis" from lawsuits and second-guessing by the land agencies had prevented the government from burning or logging some fire-prone areas.

But even in areas that have been logged, laced with roads or cleaned of excess brush, firestorms have raced through. In 2000, when eight million acres burned, fires scorched the Bitterroot Valley in Montana, taking out ancient trees on one side of the mountains and homes and orchards on the other.

The other policy debate centers on firefighters and how much risk they should take to save property. When the Mann Gulch fire killed 12 young men in 1949, the Forest Service vowed to never repeat its mistakes.

But in 1994 in Colorado, 14 firefighters died in the South Canyon fire. The circumstances were hauntingly similar, except this time they were fighting to save houses in the urban interface. The Forest Service partly blamed gung-ho firefighters for the deaths.

Last year, after Congress met the call for more firefighters in response to the huge fires of 2000, four people died in the Thirty Mile Fire in the valley just north of here, trapped in fire shelters after a flame storm overwhelmed them. An investigation said numerous safety rules had been violated. Some people also blamed the rush to throw firefighters, some poorly trained, at fires.

All these deaths have had a humbling effect on the men and women who fight fires. As Mr. O'Neal, the forest supervisor, said in announcing new guidelines this week, firefighters are not going to die to save property.

"We will continue to attack and control fires that threaten life, property or important natural resources," Mr. O'Neal said. "But in every case, safety comes first."

The Science

Calculating Danger And Predicting Relief

No matter how many loads of retardant are dumped and fire lines cut, the threat to the Rockies will be eased only by moisture -- in amounts vastly greater than can be carried in the bellies of airplanes.

The prime ingredients for conflagration remain abundant across much of the West, fire experts say: dry weather, frequent winds, sunken water tables and desiccated, fuel-laden stands of trees and brush, which one New Mexico wilderness expert called "dog-hair forest" because they are so overgrown.

As a result, when there is a source of ignition, whether a burning letter or a lightning strike, fires spring up explosively.

The Hayman fire and the Missionary Ridge fire near Durango were so broad and fierce last week that gusts of oven-hot air rising at superhighway speeds spawned thunderstorms and "fire whirls," short-lived little cousins of tornados generated by clashing hot and cool air.

"A fire whirl can sustain itself and hop right over fire lines," said Larry Van Bussum, the staff meteorologist at the National Interagency Fire Center. "They're carrying fire and debris and embers and are throwing them all over the place. You start seeing those on the fire line and you know things are getting pretty ugly."

In the mountains east of Santa Fe, N.M., one fire that burned 2,000 acres by Wednesday had tripled in size by Friday morning and was advancing at its peak through a mile of forest an hour, officials said.

Salvation, in the form of great pools of moist air, sits hundreds of miles away, over the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico.

That air, heavy with water vapor, will be drawn toward the country's scorched interior only when high pressure builds over Texas, as it does each summer, creating an atmospheric carousel.

Federal meteorologists say that moist air flow should begin in a few more weeks. Satellites have already measured some wisps filtering over Mexico. That would bring some relief to the southern Rockies, but it would do nothing to help the Pacific Northwest, which usually goes into a drought every summer until October.

Even after showers and downpours arrive in the Southwest, however, the fire threat will remain high, said John E. Jones Jr., deputy director of the National Weather Service. This is the case, Mr. Jones said, even though federal meteorologists predict above-normal rainfall for Colorado and eastern Utah this summer. Part of the problem, he said, is that temperatures across the West are expected to be higher than normal through September.

Meanwhile, across broad stretches of the region where the worst drought in memory remains entrenched, farmers and homeowners kick at powdery soil and watch smoke rise.

In Santa Fe, where the reservoir is little more than a damp bowl, the community is trying to adapt to the longstanding absence of water.

At Plaza Resolana, a conference center there, managers have placed a bucket in each shower stall and asked guests to collect the first cold gush before the hot water kicks in. Guests tote the water into the gardens to keep a few favorite shrubs alive.

A pile of smoke from a 6,000-acre fire just over the bristly ridge east of town settles at night, then rises again each morning as winds energize the flames.

The Lessons

A Community Learns To Live With Nature

After a recent helicopter tour of wildfires across his state, Gov. Bill Owens declared, "It looks as if all of Colorado is burning." He was exaggerating, of course.

But the nine major wildfires crunching across Colorado made for an extraordinary start to a fire season. Wildfires have consumed almost 300,000 acres there, driving thousands of people from their homes.

Like other Western states where dry conditions and dense underbrush are fueling blazes, Colorado is learning a hard lesson.

It was a lesson residents of Malibu, Calif., learned in 1993, when a firestorm wiped out more than 350 homes.

After the blaze, wholesale changes were made in building codes, and even in the rules governing landscaping, to reduce the spread of fire. The changes are among the most stringent in the country.

Kathy and John Haag, who lost their house in 1993, have had to build their new home using an entirely different set of rules. "I even had to move the footprint of the house on the lot and build a retaining wall in a hillside for the driveway to accommodate fire trucks," said Mr. Haag, a lawyer.

The Haags can use only certain kinds of treated wood and fire-retardant materials, and they get constant reminders from the fire department to clear brush, or pay fines.

It makes a difference. Though fire officials are expecting one of the worst fire seasons ever in Southern California because of a drought and a heavy accumulation of brush, they also say that the lessons of 1993 have helped to reduce the risks.

P. Michael Freeman, the chief of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, said that a task force created after the 1993 fire eventually made 39 recommendations, virtually all of which have been put in place. "The changes in the building code and our brush clearance I would characterize as almost radical," Chief Freeman said. Among the most important, he said, were vigilance on brush clearance and an emphasis on attacking fires quickly from the air.

The Haags said they had just finished a two-year renovation of their home when the 1993 fire roared through. They escaped with only a few things thrown into the back of a car. Seeking to expand their home later, they ran into an array of tough new standards.

They have to leave a five-foot space around the house clear for access. Grass has to be mowed to three inches or less, and ground cover, which can start 20 feet from the house, must be 18 inches or lower. Trees must be 30 feet apart. Eaves must be covered, with few ventilation openings, to prevent embers from lodging there in a fire. New houses must have sprinkler systems.

Ann Stalcup, a schoolteacher, said she and her husband effectively replaced their wooden home, destroyed in the fire, with a stone house. The new roof is covered with terra cotta tiles, the wooden deck that juts out over the hillside is tiled in ceramic and the walls of the house are stucco. A sprinkler system has been installed, and, Ms. Stalcup said, she endures frequent visits from the fire department to ensure that the brush is cleared.

Ken Chiate, a lawyer, lost two adjacent houses. One was rented to a family that still had the moving van out front when the fire came. Mr. Chiate rebuilt using the new materials and even had to include stronger walls, without windows.

Asked why he stayed in a dangerous area, he said without hesitation: "You get coyote wandering in the yard, roadrunners across your driveway, deer eating the roses. My wife feeds about a hundred quail. It's what we like, and we accept the risk."

The Outlook

Efforts to Change Yield Mixed Results

It remains to be seen whether communities in Colorado and throughout the West, not all as rich as Malibu, will follow its example.

Some experts are not optimistic. "We call ourselves a nation of pragmatists," said Dr. Pyne, the fire historian, who spends much of the year living in the fire-prone woods near Alpine, Ariz. "But you wouldn't know it by the way we deal with fire."

So far, there is little talk of requiring people who live in areas vulnerable to fire to do much differently.

Governor Owens of Colorado said in an interview that while state government could encourage people to take precautions against fire, changes in zoning laws and building codes are best left to local governments.

But local efforts seem to have yielded mixed results. Under a national fire plan put in place at the end of the Clinton administration, counties in high-risk areas are required to develop fire plans. They are also supposed to issue rules for construction, seeing to it that roads are wide enough to accommodate firefighting equipment, that buildings are made of fire-resistant materials and that buildings are a fixed distance from trees.

But meeting the requirements is daunting for many counties, and just 33 of Colorado's 64 counties have completed the task, said Larry Kallenberger, executive director of Colorado Counties Inc.

Mr. Williams, the former congressman, said the federal government should have a role, using a carrot-and-stick approach to the millions of people moving into the fire zone.

"I think you ought to be able to build anywhere you want in these mountains, but don't expect taxpayer-financed firefighters to bail you out unless you take certain preventive steps," he said.

Mr. Rey of the Forest Service said the Bush administration had no plans to require more fire prevention as a condition of government help. But he added, "People need to develop a better understanding of the risks associated with building in these areas."

That understanding includes acknowledging the costs. "The question is when do you want to pay," said Roger A. Pielke Jr., a professor of environmental studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. "You can pay through government disaster assistance and higher insurance premiums after the fact, or pay in advance through changing land-use and forest-management policies."

But the latter option is not something an elected official will find very palatable, Professor Pielke said.

"Would you rather be looked at as a hero, bringing in aid after a disaster," he asked, "or a bad guy who doesn't allow you to build in the way you want and place you want?"

The question no official -- in Colorado or elsewhere -- can answer is whether even a succession of devastating fire seasons is enough to persuade people to live differently.

Mr. Hubbard, the Colorado forester, said big fires get people's attention -- but only for so long. "After the flames have gone away and the fire season is only a memory, the sense of urgency wanes," he said.

He added that good intentions were often overrun by Western individualism, which is especially common in people who choose to live in remote settings, apart from crowded subdivisions. "You begin to see more resistance," Mr. Hubbard said.

Some people, though, are having second thoughts. Patricia and Charles Thomas moved from the earthquake country of California into the fire zones of the Colorado Rockies, thinking they were safer in the mountains. Their development, called Tranquil Acres, has proved to be anything but.

They have fled their house and are living hour by hour, waiting to see what happens as the Hayman fire bears down.

"It's a feeling in your gut like you're in war," Mrs. Thomas said. She would like to move back to California, but her husband

prefers Colorado.

"We'll probably stay here and rebuild," she said. "It's either that or I leave my husband."

Photos: The Missionary Ridge fire, one of many ravaging forests in the West, threatened homes near Durango, Colo. (Associated Press)(pg. 1); A forest near Show Low, Ariz., was covered in ash from the Rodeo fire. "We're at the mercy of Mother Nature right now," said Larry Humphrey, incident commander of the fire. (Associated Press); Two mule deer fawns huddled among the ashes of the Hayman fire in Colorado. Right, residents evacuated West Glenwood, Colo., on June 8 after a fire jumped a nearby river. (Reuters); (Kevin Moloney for The New York Times); Evacuated residents of homes near the Hayman fire assembled at a high school gymnasium to get updates. Right, a house in Pinedale, Ariz., was consumed by the flames. (Associated Press); (Kevin Moloney for The New York Times)(pg. 20) Chart/Maps: "A Record Pace for Wildfires" The number of wildfires this year is normal, but the acreage burned for this time of year is twice the 10-year average. In some places, forestry officials say drought conditions in the last 3 to 4 years created an unusual accumulation of fuel on the forest floor resulting in very intense, large and dangerous fires that are harder to put out. Acres of wildlands burned, Jan. 1 to June 21. Graph tracks the number of acres of wildlands burned since 1992. A Measure of Dryness Shading represents drought conditions. June 7 through June 13, 2002 2002 Difference from normal moisture levels Map of the United States highlights the areas with drought conditions. This season 268 large wildfires have been contained in 2002. Currently there are 18 large fires burning in 8 states. Indications of danger Danger can be gauged by charting a fire's potential intensity. Environmental conditions and dry wood make high-intensity fires. These fires burn hotter, last longer and spread faster than normal fires. Forestry officials say this is to blame for the high number of acres destroyed this year, and they say they expect to see similar conditions throughout the season. MAP KEY Active large fires are named Smaller dots indicate areas destroyed by wildfires in 2002 Map of the United States highlights the areas with large and small wildfires. Potential intensity chart for the Southwest region HIGHER POTENTIAL INTENSITY The need for fire suppression resources is extreme. The need for fire suppression resources is very high. Graph tracks the Southwest region's potential intensity for this year, twenty-five year highs, and twenty-five year averages. (Sources: Brad Quale, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, National Interagency Fire Center)(pg. 21)



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'Hang in there' - President Bush consoles evacuees in fire-stricken Arizona, promises aid

Associated Press

SHOW LOW, Ariz. (AP) - As one of the worst wildfires in the history of the West devoured more ground Tuesday, President Bush declared the charred region a disaster area and consoled evacuees at a school that has become a mass shelter, telling them: "Hang in there. You're brave and great people."

