

EVERGREEN

The Magazine of the Evergreen Foundation

August 2004



New Hope in New Mexico

**State forester Butch Blazer wants your
money and your talent**

“We need everything. Not just sawmills, furniture factories and post and pole plants, but also facilities that can consume large quantities of low quality wood, like engineered wood plants and biomass and bio-fuel facilities. Anything that does not consume a lot of water, which we don’t have, should work here.”

Harv Forsgren, USFS, Regional Forester, from a June 2003 *Evergreen* interview

New Hope In

NEW MEXICO

An essay by Jim Petersen

First it was Arizona. Now it is New Mexico. Two beautiful states caught in the grip of an unprecedented wildfire-forest health crisis without a hope in hell of turning back the relentless march of marauding pine beetles and deadly forest fires.

The problem, of course, is that there is no sawmilling infrastructure left in the Southwest, no way to process and market hundreds of millions of tons of wood fiber scientists say must be removed from the region’s forests and rangelands if they are to be pulled back from the brink of ecological collapse.

Most of the Southwest’s milling capacity was auctioned after the federal timber sale program collapsed under the weight of litigation in the early 1990s. Between 1992 and 2003, 15 sawmills, including six in New Mexico, went out of business. In good years, they processed 368 million board feet of timber.

The last and largest sawmill in New Mexico, Rio Grande Forest Products at Espanola, shut down more than a year ago. Eight tiny mills remain. Together they are capable of milling 19 million board feet annually, six million feet less than Rio Grande milled by itself in a good year.

Meanwhile, 702.68 million board feet of *new growth* are added to New Mexico’s forests *annually*—and that’s just on non-reserved forestlands that are deemed suitable for harvest, meaning they are growing wood fiber at a rate of 20 or more cubic feet per acre annually. Another 108 million board feet die annually, including 70 million feet of sawtimber: trees nine or more inches in diameter breast high.



Jim Petersen

Harv Forsgren, USFS Regional Forester, Southwest Region

Faced with such a bonanza, you would think sawmill owners would be standing in line for the chance to build new sawmills here. And you would be wrong, because almost 69 percent of the timber that grows and dies annually in New Mexico lies within national forests. What is not tied up in litigation has fallen into the bureaucratic black hole created by 30 years of conflicting environmental law: a regulatory nightmare Forest Service chief Dale Bosworth and others have liked to the fabled Gordian knot.

In fact, the need for infrastructure has become so dire that ranchers in northern New Mexico are *burying* ponderosa pine thinned from their forests in trenches—because there is no market for it.

“All of our mills are gone,” says Scott Schaffer, manager of the Flying Horse Ranch about 40 miles northeast of Taos. “There is no market for ponderosa pine in New Mexico.”

Although Mr. Schaffer does not know how widespread the practice of landfilling pine has become, he did confirm that it is occurring on a small scale. “Unlike some parts of the West that have infrastructure and no supply, we have lots of supply and no infrastructure.”

By Mr. Schaffer’s reckoning, more than one million acres of rancher-owned timberland within a half-day’s drive of the Flying Horse need thinning. “They would sign a contract today with any reputable mill owner. So would we.”

There are also no loggers left in New Mexico, so the Flying Horse is buying logging equipment. “We hope to be up and running in a couple of months,” he said in a July telephone interview. “Now if we just had a sawmill.”

Help may be on the way in the form of newly appointed state forester Arthur “Butch” Blazer, a Mescalero Apache with a long and impressive forestry resume.

“Recruiting an industry is a major, major theme for both the governor and me,” he said in a June interview.

The governor in this case is Bill Richardson, the Clinton Administration energy czar who was rumored to be on John Kerry’s short list for vice presidential consideration. But Governor Richardson, who also chaired the Democratic National Convention in Boston three weeks ago, begged off, saying he wanted to honor the pledge he made to New Mexico voters when he took office in January 2003.

Just what kind of wood processing industry Gov. Richardson envisions for New Mexico isn't clear yet, particularly given his negative reaction to a Bush Administration plan for giving states more authority in deciding the fate of federally owned roadless areas. [45 million acres, 40 percent at moderate or high risk of catastrophic wildfire] Be that as it may, when he hired Mr. Blazer he told him he wanted the state's 835,000 acres of forestland managed the same way the Mescalero Apache manage their half-million acre forest. The tribe's thinning and restoration program, which is one of the most admired in the country, supports its sawmill near Tinnie, New Mexico. Mr. Blazer managed the program for several years back in the 1980s and he still has close ties there.

