

**Statement of James K. Walls, Executive Director for  
Lake County Resources Initiative**

**U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works subcommittee on Green Jobs and the New Economy**

**June 3, 2014**

It is an honor to be here and testify before this distinguished committee. My name is Jim Walls and I am the Executive Director of Lake County Resources Initiative, a non-profit that works on natural resource projects that includes federal forest management, biomass, geothermal, solar, wind and small hydro projects. Our goal and economic diversification strategy is to make Lake County Oregon's Most Renewable Energy County and become a net exporter of renewable energy. Lake County is 78% federal lands with the Fremont-Winema National Forests and Bureau of Land Management being the biggest landowners. Lake County is in the south central dry interior of the state of Oregon. The Fremont portion of the National Forest lies roughly between the towns of Lakeview, Klamath Falls and Bend, Oregon just north of the California/Oregon border. The major tree species include ponderosa pine, western juniper, lodgepole pine, and at higher elevations white fir. Most of these trees are adapted to summer drought and extreme temperature fluctuations due to the arid nature of the region (FNF 2003). The 10-20 inches average precipitation occurs from the autumn through the spring and as a result the summers are dry and hot (Oregon State University 2003). At the height of timber removals Lake County supported 5 mills; today one remains, the Lakeview Collins Company Sawmill. As a result of the curtailment of timber harvesting, Lake County was the only county in Oregon that experienced a net job loss during the 1990's (Kauffman 2001).

When discussing climate change impact on forest, the actions we take to help prepare a forest for climate change are the same measures we are using to restore forests to more of what they were before fire suppression. Predictions are that the dry Ponderosa type forests are going to become even dryer and warmer. As a result of past management forest composition and natural fire disturbance regimes have been dramatically altered, increasing the risk of abnormally intense wildfires, insects, and disease that will devastate the remaining old-growth stands and other forest ecosystem components. Many areas have missed 7 to 10 fire return intervals, and mature forests of large, widely spaced trees have declined more than 50 percent from historical levels. Combine climate change of warmer dryer years, insects are not curtailed by cold winters and fires become larger and significantly more devastating. Climate change also means less snow pack, with the dense trees catching the snow in the limbs where substantial evaporation occurs.

I thought I have had the privilege two other times in DC to testify and maybe someone else should be given the opportunity. Then I was told that the hearing would be on impacts of climate change on forests. In my opinion we are on the verge of losing our National Forests to catastrophic fires and insects because of our past management and climate change. This impact is not confined to just eastside forest in Oregon but it extends east to South Dakota, North to Montana and South to New Mexico. The impact of climate change is just not on the forest but also agriculture as snow pack reduces the amount of water available for irrigation.

In our case, the direct impact of climate change and past forest management over the past decade has resulted in the loss of 100,000 acres to the Winter Rim/toolbox fire, 350,000+ acres to Mountain Pine Beetle and just in 2012 92,977 acres to the Barry Point Fire. In a decade we have lost 24% of the Fremont part of the Fremont-Winema National Forest. This year we are facing the worst drought that anyone can remember and have already had the first fire of the year, in May! At this rate it will only take 3 decades before we impact the whole Fremont part of the Fremont-Winema National Forest, 1.5 million acres.

As with any fires in the West, they burn in a mosaic pattern and varying intensity. My organization has been running a forest monitoring team since 2002 and one of the things we study is the impact of catastrophic fires

on soils. Those areas of fire that are the hottest often exceed 400 degrees and actually melt the soil or what we call plasticizing the soil. On these worst sites water will not even soak into the soil and it will be over 6 decades before trees will start to grow again naturally. Fires contribute significant amount of CO<sub>2</sub> and while brush does capture CO<sub>2</sub>, it is nothing like trees. If the trend continues where will the Collins Companies get material for the sawmill into the future, the loss of our last mill would be. When you look to the east from the edge of the Fremont National Forest the next tree is the Black Hills in South Dakota, is climate change going to push the desert west?

Because of past management and fire suppression the worst neighbor a timberland owner can have is a National Forest. As a result of overstocked conditions on National Forest and the lack of cold winters to kill insects private land bordering National Forests are in danger of being lost, in the case of the 2012 Barry Point Fire just one landowner the Collins Companies lost over 20,000 acres of forest land. On private lands, owners invest in the future by thinning out trees and controlling insects but on National Forests if it does not make money it does not get done, there is no investment into the future.

We have a forest collaborative called the Lakeview Stewardship Group comprised of National, Regional and local environmental groups along with industry, local leaders and local citizens who have agreed upon how to manage our National Forest. As a result the Collins Companies have a 10 year Stewardship contract and we were awarded the nation's largest Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act dollars of \$3.5 million/year for 9 years. The CFLRA was a bipartisan effort and we thank you so much for that but we need to have the same effort with Climate Change. Even with all this we are not at a scale of treatments that would assist this forest to adapt to climate change. We need to get to a scale of treating fire class 3 forest stands to over 20,000 acres/year and doing NEPA at a 100,000 acre scale. We also need to stop the fire borrowing from other programs as we will never get ahead at this rate. Please support S.1875. The cheapest way to deal with fire to treat ahead of a fire, not suppression. Doing these treatments creates and protects old growth, restores more natural low burning type fires, help forests adapt to Climate Change and provide jobs. We need to do all this with no additional budgeted dollars and the same number of Forest Service employees. Forest Service employees on the Fremont-Winema National Forest are working with us to accomplish this goal.

To get where we need to be I also ask your help to deal with the language in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (Public Law 110–140; 121 Stat. 1492) that defines biomass for applicability to the Renewable Fuels Standard excluding woody biomass from federal lands. How ironic is it when a person can stand on a property line with one foot on private land and the other on federal land, one is consider renewable and the other is not. As my 9 year old grandson who does not like change would say, *grandpa that is just stupid*. I plead with you to be a leader to change this. Without changing this definition there will be no private investment into technology that can use all the small diameter material that will be produced as a result of getting our National Forests back to a condition that is natural. Definitions of biomass in national energy policy should include Federal sources of woody biomass with the appropriate ecological safeguards in place. Senator Wyden introduced S.536 (w/ Senator Merkley co-sponsorship) on 3/5/09 to amend the EPA's definition of "renewable, please reintroduce that bill.

Another way to help mitigate Climate Change impacts is converting to renewable energy. In Lake County we have a plan to implement every kind of renewable energy except ocean wave. We did a report on all the renewable energy that could be developed in Lake County and it showed that we could offset 93% of all fossil fuel emissions in Lake County. In areas like ours that do not have natural gas, it is economical and a job creator. Implementing biomass energy, biomass thermal and/or biofuels from small material removed from the forest to adapt to climate change can produce 75-100 new green jobs in each community across the country that implement renewable energy. This July we will be going publicly with the CO<sub>2</sub> report and holding meeting in the county to develop an action plan to offset off all the fossil fuel emissions.

What if 18,000 communities like ours did something similar, what kind of impact could we collectively have on climate change. Climate change is occurring and a vast majority of scientist agree. Now it is coming out that the impacts are happening now and faster than originally thought. We are seeing more severe weather events and as a result communities around the world are going to be impacted. There is no dealing with Climate Change tomorrow, we need to start now, why not do something that is economically viable and a job creator as the first step. Renewable energy and forest management cannot solve the total problem but it is economical and ecologically correct so it is a place where we can immediately start making a difference.

Thank you for the honor and time to present here today.