The president toured the area by air and saw a string of devastated mountain communities that have lost at least 390 homes and dozens of businesses to flames feeding on paper-dry underbrush and stands of ponderosa pine. Some 30,000 people have fled their homes, and some will be helped by funds made available under the disaster declaration.

"We're kind of used to big fires out West," Bush said, "but this is the biggest of big fires."

In a single week, the blaze has blackened 375,000 acres or 586 square miles - an area larger than Los Angeles - and there is no containment in sight. Smoke has spread across the Southwest and was seen as far south as Las Cruces, N.M.

It is by far the biggest and most damaging fire of what is still a very young fire season.

A blackened buffer zone carved overnight kept the fire on the outskirts of the mountain town of Show Low, the region's abandoned economic hub. Crews for a second day patrolled the city looking for spot fires.

But the blaze roared on its western flank, where 15 more homes burned Monday.

"It's like a tidal wave, it's just amazing," fire spokesman Ed Perault said. "It's fire like a lot of folks have never seen."

With his shirt sleeves rolled up, Bush told about 300 evacuees at a high school cafeteria in nearby Eagar that "a lot of people in our country are pulling for you."

"They understand that a lot of you are living in tents when you'd rather be in your own bed," Bush said. "They cry for you and they hurt with you and I'm here to say on behalf of the American people, God bless you."

He shook hands with firefighters and evacuees, and heard a grim assessment from Larry Humphrey, a fire commander with the Bureau of Land Management.

"With the fuel built up and the dryness of the conditions there's not a heck of a lot we can do," Humphrey said.

On the western edge of Show Low, bulldozers dug a 60-foot-wide scar in the ground and crews set fires to burn their way back to the larger blaze, depriving it of new fuel. Helicopters dumped thousands of gallons of water and retardant on the flames.

More on Wildfires [Montana Fires](#)

Firefighters cut down trees close to homes, removed firewood and moved propane tanks away from homes. Sprinklers watered down houses close to the fire line to prevent stray embers from igniting.

"We're still ready," said Capt. John Brunacini of the Phoenix Fire Department. "We're like ducks on water, calm on top but our feet are going underneath."

Less than a half-mile from Show Low's homes, gray smoke turned to black as flames shot through the tops of trees along the fire line.

"It's really starting to cook," said Don Buttyan, who works for the fire department in the town of 7,700.

The fire was wreaking its worst damage Tuesday on its western flank: In the Heber-Overgaard area, about 35 miles west of Show Low, at least 238 homes and six businesses have been destroyed. A fish hatchery, ranch and hundreds of homes could be in danger depending on what the fire does next.

"We know about our place. It's burned down," said Jerry Roeller, 68. "We saw it on TV about a hundred times."

Roeller and his wife, Martha, lived in the Pinecrest Lakes RV Park in Overgaard. Videotape of the park showed burned-out metal shells and charred foundation where homes once stood. The Roellers were staying at a motel until they could return to see if there is anything to salvage.

"I want to stand on the ashes if I have to," Roeller said. "But I want to see the place."

The wildfire, formed by two smaller blazes that merged Sunday, is the largest in Arizona history. A lost hiker started one fire trying to signal for help. The other fire is believed to be human-caused, but the exact origin has not been determined.

With the number of homes lost, the fire has done more damage than the Los Alamos, N.M., blaze that destroyed about 220 homes and businesses two years ago.

"I've been doing this 29 years. This is the worst fire I've been on and our team was the first on the scene at Los Alamos," Humphrey said.

In Colorado, hot weather and shifting wind made it another miserable day for firefighters near Durango. A fire there has burned nearly 67,000 acres, at least 45 homes and damaged hundreds of power poles, cutting off electricity to more than 500 abandoned homes.

New flames flared near the main blaze Tuesday, forcing the evacuation of 90 homes. Smoke forced authorities to close a section of U.S. 550 north of Durango.

"Durango is just full of smoke," added David Waller, spokesman for the La Plata County Electric Association. "Every morning we wake up to thick smoke."

Southwest of Denver, crews had 70 percent containment of a 137,000-acre fire that has destroyed at least 133 homes and cost more than \$26 million to fight.

Ruth and Ted Johnson were among the 2,500 evacuees still waiting to return home. They worried their community near Deckers, about 40 miles southwest of Denver, would never be the same.

"All of a sudden, I find myself tongue-tied," said Ruth Johnson, 79. "I've shed a lot of tears over this. Some have been for joy and others in sadness."

President's remarks to Arizona's displaced

families

The following are remarks by the President to displaced families:

Round Valley High School

Eagar, Arizona

10:48 A.M. MDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. It's nice to see you. I'm sorry we're doing so under these circumstances. But I want you to know that a lot of people in our country are pulling for you. They understand the suffering that families are going through because of worry about your most precious possession, your home. They understand that a lot of you are living in tents when you'd rather be in your own bed. They cry for you, and they hurt for you. And I'm here to say on behalf of the American people, God bless you. (Applause.)

I want to thank Governor Hull for being - she called me a couple of days ago and she said, This is really bad. You've got to understand how bad these fires are. We're kind of used to fires out west, but this is the biggest of all big fires. And I appreciate her leadership. I appreciate her concern.

See, my job and her job is to make sure that all resources are coordinated and funded to help the people. That's what we're here to do. And the Governor is committed to that, and as am I. And that's why I brought my man, Joe Allbaugh. Where is he?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Right here.

THE PRESIDENT: He's the pretty one. (Laughter.) He runs what they call FEMA, which is the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Its job is to provide help. That's what its job is to do, to provide help during emergency. And this is an emergency.

Today, I signed a declaration declaring this an emergency, which then provides for federal help - which means money to fight the fires. It means temporary housing money and long-term housing money. It means help for small business owners; I understand there's a lot of small business owners who are worried about your business, and I don't blame you. I'd be worried, too. So it provides

help.

It helps provide counseling services, and a lot of folks here, I hope if you need counseling, you ask for it. A lot of people we want to help. So, this is the federal government's way of committing the resources allowed under the law, the full extent of the resources under the law.

I appreciate Congressman J.D. Hayworth for working this issue hard. I appreciate you being here, J.D. Thanks for coming. (Applause.)

We got people down here from the Interior Department. A fellow named Stephen Griles is the number two man in the Interior Department. I want to thank Steve for being on site here, for spending a lot of time in this area - again, to make sure that whatever we can do to help, we really, we'd like to try to do so.

I want to thank the Red Cross. I appreciate the good - (applause) - I appreciate, I want to thank Chad Ettmueller, who's the - I guess the man in charge of the Red Cross here. He just gave me a briefing on the number of meals being served - over 9,000 - the number of people being housed.

You know, one of the great things about this country is that there's a lot of loving people here in this country. I always say - (applause). And not only is the Red Cross helping, but the Salvation Army is as well. (Applause.)

See, here's what I tell them. What the enemy didn't understand is when they attacked America, they didn't understand how kind and decent this country is. (Applause.) And so I'm here to say thanks on behalf of the volunteers, the people who are doing their best to spread compassion to people who need compassion, to spread love to people who need love, to spread guidance to people who seek guidance.

I also want to thank the Forest Service, Dale Bosworth. Listen, we've got a lot of work to do to make sure the Forest Service has got wise forest policy - (applause) - to make sure to maintain the forests so that they're healthy and viable, and not become kindling-boxes.

I want to thank all the firefighters, the people who are - (applause). I had the honor of shaking some hands today of some of those who wear the uniform of the firefighter. You know, we focus on the houses which have been lost, and there have been too many houses lost. One house lost is too many houses lost. One house. (Applause.) But there's been thousands of homes saved, too, and that's important. (Applause.)

People that are just working their hearts out on behalf of their fellow citizens, you can look in their eyes and see the exhaustion. But I can assure you, having talked to them, and I know you have as well, they're not quitting until this thing is whipped. And I hope that makes you feel somewhat better, to know there's a lot of people out there working their heart out on your behalf.

I want to thank the mayors who are here, Kelly, Mayor Kelly, Mayor Handorf, and Mayor Kay Dyson of Show Low and Pinetop and Springerville. You see, one of the other things that's important is there's a lot of local folks who are doing everything they can to help as well. (Applause.)

I want to thank Dallas Massey, who's the chairman of the White Mountain Apache tribe. He came by to say hello today. Let me make this clear to you: we're all in this together. (Applause.) It is a - these fires wreak havoc on everybody who stands in the way. They don't pick and choose. And I hope, as we stay united to make sure that we do the best job we can in fighting these fires, that people stay united in doing this. It's an important moment, it's an important time for people to stay bound up in their compassion and in their desire to fight off this devastating disaster that's befallen you all.

And so it's been my honor to come. I look forward to shaking as many hands as I can. This is a - I know it's a tough moment in a lot of people's lives, there's just no doubt in my mind. But just like this war we're under, I believe out of evil can come some great good. It's hard to tell it right now. (Applause.)

It's hard to tell it. I know it's hard to tell it. It's easy for me; you say, yes, sure, he flies down in Air Force One and comes here and says that. It's easy for him to say it. But that's what I believe. Because I do believe there is a gracious and almighty God that's looking out after the people who've been affected. (Applause.)

So hang in there. Hang in there, you brave and great people. Thanks for giving me a chance to come by and say hello. May God bless you, and may God bless your families. Thank you.

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Guest Opinion: Daschle takes bold forest step

By **CONRAD BURNS** *U.S. Senator*

I am heartened by South Dakota Sen. Tom Daschle's recent action to restore some common sense to national forest management in his home state.

Sen. Daschle added a section to the Supplemental Appropriations bill that will cut the red tape required to treat the Black Hills National Forest and reduce fire danger. Specifically, Sen. Daschle exempted timber sales and hazardous fuels projects in the Black Hills Forest from the National Environmental Policy Act, from the National Forest Management Act and from all pending or future appeals or lawsuits. Management stymied This was necessary because the U. S. Forest Service has been effectively stripped of its ability to actively manage our nation's forests. One cause is the uneven appeals process, which tips the scales in favor of those who oppose any timber harvests, even to protect against future fires. According to the Forest Service, the majority of the mechanical fuels reduction projects proposed in Montana are slowed down through appeal. Unfortunately, this trend is one we see nationwide.