"All of our private forest landowners, including the tribes, need better infrastructure and stronger markets for their products," Mr. Blazer observed in an *Evergreen* interview. "So does the state."

Indeed it does. Save for the tribe's Tinnie mill and a second smaller mill they own at Alamogordo, there are no sawmills left in New Mexico. To make matters worse, there is no pulpwood market in the entire Southwest, and hasn't been since 1999 when Canadian-owned Abitibi converted the old Southwest Forest Industries pulp mill at Snowflake, Arizona to recycled fiber.

The absence of an inexpensive supply of by-products that sawmills normally generate, including chips, and sawdust, has forced secondary wood manufacturers in the region, including many startup businesses funded by government grants, to do something their competitors in other states don't have to do: buy logs on the open market. The added cost burden makes it very difficult for them to profit in already overcrowded markets for custom furniture, wood pellets, animal



Jim Petersen



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Heavy rains scoured this stream channel to bedrock [top] following the June 2000 Viveash Fire in New Mexico's Santa Fe National Forest. Needle-less trees reveal a forest far too dense to survive the impact of a crown fire that ripped through 28,000 acres of heavy timber on a windless afternoon.

bedding and other niche products made from small diameter trees.

"We need to get something going real soon," says Mr. Blazer.

It may be that the stars are beginning a more hopeful alignment. In April, Mr. Blazer sent two of his field foresters to *Timber West* magazine's small log milling conference in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to see if they could find any mill owners willing to consider capital investments in New Mexico. They found two: Duane Vaagen, who owns Vaagen Brothers, Colville, Washington, and Todd Brinkmeyer, co-owner of Plummer Forest Products, Plummer, Idaho.

Call it serendipity, but one of the two foresters sent to Coeur d'Alene was Lawrence Crane, who was timber buyer for Rio Grande's mill at Espanola before

it closed. And it was Mr. Schaffer, who also attended the Coeur d'Alene conference, who invited Mr. Vaagen and Mr. Brinkmeyer to visit New Mexico's timbered ranches. By Mr. Crane's estimate, these ranches and the state's tribal forests are capable of producing a 30 million board foot a year harvest in perpetuity, certainly enough to support a sawmill or two, depending on their size. But as Mr. Vaagen explained in a subsequent interview, sawmills alone aren't the answer. "You need a well defined market for residuals, for the trimmings, bark and sawdust that sawing creates. There isn't a residual market in New Mexico. For that matter, there isn't one in the entire Southwest."

No one is more keenly aware of the desperate need for milling infrastructure than Forest Service Southwest Regional Forester Harv Forsgren.

"We need everything," he said in a June interview in his Albuquerque office. "Not just sawmills, furniture factories and post and pole plants, but also facilities that can consume large quantities of low quality wood, like engi-

neered wood plants and biomass and bio-fuel facilities. Anything that does not consume a lot of water, which we don't have, should work here."

Forty-eight percent of all forestland in New Mexico is federally owned, and managed by the Forest Service. But the agency has become the 500-pound elephant no one wants to talk about. In fact, all but one infrastructure investment currently in play in the Southwest—the exception being a 150,000-acre ten-year stewardship contract under review on Arizona's Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest—is based on business models that *exclude* the possibility of purchasing wood from litigation-plagued national forests.

"In recent years we have not demonstrated that we can be a reliable source of supply," Mr. Forsgren says of litiga-

tion and regulatory problems that confront the Forest Service. “We have to do better. If we don’t we will lose millions of acres of forestland the public has entrusted to our care.”

In the hope that better days lie ahead, Mr. Forsgren’s staff has begun an assessment of the region’s infrastructure needs. The objective is to match the Forest Service’s forest restoration priorities with the quantities and qualities of wood the work is expected to yield.

“We have two million acres of forestland close to communities that need immediate attention,” he explains. “It is all mechanical thinning, which costs us about \$1,000 per acre. That’s \$2 billion out of taxpayer pockets, just for *this region’s* wildland-urban interface. And we have another six million acres beyond the interface that will require active management. It is neither safe nor environmentally feasible to burn such a large volume of wood and it isn’t economically feasible to bury it. But if we can develop viable markets for the thinnings we can offset some of the cost. That’s our goal.”

