

**TESTIMONY
OF
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FOR THE HEARING
ON THE
INDIAN FOREST MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT REPORT
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

March 30, 2004

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am pleased to be here today to provide the views of the Department of the Interior on An Assessment of Indian Forest and Forest Management in the United States, also known as the Indian Forest Management Assessment Report II (Report). The 1990 National Indian Forest Resources Management Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to obtain an independent assessment of the status and management of Indian forest resources every ten years. Pursuant to the Act, this is the second report assessing Indian forests and forestry management. The recommendations included within this Report provide the Department with feedback to better improve the delivery and management of forestry services provided to federally recognized tribes and individual Indian owners.

BACKGROUND

Indian forests cover 17 million acres with a commercial timber volume of approximately 42 billion board feet with an annual allowable harvest of 767 million board feet. Indian forests are located on 275 reservations in 26 states. Forest management activities consist of forest inventory and management planning including the development of Integrated Resource Management Plans, forest products marketing, timber sale management, forest projection, woodland management, forest productivity enhancement, and intensive forest development procedures. These activities ensure the sustainable management of Indian forests and provide for natural resource protection.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Division of Forestry serves Indian communities by managing or assisting tribes and individual Indians with the management of their forests consistent with tribal goals and objectives identified in forest management plans or integrated resource management plans.

THE 1993 REPORT

In 1993, An Assessment of Indian Forests & Forest Management in the United States was developed by an independent group of nationally recognized forestry experts pursuant to a contract with the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC). This first report identified four areas in need of improvement to better manage Indian forests, as follows: (1) the inconsistency between expressed tribal goals for Indian forests and the management paradigm actually applied; (2) the disparity in funding of forest management activities between Indian and other similar federal, state and private lands; (3) the relative lack of coordinated resource

planning and management; and (4) the need for a better method of setting and overseeing trust standards for Indian forestry.

THE 2003 REPORT FINDINGS

The 2003 Report is a result of a similar contract with the ITC and was produced by the same group of nationally recognized forestry experts who produced the first report. The Report recognizes that the overall management of Indian forests has improved and been modified to better meet the needs of Indian tribes and individual Indian owners. In addition, the Report indicates that this improvement is due to the efforts of both tribal organizations and the BIA. Moreover, the Report concludes that there has been substantial progress toward sustainability in Indian forests since 1993.

The 2003 Report recognizes many achievements in three of the four areas identified as needed for improvement. The first area of improvement has been a reduction of the inconsistency between expressed tribal goals for Indian forests and the governing forestry management practices. The Report identifies increasing tribal participation in forest management. In fact, the number of tribes that have partially and fully contracted or compacted management services for their own forests has increased from a total of 64 in 1991 to a total of 121 in 2001. The BIA has made improvements in coordination and cooperation with tribes and individual Indians. This partnership between the tribes and the federal government has helped to develop a more unified and consistent vision for managing the forests by incorporating both tribal and federal needs.

The second area of improvement identified in the 1993 Report was the need for increased funding for Indian forestry programs to diminish the funding disparity between Indian forestry programs and other comparable federal, state and private forestry programs. The 2003 Reports notes that progress in this area has been made. The progress in this area is two-fold: (1) the increased funding provided for Indian lands under the National Fire Plan; and (2) a more efficient management of the federal forests. As illustrated by the President's Healthy Forests Initiative, the Administration is committed to improving forest and rangeland health by investing in fuels treatment and related projects and by improving administrative procedures to ensure that projects get accomplished. The Department has significantly increased funding since 2001 for fuels treatment and other forestry activities to help create and maintain healthy, and sustainable forests. The Department will continue to maintain forest and rangeland health as a high priority.

The third area of identified in the 2003 Report showing marked improvement is that of coordinated or integrated planning. Improvements in forest management planning were evident by the progress shown in the preparation and implementation of Integrated Resource Management Plans (IRMPs). The Department has recognized the importance of forest and integrated resource planning. In the FY 2004 appropriations, the Administration requested and received a \$1 million increase in the forestry non-recurring fund for Integrated Resource Management Planning. In addition, the President's FY 2005 Budget also includes a program increase of \$1.0 million for the development of forest management plans.

The 2003 Report claimed that little progress had been made on the fourth identified area, that of setting of trust standards and trust oversight. The Department recognizes that the main point of this Report's recommendation is the creation of an Independent Trust Oversight organization outside of the Department. The Department strongly objects to this recommendation. The Committee is well aware of the huge investments in trust reform that have been made over the past few years. The Department believes that, with the realignment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of Special Trustee for American Indians, we have made significant progress in the improvement of our trust oversight capability.

The Report also contained a number of recommendations, which the Department is in the process of reviewing. At initial reading of the Report, the Department believes a number of recommendations will complement and enhance the President's commitment to healthy forests.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department on this important report. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.