Every taxpayer dollar can only be spent once, and every dime the Forest Service spends on litigation or preparation for it is one less dime available for reducing fire risk on the ground. Most people cannot begin to understand how costly this process is until they see the smoke on the horizon. The federal government will spend over \$1 billion this year fighting fires, a number that keeps increasing every year.

Fire fulfills an important natural role in forests, and it would be irresponsible to attempt to eliminate it completely. With that in mind, we have reached the point where the entire fire season is wildly unpredictable, unsafe and unending. Fuel loads have grown and so have communities. We need to do a better job reducing hazardous fuels before fire hits in order to keep our people safe and our forests healthy. Susceptible to fire, infestation A 1999 General Accounting Office report warned that over 56 million acres of forest system lands are susceptible to fire. In addition, Chief Dale Bosworth estimates that tens of millions of acres across the United States are susceptible to insect infestation and disease. Here in Montana, over 1 million acres of forest lands have burned in the past two years. However, fire is only the first step in a long line of problems - erosion, weed infestation, disease and insect infestations often follow the fires. Following the fires of 2000 and 2001, future fire management is on everyone's mind. Today, Montana has well over 250,000 acres of disease-infested lands that, without immediate management action, will continue to spread leaving landscapes, watersheds, wildlife habitats and communities in jeopardy of further devastation.

My colleagues and I have worked hard to find a long-term fix for the deteriorating condition of our national forests. I am convinced that more active management, and a steady flow of material off the forest, would secure our timber communities and reduce fire risk. We have come up against roadblocks, but if there is a bright side to these recent years of severe fire, it is a heightened sense of awareness across the country that our National Forests are in bad shape. I will keep on working to improve the appeals process and streamline permitting for hazardous fuels removal.

Sen. Daschle's bold action is recognition that our public land systems are in crisis, and that these times deserve thoughtful, common sense measures.

I am working to build bipartisan support to implement these policy changes. I hope Sen. Daschle will support an effort to broaden his idea beyond the borders of his own state, because the forests don't stop at the South Dakota border. And neither will the fires. *Billings Republican Conrad Burns represents Montana in the U.S. Senate.*

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Forest Service 'loses' \$215M in fire funds

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - The U.S. Forest Service, now battling one of the worst fire seasons in history, "misplaced" about \$215 million intended for wildfire management because of an accounting error, a watchdog group contends. The agency says the money is being recovered.

Taxpayers for Common Sense, a Washington-based advocacy group, made public on Friday an internal memo from Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth that said the error nearly two years ago had been found as the agency tried to improve its accounting practices.

The Forest Service expects to spend a record \$1.5 billion this year to fight wildfires that have consumed more than 6 million acres in the West and killed 20 firefighters.

The agency is working with the White House Office of Management and Budget to find a way to apply the money, which was supposed to have been spent for the fiscal 2000 budget that ended Sept. 30, 2000, to this year's budget. Then it can be used to help pay for current firefighting efforts, Bosworth said.

While the auditing error could make additional money available to fight fires this summer, Eric Lynch, a policy analyst for the taxpayer group, said, "The misplaced millions could have been spent to reduce fire risk long before this year's fires ravaged the West."

"How in the world does an agency lose hundreds of million of dollars so desperately needed to help extinguish fires in the West?" asked Lynch. "In a record-spending fire season, it is vital that the Forest Service be held accountable as to how it spends taxpayer money."

In a memo to regional foresters and other supervisors this month, Bosworth said \$215 million was mistakenly reduced from a wildfire management account during a year-end account reconciliation in late 2000. The error was recently found "as a result of our continuing intense efforts to address agency accountability issues," Bosworth wrote in the memo, released by the taxpayer advocacy group.

Over the past decade, the Forest Service has failed eight out of 10 inspector general audits - a record the taxpayers' group called among the worst in the federal bureaucracy.

Bosworth, in his memo, said the windfall from the accounting error would do little to reverse the financial strain that the agency is experiencing because of the severe fire season.

In the absence of a dramatic increase from Congress, "It is apparent these additional funds will only mitigate the possibility of harsh actions that could affect the employment and morale of the work force," Bosworth wrote.

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Martz briefed on forest health

By JENNIFER McKEE *Gazette State Bureau*

HELENA - It's not what you take away from the forest that counts, U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth told Gov. Judy Martz Thursday, but what you leave behind that makes a forest healthy.

"All the articles I read focus on what we remove," said Bosworth, who was in Helena for a brief visit with Martz, her natural resources policy adviser, Todd O'Hair and regional forester Brad Powell.

Bosworth served as the regional forester in Missoula from 1997 until last year, and like Martz, President George Bush and others, favors streamlining some Forest Service rules and national laws to make it easier to get thinning operations on the ground and out of courtrooms.

Bosworth and Martz mainly talked strategy and how Martz, as chairwoman of the Western Governors' Association, can help spread her message that faster thinning operations mean fewer wildfires. Powell promised the governor she should see more salvage logging operations in the Bitterroot fire area popping up in the next few weeks.

One major problem, Bosworth said, is the emphasis on how much wood will be removed from the forest in a thinning operation. Rather than look at removing millions of board feet - the standard measure for wood - look at how many trees will still be standing.

Some forests are simply overgrown, Bosworth said. Trees should be removed, especially ladder fuels - small trees that help spread fire from the ground, where it mainly burns over grass, to the tree tops, where it can whip into a crown fire inferno.

But removing smaller trees has its problems, Bosworth said, and the Forest Service must work hard to overcome those. Small trees are not as valuable as large trees for turning into two-by-fours and house logs. Some have virtually no value as such. Bosworth told Martz that a Forest Service lab in Wisconsin is trying to find uses for those smaller trees.

Like the president, Bosworth wants the Forest Service to give longterm contracts for smaller tree removal, guaranteeing local businesses they'll have a steady supply of trees and, hopefully, encouraging them to invest in some of the special equipment they'll need to turn small trees into something valuable.

Martz suggested burning them as "biomass" - a process in which the trees are burned to generate electricity.

Powell said his region, which includes Montana, wants to launch a "Fuels for Schools" campaign soon, where Forest Service crews would retrofit school boilers to burn wood and the schools could burn wood from overgrown forests.



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USFS urges repeal of '93 appeals law

By **SHERRY DEVLIN** *Of The Missoulian*

Congress should repeal the 1993 law that forces the U.S. Forest Service to accept citizen appeals of all land-management decisions, Chief Forester Dale Bosworth said Wednesday.

"There are better ways to allow people to question our projects and be involved in our projects," Bosworth said in a telephone interview from his Washington, D.C., office. "We are the only land-management agency that has an appeals process in law. It doesn't make sense."

Because of the Appeals Reform Act, the Forest Service literally needs 100-percent citizen approval of its decisions, the chief said. "If you have 19 out of 20 with you, that's not good enough. Neither is 99 out of 100, or 999 out of 1,000. Because of that one person, you still have to go through the appeals process, after which you can still end up in litigation."

"People have the right to be involved and the right to question our decisions," he said. "But along with that right goes a responsibility, and the responsibility is that you need to participate in the process up-front."

Bosworth said he welcomes "the high level of attention" being given his agency and its management of fire-prone national forests by Congress and the Bush administration.

He is not, however, likely to take sides.

"I'm a dirt forester, not a politician," Bosworth said. "I am trying to make sure people understand the problem from a healthy ecosystem standpoint and the problems communities are facing and what needs to be done to fix that on the land."

The wake-up call, he said, came in 1988, when fires cut huge swaths through Yellowstone National Park and the Scapegoat Wilderness. "That was the first fire season that really burned a whole lot differently than things we had seen in the past," he said. Then came the fires of 1994, and of 1996, 2000 and 2002.

Foresters, firefighters and scientists understand the problem, Bosworth said. A century of aggressive firefighting in the West's fire-dependent dry-pine forests has created an unnatural buildup of fuels.

Forests that once supported 30 or 40 trees per acre are now thickets of 500 or 1,000 trees per acre. Wildfires that once burned on the ground and at a low-intensity now outrun all possibility of suppression.

"We can't do anything about climate or drought or geography, but we can do something about fuels," Bosworth said. "These fires are not burning under natural conditions."

The Forest Service has identified 70 million acres of national forest land at moderate to high risk of catastrophic wildfire. "But we don't need to treat every acre," the chief said. "We need to strategically treat those acres where we can make the biggest difference. We need to start near the communities and work out."

He emphasized, however, that "it's not about what you take. It's about the condition you put the land into. We need to get fire back into these fire-dependent ecosystems."

What's missing, then, is a process that lets foresters devote their time and energy to working in the woods and in the communities, Bosworth said. "We need to give our district rangers and forest supervisors the flexibility they need to work with local communities to design these forest-health treatments."

"We've spent way too much time and way too much money doing analysis and paperwork," he said. "It's time now to spend much more time upfront collaborating with people, deciding how and where to do treatments."

"I don't need my people sitting in windowless rooms doing paperwork. I need them out on the ground, getting the job done."



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Firefighters' planes under expert review

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) - The aging airplanes that the Forest Service uses to fight wildfires have been under scrutiny before. But none of the audits or the probes or the memos had the effect of a video showing an air tanker's wings snapping off in flight.

The TV news footage of the plane plunging to the ground in flames, killing all three men on board, transfixed viewers nationwide over the summer.

"It was shocking," said Rep. Jim Gibbons, R-Nev., a former airline and military pilot. "There is no doubt in my mind that it was a tragedy due to a structural failure in that airplane."

The June 17 crash - and another a month later in which an air tanker lost a wing and went down in Colorado, killing both crew members - have led the Forest Service to appoint an expert panel to conduct the broadest review yet of the agency's aerial firefighting program.

The panel, led by Jim Hall, a former chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, intends to examine all phases of the program, including maintenance and costs, and report back before the end of the year.

"Safety remains our bottom line," Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said in announcing the panel's formation Aug. 2.

The panel held the first in a series of regional town meetings last week in Atlanta. Further meetings are planned across the West this month.

Both air tankers were operated by the same Forest Service contractor, Hawkins & Powers Aviation Inc. of Greybull, Wyo.

After the accidents, the Forest Service grounded the five remaining C-130As in its fleet and the four remaining PB4Ys, and they are still out of service. All the planes were military surplus before pressed into firefighting duty. The C-130As date to the 1950s; some of the PB4Ys are even older, dating to World War II.

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Forest Service grounds 11 air tankers

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) - The Forest Service on Friday permanently grounded 11 air tankers after experts reported that the aerial firefighting program is unsafe and plagued with problems.

The report was prompted by the deaths of six fire crew members in two air tanker crashes and a helicopter crash earlier this year.

The planes carry too high a risk, said Forest Service Fire Director Jerry Williams. A long-term solution could mean designing and building planes specifically for fighting wildfires, at a cost of \$20 million each, he said.

The grounded planes - all C-130A or PB4Y-2 models used under contract with private companies - delivered about 10 percent of the water and foam dropped on wildfires.

Nineteen government-owned P-58 lead planes and four Sherpa smokejumper aircraft were grounded pending evaluation of safety issues identified in the experts' report.