The forest restoration potential in the Southwest is significant. 17.5 million national forest acres are at moderate to high risk of catastrophic wildfire according to the Forest Service. Many stands that contained less than a hundred trees per acre in a 1909 survey now hold more than a thousand trees. Despite a half-century of commercial timber harvesting follow-up surveys, conducted in 1962 and 1986 reveal that the number of trees in all but the largest size classification is still increasing. But just how many trees will be thinned from dying forests remains to be seen. Radical environmentalists don’t want any thinning done beyond the residential boundaries of at-risk communities: this despite the significant threat wildfires pose in more distant national forest watersheds that capture one-third of the state’s total annual precipitation—forests that also provide vital nesting and roosting habitat for Mexican spotted owls or goshawks.



Jim Petersen

This is what a restored ponderosa pine forest looks like, not the clearcutting misrepresentations from private lands in the Pacific Northwest that are pictured in advertisements radical environmentalists are sponsoring in Southwest newspapers. This restoration is at Fort Valley, minutes west of Flagstaff. The site, which is maintained by the U.S. Forest Service, is the oldest experimental forest in the United States.

To underscore their unwavering opposition they recently ran a full-page advertisement in the *Albuquerque Journal* lambasting the Bush Administration and the bi-partisan congressional coalition that ratified the landmark Healthy Forests Restoration Act last fall. The advertisement features a fuzzy black and white photograph of a clearcut. But the photograph, which isn’t identified, appears to be of a post-fire salvage operation conducted on private forestland somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, not the Southwest.

Nevertheless, radicals see HFRA as “a payoff for big timber companies” that supported the President’s first run for the White House and are, no doubt, supporting him again.

But Mr. Forsgren sees HFRA’s unprecedented bi-partisan support base is “a public affirmation of the seriousness of the forest health problem and the necessity for dealing with it now.”

“I can’t think of another time in my 28 years in the Forest Service when a President of the United States has engaged himself in a more meaningful or helpful forestry dialogue,” he said. “Of course the President has a kind of media access the Forest Service doesn’t have, but I think he has very effectively communicated the seriousness of the problem we face. His personal commitment elevated the debate and encouraged a lot of other

people to get involved in a more productive discussion. It’s unprecedented.”

Despite President Bush’s frequent public references to the plight of western national forests, Mr. Forsgren insists HFRA is not a timber bonanza or the political payback many environmentalists say it is. “Timber harvesting has become a by-product of a completely different objective,” he explains. “And that objective is to improve the health of millions of acres of diseased forestland that need thinning or a combination of thinning and prescribed fire or prescribed fire by itself. We will let science and public safety guide our decision-making.”

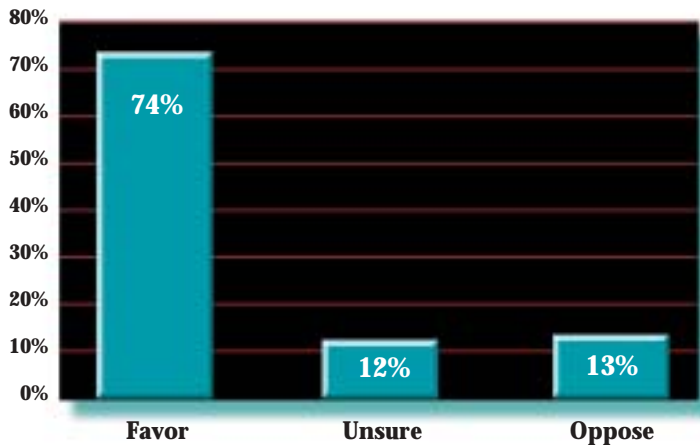
But science may not prevail on one particularly contentious point. Even

environmentalists who support thinning are having difficulty swallowing the idea that some large trees in the Southwest may need be harvested, not to feed sawmills but to restore species and structural diversity in diseased forests. Fire ecologists who have examined so-called “thinning from below” prescriptions, which rely on removing limited numbers of small trees, say such treatments do little to reduce the risk of future canopy fires. Nor do they enhance natural re-seeding of ponderosa pine, the return of important grasses and forbs, or the formation of new structural and age class diversity that thinning is known to promote when it includes trees of all sizes. Numerous examples of the more balanced thinning approach most fire ecologists would prefer can be found at the Forest Service’s Fort Valley experimental station near Flagstaff, Arizona including plots that have been monitored annually since 1962—a far longer timeframe than even the tediously cautious Federal Drug Administration requires.

