

## **Treat the Forests---Save our Communities**

By: Tom Partin

There is a new momentum building across the West that is taking many forms, but has a common theme: ---“Treat the Forests and Save our Communities.” The impetus is coming from rural Americans who have been played like pawns in a chess game over how the federal forests surrounding their communities are being managed. The uprising gets stronger with every acre of federal forest that goes up in flames destroying homes and watersheds, or is killed by insects and disease. It is also strengthened by the closure of each sawmill, by every rural community that faces 20 percent unemployment, and by every local government unable to meet the needs of its citizenry. The beat is signaling that the West has had enough of watching both our forests and rural communities die a slow and unnecessary death. It is also an indication that rural America has had enough of special interest groups that use the court system and taxpayer dollars gleaned through the Equal Access to Justice Provision to stifle needed projects while forests and communities suffer!

A new social license is rapidly evolving as the need to reestablish management and create jobs in our federal forests is becoming clear. In Oregon we have seen this demand for change being carried by Senator Ron Wyden’s efforts to increase forest management east of the Cascades, by Peter DeFazio who brought Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to Oregon to seek a solution for the BLM lands in southwest Oregon, and by Congressman Greg Walden who has introduced legislation to expand the authorities of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act to treat more forested acres.

In Montana Senator Jon Tester introduced the Montana Forest Jobs and Restoration Initiative; Senators Risch of Idaho and Udall of Colorado introduced the National Forest Insect and Disease Emergency Act for use in any area where insect epidemics pose a threat to forest health and human safety. Other national forests such as the Colville in Washington and the Nez Perce in Idaho sent delegations back to Washington DC asking for expanded authorization to get more acres of forest health treatments on the landscape. In California the collaborative Quincy Library Group has worked to restore management of some forests in the Sierra Nevada. The voices are many and strong. At a recent meeting with Interior Secretary Salazar in Washington, DC, we heard Oregon’s Congressional delegation declare that if an administrative solution to the federal management gridlock is not found, a legislative solution will be forthcoming.

Each of these efforts, while specific to individual regions or forests have surfaced out of desperation of the people who live in rural America and want to forge new workable solutions for our federal forests. While each bill or request may vary, they have the same theme: ---“Treat the Forests and Save our Communities.”

Congress must now listen to the drumbeat from rural America and take action to get needed forest health treatments implemented; put our residents in rural America back to work; and reject the actions of those who hold jobs and communities hostage by using lawsuits to stop sound forest management projects.

The rural West has experienced 20 years of ineffectual federal forest management and has paid the price by living in increasing poverty and watching their forests decline and die. The tide has turned and a new momentum has developed for action. It's about time!