The remaining 33 air tankers will return to the air, Williams said, only if they pass a "rigorous inspection" and follow a new maintenance program. Both the inspection and maintenance programs must still be developed.

"We are going to reduce public and employee exposure to what we perceive as high-risk aircraft," Williams said. "The contractors did not identify structural problems."

The panel found the aerial firefighting program had a pass-the-buck approach to safety standards, inadequate training, lacking communication between agencies and a focus on compliance rather than safety.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth and BLM Director Kathy Clarke enlisted the aviation experts, led by former National Transportation Safety Board chairman Jim Hall and Texas state forester Jim Hull, to study the issue in August.

The report faulted the Federal Aviation Administration for leaving the certification and inspection of the aircraft, many of which are modified World War II military tankers, to private contractors.

"The FAA apparently sees no statutory requirement to oversee airworthiness," said William Scott, panel member and bureau chief for Aviation Week and Space Technology Magazine. "This creates a dangerous situation."

But Allen Kenitzer, FAA spokesman in Seattle, said Congress has not authorized the administration to set standards for aircraft used by the government. Only when the planes are being used privately, and not under Forest Service contract, are they subject to FAA standards, Kenitzer said.

[onthenet Full report](#)

That leaves Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management or private contract personnel to decide if an aircraft is safe to fly.

"Private operators, for the most part, have done an admirable job of keeping these aging aircraft flying," the report said. "However, they are handicapped by receiving little, if any, support from former military operators and the aircraft's original manufacturer."

While endorsing change, both Williams and BLM Fire Director Larry Hamilton cited budgetary limitations and another fire season just months away.

More helicopters that can carry heavy water loads will be used next year, Williams said, and military planes may be called in if the fleet runs short.

The aviation program came under scrutiny after the wings sheared off two air tankers because of fatigue cracks. Three people were killed in June when the wings separated from a 46-year-old C-130A being used to fight a fire in California. In late July, a 57-year-old PB4Y-2 broke up and crashed fighting a Colorado fire, killing its two-man crew.

Both planes were operated by Hawkins and Powers Aviation, a Greybull, Wyo., company that contracts with the Forest Service to provide firefighting tankers.

On July 30, an Aerospatiale SA 315B Lama helicopter suffered an engine failure and crashed in Colorado, killing the pilot.

The panel also found that the firefighting agencies allowed contract pilots and crews to fly under safety standards that were lower than for those flying in other government missions.

Special requirements were not set to accommodate the severe missions the firefighting planes were sent on, the panel said. The planes are also subjected to gravitational force far above what most pilots believed and what the aircraft were designed for, the report said.

Additionally, the panel said forests are thicker than in years past, and fires are more difficult to combat, and some agencies focused on fire management while others focused on suppression.

The situation demands attention from national leaders, Hall said.

Fires burned more than 8 million acres in 2000 and nearly 7 million in 2002, both nearly double the 10-year average.

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Budget leaves Forest Service unprepared for fires

By TED MONOSON Gazette Washington bureau

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Forest Service officials are scrounging for money and planes to meet this summer's expected fire fighting needs.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth told a congressional panel Wednesday that the agency could face a deficit of close to \$1 billion if the 2003 fire season is similar to last. The impact of the deficit is expected to fall particularly hard on aerial firefighting efforts.

Under the 2003 spending bill that Congress recently passed, the Forest Service will receive about \$420 million to fight fires, which is about \$1 billion less than was spent to battle the 2002 fires.

"We deal with what we get and we do the best we can," said Jim Barnett, a Forest Service aviation management specialist. "It is too late to do anything significant for the 2003 season. It's now a matter of shuffling dollars."

Forest Service officials said Congress did not provide enough money for aerial firefighting despite a warning from a Forest Service official that the lack of funds threatened pilots' lives.

In an early January meeting with aides to senators, the Forest Service's assistant director of fire and aviation management quoted extensively from an editorial that Bill Scott wrote in the Dec. 17 issue of Aviation Week and Space Technology Magazine.

In a memo that he handed out to the aides, assistant director Tony Kern did not refute any of the quotes from the article.

Kern notes that Scott wrote that aerial firefighting operates on "shoestring budgets, making do with whatever they could afford -- often at the cost of lives." Kern also noted that Scott wrote "wildland fire management is now a bigger job than federal land management agencies can handle."

Forest Service official Barnett said that because of safety concerns and the grounding of planes, the money for aerial firefighting would probably not be enough.

In 2002, 11 airtankers that were used to fight wildfires were grounded after six fire crew members died in two airtanker crashes and one helicopter crash. The grounding reduced the size of the airtanker fleet from 44 to 33.

The two planes that crashed were owned by Hawkins & Powers Aviation in Greybull, Wyo. Five company employees were killed in those crashes.

"We're looking at significant increases in updating aircraft maintenance and none of that went into the 2003 budget," Barnett said. "We're seeing some opportunities that will allow us to address the situation."

The "opportunities" Barnett was referring to are other accounts the agency plans to dip into.

He said officials have not yet decided which accounts would be reduced to meet aerial firefighting needs.

Scott was one of five members of a blue ribbon fact-finding panel that Bosworth and Bureau of Land Management Director Kathleen Clark convened to evaluate the firefighting aviation program.

Scott said that Forest Service aviation officials are partly to blame for Congress' failure to provide adequate funding.

"There is a scarcity mentality," Scott said. "They say we'll take what we can get and do the best we can, rather than saying this is what we need to do and this is how much we need. That attitude is starting to change, but it's too late for 2003."

The panel which was led by former Clinton administration National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Jim Hall and Texas State Forester Jim Hull recommended the grounding of the 11 airtankers. It also called for Congress to put more money into aerial firefighting.

"We've tried to do it on the cheap and we've paid the price in human lives," Hall said. "That is an unacceptable policy for our country. I hoped the blue ribbon panel report would change that."

J.P. Donovan, spokesman for Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., said that because of the grounding for the short term there would be a shortage of planes to fight wildfires, and the panel's report has not provided a viable alternative for the future.

"If you have a problem with these things falling out of the sky, the question is what is the alternative?" Donovan said. "We have yet to have someone come up with a viable option. Congress needs to take the bull by the horns, but the bull has not shown up."



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Federal efforts at wildfire prevention criticized

By TED MONOSON Gazette Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Wyoming Republican Sen. Craig Thomas said Interior and Agriculture department officials are putting too much energy into preparing to fight fires and not enough on preventing fires.

"We just aren't moving fast enough on the prevention aspect," Thomas said during a hearing Thursday. "We really need to focus on what the problem is."

Agriculture Department undersecretary for natural resources David Tenney had already warned Thomas and other members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that he expects the 2003 fire season to be as bad as the 2002 season.

"I wish I could say it's going to be better, but it looks like we are going to have another challenging season," Tenney said. "We are trying to prepare, and I think we are prepared."

During the 2002 season 7.2 million acres burned and the federal government spent \$1.6 billion to fight wildfires.

Thomas and other Republican members of the committee said environmental rules and regulations were preventing the Forest Service from clearing and thinning brush to prevent fires.

"We are losing a lot more to fires than we lost to the chain saw," said Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore. "Both the environment and the economy are getting reamed."

Chris Mehl, The Wilderness Society's Northern Rockies spokesman, shared Thomas and Smith's concern for the residents whose lives and properties are threatened by wildfires, but said environmental rules and regulations are not to blame.

"Every Westerner knows that when you have large forests and you have a drought, fires are going to happen," Mehl said.

Mehl said a way to protect homes and lives is to increase the amount devoted to fire suppression and make sure that it is used to clear the brush around communities.

Last week Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth told a House panel that Congress has not directed enough money to fight wildfires for 2003. He added that to fight fires the agency would have to "borrow" money from other accounts.

"We don't need help changing the laws," Mehl said. "We need help getting the money. The issue is not the regulations, it's getting out there and rolling up our sleeves."

Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., shares Mehl's concern about funding.

"Washington simply must devote more resources to healthy forests and spend less time wrangling over policies to keep inside-the-beltway extremists happy," Rehberg said. "We need real funding for proven solutions that promote forest health."

Mehl and other critics say the Forest Service spends too much time and money thinning trees far from communities.

In 2002, the agency spent only one-third of its money for thinning on wildland-urban interface areas, which is the half-mile around communities.

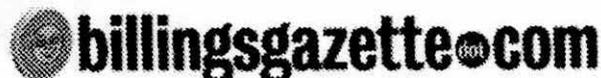
The agency has said it will spend 55 percent of its 2003 money for thinning in wildland-urban interface areas.

There have also been questions about whether the Forest Service is using the thinning money to reduce the threat of fires. A November 2001 report by the Forest Service inspector general criticized the agency for spending \$2.5 million in thinning money for the Bitterroot National Forest on commercial timber projects and processing permits for mushroom harvesters.

Although the committee spent time discussing how to prepare for and prevent wildfires, they also discussed how to make sure that tourists are not scared off by the wildfires.

"The problem is that international tourists do not differentiate," Commerce Department assistant secretary for trade and development Linda Conlin told the committee. "If they hear that there is a fire in Arizona, they may avoid the entire West."

Conlin noted that Congress set aside \$50 million in the 2003 spending bill for tourism grants and told the senators to urge their state tourism departments to use the money to educate tourists.



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USFS chief: Debate looking at wrong issues

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- Debate over the future of the nation's forests is focusing on the wrong issues, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said Tuesday.

Logging and road building are "yesterday's issues," he said, while fire and invasive species pose a much greater threat.

"The current debate about the administration and management of America's national forests ... I think it's about the wrong issues," Bosworth said.

Bosworth chose Earth Day and the environmentalist stronghold of the San Francisco Bay area to launch his message, speaking first at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco and then giving an afternoon address at the University of California, Berkeley.

Bosworth identified four crucial issues for forests, with development of lands adjacent to forests and unmanaged recreation joining fire and invasive species as the top threats.

Four issues that he labeled "diversions" were logging, road building, livestock grazing on public land, and the "poster children" of endangered species such as the spotted owl.

[onthenet 2003 budget](#)
[2004 budget](#)

On the issue that he called "the bogus debate over logging," Bosworth said there is a misperception that the Forest Service is focused on making money from timber. He said the amount of timber cut has dropped from 12 billion board feet a year two decades ago to 2 billion board feet a year now in the United States. It takes about 10,000 board feet to build an average house.

He said the Forest Service cuts trees now mainly for conservation purposes, such as improving wildlife habitat. Some forests are overgrown and must be thinned to prevent fires, he added.

"Americans are going to have to decide: We can remove some of the trees and lower the risk of catastrophic fire, or we can do nothing and we can watch them burn," he said.

Environmentalists were cool to Bosworth's message, which expanded on remarks the Forest Service chief made earlier this year.

"This is the administration attempting to use Earth Day in a political way to draw attention away from their plans to increase logging and oil and gas development in our national forests, and I think it is shameless," said Dan Smuts of the The Wilderness Society.

But Bosworth said that as a 37-year veteran of the Forest Service, he's not playing partisan politics.

"What I am focusing on is what I think are the problems that are out there in the national forests and the problems I believe that the American people are going to be faced with for the next 20 years," he said.