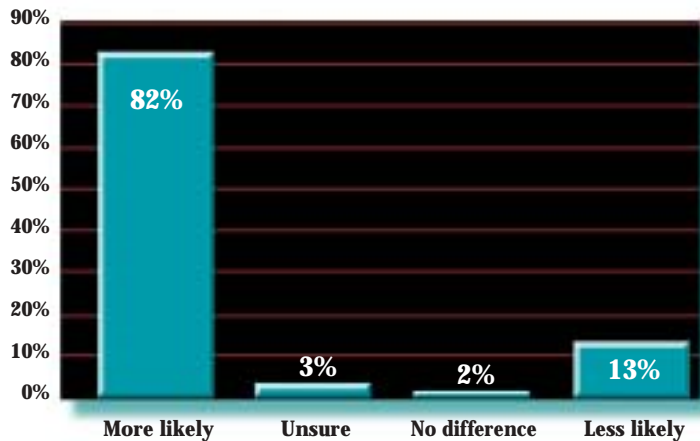
“Politics and emotion will no doubt always play a role in our public forest management decisions, but if our goal is to re-create a more natural range of forest conditions, limiting the sizes of some of trees we remove from forests that are too dense isn’t going to get us there,” says Carl Fiedler, a University of

Results of a nationwide poll of registered voters conducted in March 2004 to measure continuing growth in public support for the Bush Administration's Healthy Forests Initiative and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act signed into law last December by President Bush

The recently-passed Healthy Forest Restoration Act Addresses the need for reform in our nation's regulations regarding prevention of catastrophic wildfires & insect infested & diseased forests. This legislation establishes a more effective & timely process to protect our nation's public lands and forests from catastrophic fires. Do you favor or oppose such reforms in our federal regulations?



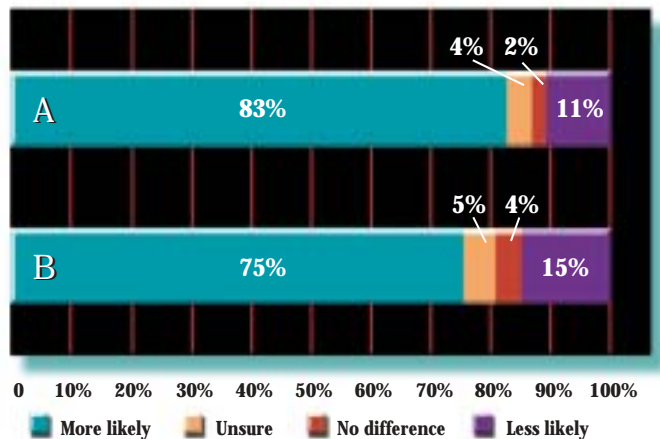
Over the past two years, more than 147,000 fires burned nearly 11 million acres of land in the U.S. these fires were hotter, grew faster & were more deadly than previous forest fires because of forest underbrush & tree density. the recently-passed Healthy Forest Restoration Act allows this underbrush to be cleared & the tree density to be thinned. Please tell me, whether knowing this information would make you more likely or less to support the Healthy Forest Restoration Act?



Please tell me for each one, whether knowing this information would make you more likely or less to support the Healthy Forest Restoration Act

A. Due to uncontrollable forest fires, 10,000 Americans were forced to flee their homes. The Healthy Forest Restoration Act will help prevent forest fires from spreading to residential areas.

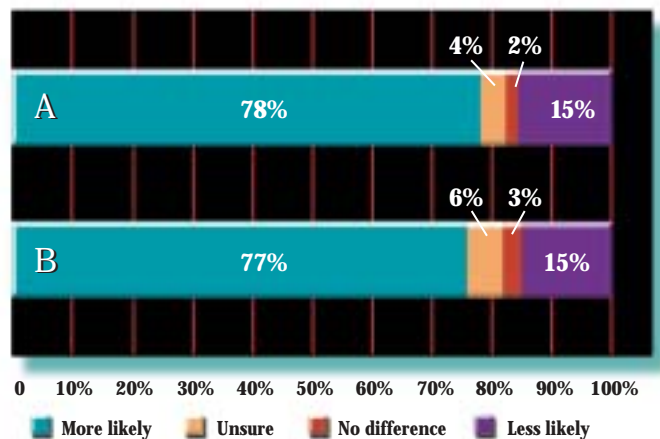
B. Twenty-two civilian Americans were killed by devastating forest fires in the last two years.