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Protests expected during Western Governors' forest summit

MISSOULA, Mont. (AP) - Local, state and federal law enforcement will protect Western governors when they meet here later this month for a forest summit.

Missoula County Sheriff Mike McMeekin said he expects some protest during the summit but hasn't heard of anything that raises concerns for public safety.

"I'd be amazed if we don't have some people take advantage of the opportunity to voice their opinion one way or another," he said.

Gov. Judy Martz, as chairwoman of the Western Governors Association, called the meeting for June 17-19 to quicken the pace of forest-thinning projects throughout the West.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth, and Govs. Dave Freudenthal of Wyoming, Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho, Ted Kulongoski of Oregon and Janet Napolitano of Arizona are expected to attend. The agenda includes a trip to the Lubrecht Experimental Forest, Pyramid Mountain Lumber in Seeley Lake, and two other sites near Seeley Lake.

Security has been delegated to an incident command team headed by Undersheriff Mike Dominick and including the Missoula City Police, Missoula County Sheriff's Department, the Montana Highway Patrol, the U.S. Forest Service and the FBI, McMeekin said.

The team is still in the planning stages, said Linda Hegg, the city communications director who will act as the team's public information officer. She said everyone should be ready to go by the middle of this week.

McMeekin said his department and the city police have worked for several years to keep an open discussion with any organization that might be involved in Missoula-area protests.

"The effort to have a continuing regular dialogue with representatives of a lot of diverse groups, that has big dividends," the sheriff said. "The more understanding you have with different groups, the less confrontation you're going to have."

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Forest health meeting begins

MISSOULA (AP) -- Gov. Judy Martz and U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth kicked off the Forest Health Summit on Tuesday looking to build consensus for forest thinning projects they say will reduce the risk of wildfires.

Environmentalists criticized the three-day event as a pep rally for logging.

Martz, who has made forest issues a priority since taking over as chair of the Western Governor's Association, said some logging will be needed reduce the threat of wildfires, and she expects conclusions at the end of the conference to include such a recommendation.

"The science will tell us how to have a healthy forest, if we just listen to the science," she said at a news conference opening the summit by Western governors.

She said more logging, and the jobs it brings to rural communities, will be byproducts of reducing wildfire danger and not the primary purpose.

"I think some logging will come of it, but the total focus is a healthy forest," she said.

Bosworth said forests in the West have become clogged with trees by years of suppressing forest fires, and now they need to be thinned in an attempt to re-create natural environments.

"I think it's really important to people throughout the West that we address these problems of forest health," he said.

The conference includes a Wednesday tour of an experimental forest run by the University of Montana and a sawmill in Seeley Lake.

Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne and Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano planned to address the summit. And panelists, including forestry professionals and some conservationists, planned sessions to draft recommendations on how forests should be treated to reduce the danger of wildfires.

Bosworth has touted the Bush administration's Healthy Forests Initiative as a way to speed logging projects without dealing with complaints and lawsuits from environmental groups.

Critics complain that the initiative would severely limit public participation, and they contend the Bush administration is using the threat of wildfires to mask a giveaway to the timber industry.

"This administration, and Governor Martz, are using the fear of fire and using the words like community protection to increase logging and undermine public input," said Matthew Koehler of the Missoula-based Native Forest Network.

His group hosted a tour of a logged area in the Bitterroot National Forest south of Missoula, saying it was an example of the type of harsh logging that degrades the environment and muddies watersheds.

He said Martz's planned tour was going to show off small-scale thinning projects that don't represent the true

effects of unmitigated logging.

"We just feel this is a political event that is just another in a long line of pep rallies for the so-called healthy forest plan," Koehler said.

Martz said she doesn't expect everyone to agree with the final forest plan.

"I think our challenge is to educate those who will listen," she said.

Security was tight at the event. The first sign of any problems occurred at the offices of the Missoula Sierra Club.

Missoula police said the office was vandalized at about 4 a.m. Tuesday. Lt. Jim Neumayer said a witness reported two carloads of men -- about eight in all -- pulled up to the building and got out. One man armed with a baseball bat broke out seven windows, Neumayer said.

The suspects were gone by the time police arrived and Neumayer said police had few leads.

Bob Clark, the Sierra Club's conservation organizer in Missoula, said that while there is no proof that it was anything more than a random act, he believed his group was targeted because of its stand on environmental issues, including logging and forest health.

The Sierra Club sponsored a summit on Monday that focused on forest health, fires and logging.

"I think the timing was more than just coincidence," he said.

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USFS chief: Old growth won't be cut under bill

REDMOND, Ore. — The chief of the U.S. Forest Service told a House committee Monday that his agency has no intention of cutting old growth timber to pay for thinning forests to prevent wildfire.

"Is it your intention to go out and cut old growth to pay for hazardous fuels reduction?" asked Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., co-sponsor of a bill that has already passed the House that would speed thinning projects on 20 million acres of federal lands to prevent wildfires by easing some environmental restrictions.

"That is not our intent at all," responded Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth.

Bosworth added that while it makes sense to defray some of the cost of thinning by selling trees large enough to sell into lumber, there may not be enough in areas of high fire danger to completely cover the cost.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., has threatened to filibuster the bill unless it is amended to protect old growth forests and provide funding for the thinning projects.

"With fires burning here in Oregon, Montana, and Alaska, there is no better time to be listening to witnesses, expert testimony, than right now," said Steve Ding, staff director for the committee. "If it has a positive impact on senators still undecided, all the better."

Pombo called it "outrageous" that some senators were threatening a filibuster in the face of the wildfire danger facing the West and labeled them "part of the no-cut crowd."

Walden said he expected a vote in the Senate on his Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 by October. He added that he wanted to continue to hear reaction to the bill because any Senate version that passes will have to be resolved with the House bill in conference committee.

Tim Lillebo of the Oregon Natural Resources Council, an environmental group, asked Walden to consider including language that specifically protects old growth, and directs up to 80 percent of any funding that is provided to be spent on areas around rural communities that could burn in large wildfires before moving into the backcountry.

"I think most people do agree we need to do things in the forest to reduce fire risk," Lillebo said. "We need to do prescribed fire and we need to do some thinning."

Walden pointed out language in the bill that already directs agencies to focus thinning projects in what is known as the Wildland-Urban Interface. Under Walden's questioning, Bosworth said it "doesn't make sense" to include a definition of old growth in the bill, because it differs across the landscape.

Walden added he felt it would be necessary to provide some kind of federal funding not already in the bill because the small trees that need to be removed will not bring enough money to pay for all the work.

Bosworth said if the legislation passes, it will still take 10 to 15 years to significantly reduce the fire danger on the 190 million acres the Forest Service has estimated has a high risk of burning in a catastrophic fire.

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Forest boss urges funding changes

NINEMILE – Congress needs a better way to pay for wildland firefighting costs, the U.S. Forest Service chief said in weekend remarks at a Montana fire camp.

Dale Bosworth also appealed to environmental groups to work with his agency and find more compromise on forest thinning projects. Bosworth said nothing is helped when nobody gives ground.

"It doesn't help the public," he said. "It doesn't help the forests. It doesn't help the future."

Bosworth said Congress allotted \$360 million for firefighting this fiscal year, or more than \$240 million short of what the Forest Service has spent. Bosworth said expenses could reach \$900 million by the end of the season. He said national forests around the northern region have had to give up \$15 million from their budgets.

"We're taking dollars from other programs to fund the firefighting effort," he said, "and that's not a good way to operate."

Bosworth said his agency is meeting with the federal Office of Management and Budget for a long-term funding solution. Ideas include creation of an emergency firefighting fund or a line of credit the Forest Service could draw on during fire seasons.

Bosworth said one thing is clear: The current funding method has some serious shortcomings.

"What ends up happening is, we use the 10-year average for fire suppression and ask for that amount," he said. "And we usually get what we ask for. But on years like this, we end up spending way more than the 10-year average."

So far this year, the Senate has refused a request for emergency fire funds. Another request is expected after this weekend.

Bosworth said lower elevation forests once burned every eight to 20 years, but have missed several fire cycles and are dense with small-diameter growth that fuels especially hot and difficult fires.

"We are not thinning these forests as quickly as we need to," he said.

Spokesmen for the National Forest Protection Alliance and the Native Forest Network have said they support thinning projects only around homes.

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Forest chief urges study of ecosystems

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. - U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said Monday that if the West's runaway wildfire problems are ever to be curbed, officials, environmentalists and the timber industry need to begin by leaving some things exactly as they are.

In Portland to deliver the keynote speech at a three-day wildfire risk assessment conference, Bosworth said the goal is to restore ecosystems across the West that have been depleted by out-of-control fires. That begins, he said, with looking at the components of a healthy ecosystem - the number of trees, their age, how they are spaced, the diversity of wildlife habitat - and committing to leaving them in place.

Then and only then, he said, agreement can be reached on what to remove from the ecosystem, and how to do it, whether it is by prescribed burning, logging, thinning or stewardship management.

But he sidestepped a suggestion from University of Washington forest resources professor Jerry Franklin to simply mandate that old-growth trees would not be disturbed in fire prevention efforts, and that heavy duty logging be kept out of so-called "roadless" areas.

Franklin, a leading expert on the ecological role of old-growth forests, is among those who have tried to get assurances from the Bush administration that such trees would be protected in any fire prevention thinning efforts.

But the massive old trees are also the most profitable, and the biggest incentive, for the timber companies who could be doing much of the fire prevention thinning.

At Monday's conference, Bosworth said simply removing old growth trees from the equation could lead to debate over what constitutes an "old-growth" tree, and said there needed to be an end to the bickering that he said has delayed many forest management actions.

"We need to have some judges looking at all the evidence and information," he said. "In some places there are preconceived notions about what ought and ought not to be done."

Bosworth also said that across the West, people might expect to see more wildfires being allowed to burn, often in more remote areas where conditions are right and the ecosystem will benefit. And he said the agency is working on plans to create an emergency fire fund for years when the wildfire season spirals beyond expectations.

That would prevent the agency from having to raid other pots of money to fight fires, and could free up more money for the prevention efforts that take place in between wildfire seasons, Bosworth said.

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Forest Service prepares changes to deal with roadless rule; environmentalists say they're worried

By KATHERINE PFLEGER Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) – Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth would get more authority to allow logging or road-building in national forests under a draft plan crafted by agency officials.

The plan, circulated Tuesday by the environmentalist Heritage Forests Campaign, would formalize the way the Forest Service handles a Clinton-era plan to protect a third of all national forest lands.

Environmentalists view the draft as a way to chip away at the "roadless rule" and reopen national forests to logging. But Forest Service spokeswoman Heidi Valetkevitch said that's not the case.

"There are some slight changes," she said.

The Clinton administration rule protected 58.5 million acres of national forest land from development, and was hailed by most environmental groups. But some timber industry and off-road vehicle groups said the policy was too restrictive.

The Bush administration also considered the policy flawed, and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman in May promised to amend it, specifically to allow more local ideas. Veneman oversees the Forest Service.

A short time later, a federal judge blocked implementation of the amended policy, saying it would cause "irreparable harm" to federal forests. Last month the Bush administration opened a 60-day public comment period, after which it will issue revisions.

In a June memo, Bosworth said he would take responsibility for decisions on timber harvests and road construction, giving the officials who oversee individual forests a chance to map existing roads and determine appropriate protections. Once local officials get approval for plans to enforce those protections, Bosworth will no longer make the decisions from the top.

The draft plan mirrors that language.

Environmentalists are concerned the timber industry and other groups will have unfair influence over local officials, and that the Bush administration is predisposed to side with them over conservationists.

"This seems to really solidify the administration's intent to scuttle the national forest protections and revert back to a piecemeal approach that gives the timber industry the upper hand in determining the fate of our forests," said Jane Danowitz, director of the Heritage Forests Campaign.

She also is concerned about the amount of time the draft indicates the interim process will be in place – 2 1/2 years. But Valetkevitch said she expects the timetable was established only to be on the "safe side."

"We are trying to get roadless (areas) dealt with as quickly as possible," she said.

onthenet

Forest Service's Roadless Plan: <http://www.roadless.fs.fed.us>

Heritage Forests Campaign: <http://www.ourforests.org/>

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Forest Service Resource Characterization and Environmental Effects

The Forest Service is committed to providing a high quality of environmental protection and resource management. This report provides a detailed characterization of the forest resources within the project area and discusses the potential environmental effects of the proposed project. The project area is located in the western United States and is characterized by a diverse range of forest types, including coniferous, deciduous, and mixed-use forests. The project involves the construction and operation of a new facility, which may have various impacts on the forest resources, including changes in land use, potential for soil erosion, and impacts on wildlife and riparian habitats. The Forest Service will work closely with the project proponent to develop and implement a comprehensive mitigation plan to minimize and avoid these impacts. This plan will include measures such as reforestation, erosion control, and habitat restoration. The Forest Service will also monitor the project area throughout the project's lifecycle to ensure that the proposed mitigation measures are effectively implemented and that the forest resources are protected and managed sustainably.



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Lack of ATV rules makes forest officials' jobs tougher

Associated Press

HELENA - The explosive popularity of "off-highway" vehicles - everything from four-wheelers to trail-bikes and souped-up jeeps - has exploded over the past 20 years and left many federal land managers scrambling to put new rules in place to manage them and protect natural resources.

That task is proving more difficult than anyone expected. Officials have found themselves trying to balance the rights of those who want to visit public lands by motor vehicle with those who say it's gotten out of hand.

"They're at total opposite ends of the spectrum," said Steve Christiansen, environmental coordinator for the Gallatin National Forest in Montana. "Right now, it looks like there's no way to find a solution that will make the majority happy."

The Gallatin is one of nine forests in the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Region under orders to update management plans to help reign in motor-vehicle use.

In a 2001 decision, Dale Bosworth, at the time head of the Northern Region, put strict limits on motor-vehicle use in the forests, ordering vehicles to stick to designated roads and trails. He also ordered forest supervisors in the region, covering Montana, North Dakota and parts of South Dakota, to review all of their existing trails and roads and determine which ones - on about 10 million acres in all - should be closed and which should be open.

Bosworth, now chief of the U.S. Forest Service, noted at the time that it was clear the general policy of "open unless closed" had led to thousands of miles of unauthorized roads, damaged natural resources and growing conflicts among users.

Crisscrossed with trails Forest supervisors in the region are still struggling to meet Bosworth's orders, and are running into even more conflicts as they try to decide which roads and trails to close.

"It's just gotten more complicated, more controversial," said Dick Schweke, travel planner for Montana's Lewis and Clark National Forest. "We seem to bog down with public controversy."

The Lewis and Clark forest estimated last spring that more than 1,000 unplanned trails have been carved on the forest's 1.8 million acres.

Forests across the West often are crisscrossed with old logging and mining roads and two-track trails, a lot of them considered part of a forest's official "trail system." Others were cut by horse packers or homesteaders and existed for decades, although never officially recognized as designated routes.

Critics say many more were carved out by off-road enthusiasts without permission. And once one ATV or jeep made a path, others followed, often not even aware the trail was never supposed to be there.

"Any responsible private landowner wouldn't say, 'sure, drive wherever you want,' so why should a land manager? Why is this happening?" said John Gatchell of the Montana Wilderness Association. "There is this whole misplaced discussion of access."

"Legally, (off-road enthusiasts) have been pioneering," Schweke said. "And that's what we don't want."

When Bosworth became Forest Service chief, he said unregulated recreation, specifically off-highway vehicle use or "OHV" use, was as a major threat to national forests.

No time or manpower In the Forest Service's Southwest Region, which includes five forests in Arizona and New Mexico, supervisors also are trying to develop new rules for managing OHVs. A draft decision is expected in January, and it is almost certain to include off-road restrictions similar to those in Montana and the Dakotas, officials say.

OHV use "grew so fast that it caught us off guard," said Raquel Poturalski, public affairs officer on the Coconino National Forest near Flagstaff, Ariz.

In 1983, the Forest Service estimated there were about 19.4 million OHVs in the country. By 2000, that number had grown to 35.9 million.

But it hasn't just been the explosive growth in the popularity of the machines that has led to problems. Land managers, off-road enthusiasts and conservationists agree the problem has been made worse by lax regulations and little enforcement.

Before Bosworth's 2001 decision, forest managers tried regulate OHVs under two rather vague presidential orders from the 1970s. The orders said only that it was illegal to ride in a manner that would cause "resource damage."

"The federal law has always said you can't ride somewhere that will do resource damage. But the issue always was, and is, what is resource damage?" said Dave Payne, recreation manager for the Helena National Forest. "Is it the first person who drives across some land and makes a little rut or is it the second, or the third? Who really knows?"

Land managers simply haven't had the time or manpower to patrol the millions of acres.

In the Helena National Forest, Payne shows a trail specifically built for motorized use. It is posted with signs and is engineered to leave little impact on the land, with strategically placed water ditches.

But just a short distance away, he points to another trail, created by off-road users, that scales an adjacent hillside - straight up - for at least 3/4 of a mile.

"That is what we don't want," he said.

Many off-road enthusiast groups agree some limits are needed, but they fear too many trails will be closed in the process.

"We don't want to see proliferation or really any new routes created. We are just concerned that the trend is to pretty severely restrict access," said Bill Dart, of the Blue Ribbon Coalition, which supports multiple use on public lands.

Kristen Bregel of the Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C., said most conservation groups are not pushing for a complete ban.

"Land managers have realized that the era of going where you want is coming to an end and off-road vehicles should stay on designated routes," she said. "Often times, you hear that we are promoting an all-out ban. We're not completely unreasonable."

Mary Wagner, an associate director for the U.S. Forest Service's recreation, wilderness and heritage resource staff in Washington, D.C., said Bosworth's office has created two separate teams to address the issue.

The first team is supposed to set up a nationwide policy on OHV use for forests to follow. The second team is to give each of the forests the tools needed to do the hard part - designating which roads to close and which to keep open.

"The policy is maybe the easy part," Wagner said. "It's the route designation that is a challenge."

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File Code: 1570

Date: October 20, 2005

Route To:

Subject: Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck Ruling of October 19, 2005

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy
Chiefs, WO Staff Directors

On August 5, the Deputy Chief for National Forest System issued instructions for complying with this lawsuit. On September 23, I issued further instructions. This memorandum supersedes the instructions contained in those documents.

Yesterday, the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of California issued a clarification in Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck. The court ordered that categorically excluded timber sales and the following categorically excluded activities are subject to notice, comment, and appeal under the 36 CFR 215 rules.

1. Projects involving the use of prescribed burning;
2. Projects involving the creation or maintenance of wildlife openings;
3. The designation of travel routes for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use which is not conducted through the travel management planning process as part of the forest planning process;
4. The construction of new OHV routes and facilities intended to support OHV use;
5. The upgrading, widening, or modification of OHV routes to increase either the levels or types of use by OHVs (but not projects performed for the maintenance of existing routes);
6. The issuance or reissuance of special use permits for OHV activities conducted on areas, trails, or roads that are not designated for such activities;
7. Projects in which the cutting of trees for thinning or wildlife purposes occurs over an area greater than 5 contiguous acres;
8. Gathering geophysical data using shorthole, vibroseis, or surface charge;
9. Trenching to obtain evidence of mineralization;
10. Clearing vegetation for sight paths from areas used for mineral, energy, or geophysical investigation or support facilities for such activities.

The district court expressly indicated that permits for short-term special uses, such as state-licensed outfitters and guides or gathering forest products for personal use, need not be subject to notice, comment, and appeal.

Therefore, any categorically excluded activity that does not fall within the categories the judge listed above does not require notice, comment and appeal, whether issued before or after July 7, 2005. Any actions or authorizations that were suspended under the prior instructions and that do not fall within the above categories should be immediately reinstated. In those situations where notice, comment, and/or appeal opportunity was initiated for a project under the previous



instructions, but because of the court's clarification is no longer required, the local line officer may determine if it is in the best public interest to continue to provide notice, comment, and an opportunity for appeal.

I know we still have work necessary for us to carry out our mission affected by the judge's clarifying order, including prescribed burning and fuels treatment in the wildland interface. These projects will still be subject to notice, comment and appeal and therefore necessarily be delayed. This is a challenging situation which affects our employees, partners, local communities, and individuals who use the national forests and grasslands. I appreciate and am proud of all our employees' efforts to comply with the court's order, serve the public, and take the steps necessary to implement important resource work under difficult circumstances.

Your contact in the Washington Office is Steve Segovia at 202-205-1066.

DALE N. BOSWORTH
DALE N. BOSWORTH
Chief

Enclosure



Story available at <http://billingsgazette.net/articles/2004/02/12/wyoming/export143441.bt>

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USFS chief upholds regional forest, grasslands plans

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. - U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth has defended new plans for managing forests and grasslands in the Dakotas, Nebraska and Wyoming, rejecting all 16 appeals filed against the plans.

The revised management plans of 10 National Forests and Grasslands in those states were finished and approved by regional foresters Brad Powell and Rick Cables in the summer of 2002.

Included in the plan is the Thunder Basin National Grassland in northeastern Wyoming. The grassland, managed as part of the Medicine Bow National Forest, occupies 553,000 acres among state and private property and other federal lands.

The content of the appeals ranged from problems with wildlife management to cattle grazing policies.

One of the appeals filed by a broad coalition of conservation groups - including the Predator Conservation Alliance and the Sierra Club - focused on the plan not doing enough to protect prairie dogs and similar species.

For the Forest Service to make a blanket refusal to all the appeals is disheartening and in some ways, unprecedented, said Jonathan Proctor of the Predator Conservation Alliance.

Management plans are the governing documents for forest service agencies, directing the management of livestock grazing and thinning, travel, recreation, and wildlife among others. Law requires agencies to update their plans every 10 to 15 years. Once those plans are approved regionally, they go to the chief in Washington. After that decision is made and the secretary of agriculture is given a 15-day review period of the plan, there are no more chances to appeal.

It is common for appeals to flood in after plans are finished.

Proctor said the appeals often are small in nature - a word here, one specific point there. Most times the Forest Service will implement at least a few, Proctor said. But this time, none on either side of the issue were taken.

Heidi Valetkevitch, a spokesman for Bosworth's administration, countered that it's not unusual to have an entire plan affirmed without changes, even small ones.