Please tell me for each one, whether knowing this information would make you more likely or less to support the Healthy Forest Restoration Act

A. In catastrophic forest fires in the past few years, millions of animals were killed or displaced from their habitats. The Healthy Forest Restoration Act will preserve animals' habitats by clearing out forest underbrush.

B. Catastrophic forest fires, which burn hotter & longer than normal forest fires, sterilize the soil for decades & kill mature trees that normally would have survived forest fires for hundreds of years.



Montana forest ecologist and co-author of a 2002 strategic assessment of wildfire risks in New Mexico. “In at-risk forests you have to play the hand you are dealt, looking back in time for forest conditions that seemed to sustain themselves, then looking ahead to try to figure out what is possible given the forests we have today.”

Public support for thinning the West’s diseased and dying forests is at an all time high, a fact not lost on Mr. Forsgren or anyone in the Bush Administration [see charts, Pg. 5]. In a national survey of registered voters conducted in March, 82% said they favor thinning and brush removal projects that reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. By the same margin, respondents also favor removing bureaucratic red tape that delays projects, while 74% favor the more timely review process HFRA codifies. The results surprised pollsters, who had expected public support for forest restoration to decline during the winter months following last year’s disastrous wildfire season. In fact, it increased.

Although two focus groups conducted in Albuquerque in May produced similar results it is difficult to determine just where Governor Richardson’s administration stands on the infrastructure question or what types of milling investments they would welcome. No one from the logging or sawmilling sectors was invited to speak at the June 14 forest and watershed health summit hosted by the governor’s office, though Mr. Blazer said he tried hard to find someone to participate in the two-day conference in Ruidoso. That he could not speak volumes for New Mexico’s plight.

Had anyone from the logging or sawmilling industries attended the conference they would have witnessed what Mr. Blazer hopes is a new beginning for all who share a concern for the health and safety of the state’s drought-stressed forests, rangelands and watersheds. Highlight of the conference was the unveiling of a draft plan for addressing the crisis. Although the plan is

mainly a statement of shared principles, it is a tribute to Mr. Blazer’s considerable diplomatic skill, for it was he who assembled the 33-member public-private sector task force that developed the plan in less than six months, a quite remarkable achievement given the enormity of the problem and the necessity of involving state, federal, county and tribal governments that don’t always agree.

“I am very optimistic,” Mr. Blazer told conference attendees at the opening session in Ruidoso. “The fact that all of the stakeholders came to the

Education, Urban and Community Forestry and the Office of Tribal Relations. Suffice it to say New Mexico’s plan, bold though it is, won’t get very far without his blessing—and support.

Fortunately, Mr. Holtrop had nothing but praise for the New Mexico plan which he said meets the government’s new on-the-ground restoration standard in six ways [1] Multiple ecological restoration goals are [2] integrated at a cross jurisdictional landscape level, [3] legal and policy barriers identified, [4] restoration’s short term impacts and long term benefits to species are identified and [5] collaboration and consensus-building incorporating [6] local values, objectives and needs is emphasized.

“The National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act provide the framework for moving forward,” he told the group, “but they are useless without local partners, communities and states willing to roll up their sleeves and go to work.”

Of course the litigation monster still trumps federal forestry’s new community outreach, but Mr. Forsgren says he believes radicals and their lawyers have marginalized themselves. “New citizen groups are stepping up,” he says, “supporting thinning projects that often include cutting merchantable-size trees. It is a hopeful sign.

Obeying the law and bringing people into our decision making process early on are the keys.”

So again the question: with so much potential in New Mexico’s public and privately-owned forests why aren’t sawmill owners standing in line to make investments?

“Capital investments on a scale necessary to address an 11-state forest health crisis can’t be justified if the beginning assumption in your business model is that the very government you are being asked to help is not a reliable wood source,” Mr. Vaagen explains. “Mills that don’t own forestland in the Interior West don’t have access to sufficient private timber to make such large investments pay out without government timber in the mix, so if the government wants us to help, it must first demon-



Jim Petersen

John Deere’s biomass bundler at work in a Forest Service thinning near Bonners Ferry, Idaho: such thinnings will not occur in the southwest until there are viable markets for woody biomass and other low quality wood fiber fire ecologist say must be removed from at risk forests if ecological collapse is to be averted. Despite its enormous weight, the “light on the land” bundler exerts less ground pressure than a walking human.

table in the spirit of mutual cooperation and commitment is a good sign.”

The plan’s principal goal is to focus the smorgasbord of restoration efforts currently underway in New Mexico on a single objective: the restoration of a more natural range of disturbance patterns to New Mexico forests, rangelands and watersheds. It is a tall order given the fact that there isn’t much the state can do without federal approval or federal funding. Small wonder then that Mr. Forsgren and Joel Holtrop, the Forest Service’s Deputy Chief for State & Private Forestry were prominently featured on the program. Mr. Holtrop oversees programs that are central to the Bush Administration’s forest restoration plans: Fire and Aviation Management, Cooperative Forestry, Forest Health, Conservation

strate that it can be a consistent supplier of wood fiber. The Forest Service is making progress with its stewardship contracts, but there isn't any consistency or volume yet, and I don't see a collective will to utilize all of the new management tools HFRA provides. "Taxpayers need to know the marketplace can solve this problem, but until we see it, we'll continue to sit on the sidelines with everyone else."

It is clear the Forest Service and the West's surviving mills are waiting for one another to make the next move. Equally clear is the fact that it is the government's move.

"I fully understand the industry's low level of expectation," Oregon Congressman Greg Walden said in a May *Evergreen* interview. Mr. Walden was an HFRA co-sponsor. He also chairs the House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health and is a member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Resources.

"History makes the case for skepticism," he continued, "but two things are very different now. First, we have a President and an administration fully committed from the top down to restoration and all that it implies. Second, significant improvements have been made in NEPA [the National Environmental Policy Act] and the appeals process. As Forest Health Subcommittee chairman I intend to hold the agencies [the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management] accountable for HFRA's full implementation."

But Congressman Walden concedes that getting the industry to make new investments in milling and biomass facilities will be an uphill struggle. "We lost so much," he said of the estimated 80,000 loggers and sawmill workers who lost their jobs when the federal timber sale program collapsed a decade ago. "The loss of trust and credibility is one thing, but then look at the losses associated with the dismantling and sale of processing equipment, and the billions of dollars in capital and jobs that were exported to other

countries that are now selling lumber and paper in U.S. markets our government surrendered when it got out of the forest management business."

Although Mr. Walden doubts that the nation's major forest products companies will ever again want to do business with the federal government, he is hopeful the West's surviving family-owned mills and logging companies will once they see serious effort on the government's part—a ritual dance not very different from that which stimulated the first serious industry investments in the West in the 1920s.



Jim Petersen

A log truck passes the weigh scale at the Mescalero Apache sawmill at Tinnie, New Mexico. Note the red chip bin in the background. When this photograph was taken in 1999 the tribe was still selling its wood chips to a pulp mill at Snowflake, Arizona. But the mill no longer accepts wood chips, a fact that worries potential sawmill investors who need a market that can dispose of residual wood fiber generated by the milling process.

"My message to them is that the bipartisan House and Senate coalition that championed HFRA is still together and still working to create a better and more business-like climate," he said. "But given all of the other demands on the federal treasury, the fact is forest and rangeland restoration will fail without their capital and their expertise."

Mr. Vaagen hears the words but he's still reluctant—as are the rest of the West's surviving sawmills. "From experience we've learned it isn't prudent to make large capital investments without signed contracts," he said. "We lost a ton of money when we closed our Republic mill, a mill ideally suited for processing small logs from Forest Service thinnings. But the logs never came."