She also said Bosworth's recent decision is not precedent setting and does not reflect any of the new changes on the appeal process put forward by the President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative, which aims at shortening and streamlining the appeal process.

Bosworth's 112-page decision released Friday rejected the appeals, saying that the regional foresters had met all requirements in their decisions.

Nebraska National Forest spokesman Jerry Schumacher said the Nebraska National Forest got word of the chief's decision last week.

"We were very pleased that the decision was upheld," Schumacher said.

The 16 appeals were widespread and complicated, Schumacher said, and the decision was thorough and well-documented.

While several of those pushing the appeals said they are pleased overall with the new plans, there is room for improvement.

"It was a step in the right direction," said Jeremy Nichols, grasslands advocate for the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance. "It just didn't go far enough to protect our national heritage on these national grasslands."

After the secretary of agriculture approves the plans, groups still insisting on change would have to seek it in court.

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Sagebrush finally gets respect

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho - Long derided, degraded, dug up and burned, sagebrush in the American West is finally commanding respect.

Twenty-one environmental groups filed a petition in December to list sage grouse as an endangered species. That action has accelerated efforts to preserve sagebrush ecosystems on which the birds depend across 11 Western states and Canada.

"I don't think any conservation effort of this scale has been tried before," said Tom Hemker, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game biologist in charge of sage grouse programs.

If sage grouse are listed, new restrictions could be placed on grazing, oil and gas development, hunting, motorized recreation, power lines, roads and farming across 110 million acres. Impacts on the economy of the West would surpass those of the listing of the northern spotted owl.

Similar to forests "We've learned that some of these large stands of sagebrush serve similar functions to those of old-growth forests," said Steve Knick, a U.S. Geological Survey biologist in Boise who is recognized as an expert on the birds.

Sagebrush is a defining characteristic of the American West, found in every Western state. Its clean, bittersweet scent is recognizable by Westerners.

Settlers plowed up sagebrush and replaced it with grain and vegetables. Even on federal land, where most of the sagebrush survives, managers used chains and fire to rid the desert of its shrubs so they could sow nonnative plants.

More insidious was the creeping invasion of alien species like cheatgrass.

Human activities like grazing and road-building have accelerated sagebrush's decline

Sage grouse migrate seasonally from summer to winter habitat. If human activities become a barrier to this migration, the birds disappear. These incursions into the "sagebrush sea" have led to a steady decline in sage grouse numbers for the past quarter of a century.

Today, about 140,000 survive, 8 percent of the historic population. But scientists have not pinpointed one specific action responsible for the decline.

"The reality is that almost all sagebrush habitats are suffering consequences of heavier use than

they can take," Knick said. "At present, we don't have a handle on how to address the problems existing in this habitat because they are so diverse and widespread."

Sounding the alarm The most comprehensive research paper was published in November by Knick and five other scientists. It sounded the alarm for the future of sage grouse unless major changes are made, especially in the remaining high-quality habitat.

The report doesn't blame any single activity for the declines in bird numbers. But it shows that one of the most significant changes facing the highest quality habitat is oil and gas development.

Currently, 6.6 million acres of federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management are in production for oil, gas or geothermal energy. Another 23 million acres are available for oil and gas leasing. Under the Bush administration's energy initiative, the BLM hopes to approve 29,000 new oil and gas leases by 2005.

Challenge for BLM The Knick paper showed that much of the development was taking place in the best remaining sagebrush ecosystems in Wyoming. This presents a challenge for BLM, which has made protecting sage grouse and encouraging more energy development on public lands a priority.

"They are two conflicting missions right now, and they produce some very confusing guidelines for local groups to follow," said Mark Salvo, a sage grouse specialist for the American Lands Alliance.

Knick's paper also has "given pause" to the BLM and others in the Bush administration, said Jim Kenna, special assistant to BLM Director Kathleen Clarke.

An executive committee of Clarke, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Steve Williams, has been meeting since late last year to consider new efforts to coordinate sage grouse programs with gas development.

Knick is working with biologists from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies on a sage grouse assessment. Its results won't be out until May, and he's far from ready to say whether he would recommend listing.

But many if not most of the activities now taking place in sage grouse habitat can continue without harming the birds if actions are taken, he said.

"I think you can have intact ecosystems and allow use," Knick said.

"We've had discussions about what interim management should look like," Kenna said.

But it is inaccurate to say that oil and gas development has grown significantly under Bush, said Lynn Scarlett, assistant interior secretary for budget and policy analysis. The total acres under production averaged more annually during the Clinton years, she said.

"There has not been any major spike in activity," Scarlett said.

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Employees disciplined for e-mails

Associated Press

MISSOULA - Sixty-five employees of the U.S. Forest Service, including some in the agency's Washington, D.C., headquarters, are in trouble for sharing sexually explicit material through their government-issued computers and e-mail addresses, agency officials said Monday.

Thirty are in the Forest Service Northern region, based in Missoula, and 35 are in six other regions of the Forest Service and Washington, said Ed Nesselroad, the Northern Region's director of public and governmental affairs.

The material included stories, jokes, cartoons and photographs.

The e-mails came to light last fall after someone received one of the pornographic messages and alerted a supervisor, Nesselroad said. An internal investigation revealed a group of employees who regularly shared sexually explicit e-mails.

The Montana employees are in the regional office in Missoula and six national forests: the Lolo, Bitterroot, Beaverhead-Deer-lodge, Helena, Lewis and Clark and Kootenai.

All 30 now face disciplinary action ranging from dismissal to time off without pay to letters of reprimand, Nesselroad said.

The e-mails also apparently went to people in other federal agencies and at least one state government, Nesselroad said.

"We are still in the process of notifying other agencies that they have employees on these mailing lists," he said. "Those agencies will make their own determinations about what to do."

In Washington, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said he did not know the specifics of the investigation, only that it is ongoing.

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Burns, others call Bush's wildfire-fighting budget too low

By TED MONOSON Gazette Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., is among a group lawmakers who say the Bush administration's proposed budget for next year does not include enough money for preventing and fighting wildfires.

At a Thursday hearing, Burns asked Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth and Agriculture Department Undersecretary Mark Rey about the proposed budget.

Burns is in charge of the panel that has jurisdiction over the Interior Department and U.S. Forest Service budgets.

Although the budget would increase the amount of money to be used to clear dead trees from forests and fighting wildfires, Burns said it would not be enough. He warned that under the proposed budget, the federal government would have to borrow from other accounts to fight fires. The federal government has been forced to use this tactic for the last several years.

"While I support the proposed increase of \$88 million for fire suppression in the FY 2005 budget, no one should be under the illusion that this will solve the fire borrowing problem," Burns told Bosworth and Rey. "In fact, if the fire season is anything like what we have seen in the last few years, the agency would still have to borrow hundreds of millions of dollars from nonfire programs."

The administration's plan calls for a 15 percent boost in wildfire suppression, from \$790 million in fiscal year 2004 to \$908 million in fiscal year 2005, under the administration's plan for the Interior and Agriculture departments. The departments' hazardous fuels reduction would also be increased from \$442 million to \$475 million.

The \$908 million for wildfire fighting falls short of the \$1.4 billion that was spent to fight wildfires in 2002 and is slightly shy of the \$1 billion that was needed in 2003.

Rey, a former timber industry lobbyist, said the proposed budget would allow the agency to implement a law overhauling the management of forests that was signed into law last year. Burns, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., and Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., voted for the measure overhauling forest management.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., who also voted for the law, says the \$475 million for hazardous fuels reduction is far short of the \$760 million that was promised in legislation.

Environmentalists criticized last year's legislation because they said it did not focus enough on reducing fuel build-ups in the areas immediately around communities.

Burns criticized the proposed budget for cutting state, local and volunteer assistance programs by 42 percent from \$132 million in fiscal year 2004 to \$77 million in fiscal year 2005.

"This program provides critical funds to train and equip local fire departments," Burns said.

"These local fire departments are often the first to respond to wildland fires and they provide vital help to the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior."

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Bush administration criticizes Tiffanys over opposition to mine in Cabinet Mountains

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. - The jeweler Tiffany & Co. is publicly opposing plans for a silver and copper mine beneath a wilderness area in Montana, prompting a forceful response Thursday from the Bush administration.

Tiffany officials paid for an open letter published Wednesday in The Washington Post that asked Forest Service chief Dale Bosworth, whose agency has approved the mine, to block construction. The mine would require boring three miles under the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness Area near the Montana-Idaho border.

Mark Rey, an undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture, said the letter signed by Tiffany's chief executive was filled with errors, though he declined to say what they were.

"I'm guessing this ad in The Washington Post cost upwards of \$50,000," said Rey, director of the administration's forest policy, in a telephone interview. "For \$49,999.63 less, they could have sent us this letter and given their customers a discount on their products."

Mining interests also criticized Tiffany, suggesting the company was responding to threats of boycotts of its jewelry from environmentalists opposed to the mine.

The Forest Service approved the mine in June, but nine environmental groups have sued to stop construction, saying the mine would hurt grizzly bears and bull trout in the area.

Bosworth planned to meet April 15 with Michael J. Kowalski, chairman and chief executive officer of Tiffany, who signed the open letter, Rey said.

Officials with New York-based Tiffany, a 167-year-old company whose name is synonymous with fine jewelry, stood by the contents of the open letter and called for reform in federal mining policy.

"It is by no means the first time that we have communicated with appropriate government officials about our desire to see precious metals and gemstones extracted in environmentally and socially responsible ways," the company said. "Our record on that score goes back nearly a decade."

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Both sides of logging debate pan forest plan

Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. - An environmental group and a coalition of county and timber officials are at a stalemate over the level of tree harvesting that should be allowed in the Medicine Bow National Forest.

Both groups filed last-minute appeals of the forest's recently approved management plan but are seeking opposite outcomes.

The Medicine Bow National Forest Local Governments Coalition is seeking more logging and grazing in the 1.1-million-acre forest scattered throughout southeast Wyoming. The coalition includes Carbon, Converse and Laramie counties, five conservation districts and the Intermountain Forest Association, a timber trade group.

Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, based in Laramie, is seeking less logging and more wildlife protection.

The Local Governments Coalition believes that much of its scientific data was ignored by the Forest Service, that the economies of communities near the forest will suffer and that the management plan will lead to more catastrophic wildfires and less timbering and livestock grazing.

"The plan isn't based on the best available science and uses antiquated, out-of-date methodologies," Larry Hicks, director of the Little Snake River Conservation District in Baggs, said Wednesday.

The No. 1 concern of the coalition is the amount of water that would be retained by the forest, known as water yield. Increased forest density has reduced water flows into the North Platte River, the coalition says, and more logging would reduce overgrowth and increase those flows.

"The Medicine Bow supplies water for half the population of the state of Wyoming," Hicks said, adding that the Forest Service no longer views management of water yield as a legitimate option.

"They suppressed data and information and consequently that's a violation of numerous federal statutes and their own planning guides and regulations," he said.

Erik Molvar, wildlife biologist for the conservation alliance, dismissed the coalition's concerns.

"There are some people out there on the radical fringe who aren't going to be satisfied unless the Medicine Bow National Forest is one clear-cut wasteland," he said.

Molvar also said the idea that more stream flow will result from logging is a myth. Timber harvests at the level sought by the coalition would cause severe erosion and destroy the streams in the watershed, he said.

In its limited appeal, Biodiversity argues the Forest Service fails to protect some rare types of wildlife such as the northern goshawk and inadequately monitors so-called "indicator species" that can help officials gauge the impact of logging projects.

The alliance also said the Forest Service erred in calculating maximum allowable timber harvests.

"If those areas really are going to be given the protection the forest plan says they are and they log at the maximum level, then they're going to run out of timber before the end of the forest plan," Molvar said.

The coalition says increased logging, focused in certain areas, would not only keep small-town jobs intact but reduce wildfire danger.

Analysis from the coalition's experts concluded "that the Medicine Bow is an anomaly from the standpoint that we're way past the normal fire regime, where we're setting the forest up for some severe major wildfires," Hicks said.

Catastrophic fires will result in lost timber, forage and big-game hunting opportunities, which will severely hurt local communities, he said.

Also, Hicks said, the forest is not balanced in terms of diversity, that there is too much lodgepole pine that is too old, which he said stifles wildlife and plant variety.

The appeals will be reviewed by Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth, and further appeals would go to Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey, who oversees forest issues.

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Wyoming digest

Monday, May 10, 2004

Few changes planned at Girls School

SHERIDAN - Major changes are not in store at the Wyoming Girls School despite the attempted suicide of one of its charges, a state review and the superintendent's resignation, according to the director of the Wyoming Department of Family Services.

Rodger McDaniel said a staff meeting at the school on Thursday addressed untrue rumors that the institution will close, staff will lose their jobs and that the school's philosophy will change.

"We intend to maintain the openness that they have here and fundamentally the same environment," McDaniel said.

The Sheridan Press was not allowed to attend the meeting.

John Kiedrowski, the school's interim superintendent and full-time superintendent of the Wyoming Boys School, said, "One of the good things is that staff are going to be able to read the reports," he said. "In a sense, I think they recommend some different changes, but in a sense they're positive too."

The Press contacted several other Girls School employees, all of whom declined to comment.

"What we talked about was, there are not going to be massive changes," McDaniel said. "People really need to be comfortable with that."

High Savery Dam filling with runoff

RAWLINS - Recent high-country snowstorms and runoff have been filling the new High Savery Reservoir at about a foot per day.

Mike Hand, manager of the project for the Wyoming Water Development Commission, said the reservoir began filling in late March.

The reservoir's depth is now more than 46 feet, leaving about 100 feet of depth to fill.

Hand said it is likely the reservoir will fill this year, but the process could take up to four years if the drought continues.

He said he would rather have the reservoir fill slowly, allowing the dam to settle properly and make sure it is capable of holding the full 22,433 acre-feet it was designed to impound.

The commission plans to operate the reservoir for the first five years to make sure the wetlands created as part of the project are functioning properly.

Hand said the state would begin releasing water to the Little Snake River Water Conservancy District after the reservoir fills to 80 percent of its capacity.

The \$33.8 million earthen dam was substantially completed last fall. Completion of the dam and the wetlands system is expected Sept. 1.

Teton County debates size of guest homes

JACKSON - The maximum allowed size of guest houses in affluent Teton County might be doubled to 2,000 square feet.

County planning commissioners are considering exempting basements from the square-footage count for guest homes on at least an acre of property in rural or neighborhood conservation zoning districts.

Guest houses may be no more than 1,000 square feet, including the basement. Rather than count toward that figure, the area of a guest house's basement would count toward the area of the main home.

That would permit construction of a 1,000-square foot guest house with a 1,000-square-foot basement.

After studying the issue, the county planning staff recommended against adopting the change. On Monday, the commission debated the issue more than an hour but delayed a vote.

The county has allowed guest homes to be rented with leases of at least three months since 2001.

The change was proposed by former Commissioner Mike Shidner, who felt it would create more affordable housing, reduce commuter traffic and create neighborhoods with continuity because parents could build houses for their children.

Single-engine plane crashes; pilot unhurt

CASPER - The pilot of a single-engine plane that crashed 25 miles west of town escaped without injuries.

The 36-year-old Denver man, whose name was not provided, lost power of the Sidewinder airplane at about 12:30 p.m. Friday.

He had recently bought the plane and was heading from Thermopolis to Casper when it came down about a mile north of U.S. 20-26.

Sheriff's Cpl. Lynn Cohee said the plane bounced along the uneven ground, losing its wheels and shedding small pieces of fiberglass before coming to a stop.

Joan Brewer and her daughter, Sandy Sherwin, who live in a nearby ranch house, said they did not know about the crash until a deputy asked them how to get to the crash site.

see next page

"He came in the door and he said, 'You got a plane in your back yard,' Brewer said. "And I said, 'What?'"

According to the plane's registration, it has two seats, a 140-horsepower engine and an average cruise speed of 85 mph. It was home-built in 1977.

Gas prices rising in Wyoming

CHEYENNE - Gasoline prices in Wyoming are reaching new heights but remain below the national average, according to the American Automobile Association.

On Sunday, the price of a gallon of regular-grade gasoline averaged \$1.82 in Wyoming, up from \$1.70 a month ago and \$1.51 a year ago.

In Cheyenne, the average was \$1.78, compared to \$1.63 last month and \$1.36 last year. The average of \$1.74 in Casper was up from \$1.64 a month ago and \$1.44 a year ago.

The nationwide average was \$1.87, up from \$1.77 last month and \$1.51 this time last year.

The West Coast has been paying the most for gas. California averaged \$2.17, Oregon \$2.13 and Washington \$2.11. The lowest prices have been in the South, with Georgia averaging \$1.75, Alabama \$1.77, Mississippi \$1.78 and Louisiana \$1.71.

Upper North Platte runoff below normal

CASPER - Only 37 percent of the normal runoff is expected this spring and summer in the North Platte River Basin above Glendo Dam.

The 30-year average runoff from April through July is 926,500 acre-feet. This year, only 340,000 acre-feet of runoff is forecast, according to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The amount of water in storage for irrigators is just 50 percent of average: 377,691 acre-feet.

The bureau is telling North Platte Project water users to expect water-use restrictions because only 57 percent of the irrigation demands in the area will be met.

Casper drug court plans to expand

CASPER - Talk has begun on expanding the city's drug court program to include a residential treatment system.

The court currently deals only with addicts found guilty of misdemeanors and sentenced to intensive outpatient therapy, according to Circuit Judge Mike Huber.

A proposed higher-level drug court is modeled after a program in Nashville that was recently honored for its effectiveness by the White House and the federal Office of Drug Policy.

Several weeks ago a delegation consisting of Huber, Councilwoman Renee Burgess, Police Chief Tom Pagel, drug court coordinator Clara Orr and Rep. Tom Walsh, R-Casper, visited the Nashville program.

"There is not a doubt in my mind it would work here," Burgess said during a meeting on the Casper program Thursday.

Judge Seth Norman, the Tennessee official behind the Nashville program, plans to visit Casper to discuss the issue.

Burgess, Huber and Pagel said they are hopeful Casper will be able to get between \$800,000 and \$1 million in federal funding.

7 appeals filed on forest plan

LARAMIE - Seven groups, businesses and individuals have appealed the latest plan for managing Medicine Bow National Forest on a variety of grounds.

The revised plan was released early this year.

Some of the appeals seek less logging and more areas set aside for conservation. Others want the opposite.

The forest has until June 17 to review the appeals and prepare responses. The paperwork then goes to Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth, who will decide whether the forest plan should be revised in part or entirely because of the appeals.

One group, the Medicine Bow National Forest Coalition of Local Governments, is seeking more logging and grazing in the forest.

Another group, the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, says the plan does not protect some rare types of wildlife and that the Forest Service erred in calculating the maximum logging amount.

Appeals have also been filed by Recreationists of the Bow, the Coalition of Medicine Bow Businesses, and Mountain Meadow Cabins. Attorney Mark Squillance, of Toledo, Ohio, and John Swanson, of Minneapolis, have also appealed.

Torrington landlords fight utilities ordinance

TORRINGTON - Landlords and city officials are negotiating a plan for renters to put their utility bills in their landlords' name.

City Attorney Jim Eddington said landowners do not want to be responsible for their tenants' utility bills - and they want to have the option to shut off late-payers.

"The city acts like this problem is the landlords' fault," said one landlord, Jerry White. "We are not the ones using the utilities."

Eddington explained that city ordinance requires that when utilities are shut off, they may not be turned back on until the past bill is paid with all interest and penalties, along with the reconnection fee and double the deposit.

He said the liability falls either on the landlord or new renter.

One proposal being discussed is for the city to add up the average of three months of utility bills for a rental unit and charge that amount for the deposit. The utilities could then be shut off when the deposit is used without the city losing money.

City Clerk Sandy Pittman said the city's computer system is not equipped to calculate the average utility costs for each rental unit.



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Firefighting agencies contract for 100 new aircraft

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho - The heads of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service on Tuesday announced their agencies would acquire more than 100 additional aircraft to battle this summer's wildfires after ending contracts for 33 aging air tankers last month.

Under attack from western congressmen for cutting the old planes, BLM Director Kathleen Clarke and Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said earlier in the day they couldn't justify using the old tankers because of safety risks.

But the two directors later announced they would contract with private companies for up to 36 single-engine air tankers, 26 large helicopters, 45 medium helicopters and two CL 215 air tankers. In addition, eight U.S. military C-130 aircraft equipped with a retardant-dropping system are available.

The additional aviation will cost about \$66 million.

"We are committed to using available resources to stop fires before they become unmanageable," Bosworth said. "These additional aircraft will enable fire managers to fully maintain their ability to stop nearly 99 percent of all fires on initial attack and continue to protect communities."

Officials at Boise's National Interagency Fire Center, the nation's hub for fire suppression equipment and manpower, characterized Clarke and Bosworth's first statements as personal opinions.

The newly contracted aircraft join an existing fleet of more than 700 firefighting planes and helicopters, officials said.

The suspension of the 33 aging air tankers came after a recent National Transportation Safety Board report on three fatal air tanker accidents. All happened within the last 10 years.

In 2002, three crewmembers were killed when a 46-year-old Lockheed C-130A crashed after it lost both wings. Similar problems were found in an aging PB4Y-2 that broke up and crashed fighting a Colorado fire that year, killing both crew members.

In 1994, a C-130A crashed when its right wing came off in flight, killing three people aboard.

The Chamber of Commerce of Chico, Calif., on Tuesday criticized the federal government for grounding the 33 planes. It said a local business, Aero Union, has more than one-third of the

planes. Last summer, Aero Union had 230 employees, but had to laid off 50 because of the canceled contracts.

The chamber asked residents to join its "Green Ribbon Air Tanker Support" program and contact their congressional delegation.

The acquisition followed pledges from some lawmakers last month to get the 33-tanker fleet back in the air right away. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., Rep. J.D. Hayworth, R-Ariz., and others have sharply denounced the government's decision to ground the big fixed-wing aircraft.

During a hearing at the House Resources subcommittee on forests, DeFazio said there was no adequate substitute for the air tankers.

The two directors said that with or without the big air tankers to lay down swaths of fire retardant, they still planned to maintain a success rate of stopping 98 percent of fires on initial attack with thousands of firefighters, engines and bulldozers.

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