Postscript: *Evergreen* was born in the twin cauldrons of wildfire and wild politics. We have spent most of the last 18 years writing about both. In fact, some say we are the architects of the entire forest health debate. If we are we had a lot of help. But this much is certain: none of us made any progress on the political front until President Bush flew to Medford, Oregon in August of 2002 to unveil his healthy forests agenda. Then everything changed. His willingness to invest some of his

political capital in our great need has made all the difference. Most importantly, it elevated the debate. Yes, the radicals are still with us, and probably will be for some time to come, but they and their doomsday rhetoric are no longer the dominant force. New people and new more hopeful ideas are gaining favor. And there is a new spirit of cooperation and commitment. We saw it in spades at the forest and watershed summit in Ruidoso. The West's voters, including New Mexico's, need to know this, and they need to know they have the President to thank for their renewed sense of hope.

It is unfortunate that presidential hopeful John Kerry does not share Mr. Bush's commitment to the West's at-risk forests and communities. He was absent on the day the Senate voted 80-14 for HFRA, but he still managed to find time to rebuke his colleagues, claiming that the bill "takes a chainsaw to public forests in the name of protecting them."

Knowing this, we asked Harv Forsgren a hypothetical question when we interviewed him in his Albuquerque office last month. We said if radical environmentalists are the forest saviors they say they are, who is on the other side that wants to destroy forests? After thinking for a moment he said, "There isn't anyone on another side anymore."

In Our Opinion

Editor's Note: Normally, this space is reserved for a description of The Evergreen Foundation, its mission and funding sources. But in light of the forest health/ watershed crisis in New Mexico, and the role the U.S. Forest Service hopes to play in both forests and necessary sawmilling infrastructure, we are yielding our space to George Leonard, a retired Associate Chief of the Forest Service we have long admired. Mr. Leonard is a member of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees, an organization with which we have a close working relationship. Below is a statement Mr. Leonard read at the association's May 22 annual meeting in Sacramento.

"I am proud of the U.S. Forest Service and what we accomplished over the years.

I am proud that we fought fires aggressively. Some argue that our overstocked forest problems today are the result of overly aggressive fire suppression, but the forests of the West were not sustainable at the rate of loss to stand replacement fires that was occurring in the first half of the twentieth century. Having too many trees is a lot better than having too few.

Those who argue for letting fires burn do not remember the millions of acres of brush fields stretching from the flanks of Mount Shasta south through the Sierras. Too many trees are a lot better than too much manzanita.

I am proud that we reforested those brush fields and that they now support stands of trees. We solved nursery problems; learned how to prepare the site to reduce competition, and how to deal with re-sprouting brush and mountain misery.

I am proud that we got out the cut. We were reliable suppliers of timber to local mills. We contributed to the economic stability of our mountain towns. We helped make our country a nation of homeowners.

While we were contributing to the wood needs the country, the condition of the forests was improving. In California, from 1952 to 1992, annual tree mortality decreased 45%; net growth increased 86%, and the inventory of sawtimber-size trees increased 12%.

I am proud of many things we accomplished during our careers—protection of wildlife, enhancement of rangelands and watersheds, implementation of a wilderness management system, and providing the nation's premier outdoor recreation experience. We made the concept of multiple-use a reality.

But most of all, I am proud that we were a CAN DO outfit. We knew and the public knew that if we were given a job we would get it done and get it done right.

A notable fact during much of our careers was that a political consensus existed about what was expected of us. We had strong public and political support for what we were doing.

Unfortunately over the last decade or more that consensus has broken down. Public expectations and demands on the National Forests have changed. Neither the agency nor our political leaders have been successful in rebuilding a working consensus on the use and management of these valuable lands. Disputes have stopped management activities and the agency's reputation as a CAN DO outfit has suffered. Instead of CAN DO, we hear of paralysis by analysis.

The tragic fires of recent years have raised public awareness of forest management issues and are helping to reestablish the political will to do something about the condition of our forests. There is recognition, although not universal, that we must manage our forests if we are to avoid catastrophic fire losses. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act provides some help to the land management agencies by reducing the number of redundant procedural steps that have hampered and delayed needed work.

The Forest Service has an opportunity, perhaps the last opportunity, to get on with its job of protecting and managing the National Forests. The Forest Service has the opportunity to reestablish itself as a CAN DO organization.

Just as I am proud of the agency where I spent my career, I am proud of the Forest Service today. The dedicated, professional men and women of the Forest Service have the knowledge and skills needed to do the job. They know what needs to be done and are anxious to get on with it. They deserve the support of the public and our political leaders so they can be successful. The fate of our forests, lives, and property depends on their success."