

From: Dale Bosworth
To: ALL FS
09/03/2003 09:32 AM

Subject: "My Take" on recent Healthy Forest Initiative Actions and Events.
Please respond to Chief of the Forest Service

Things have been busy lately with respect to the Healthy Forests Initiative. In addition to a number of congressional hearings here in Washington D.C. and in the field I joined the President and Secretary Veneman on two HFI-related field visits and the Secretary made a separate trip to California to look at forest health issues on the San Bernardino National Forest.

This high level interest and involvement coupled with current fire activity in the West have put forest health on the radar screen for a lot of people. Some of the media coverage has been off the mark, but some has been good and in-depth on a complex issue. I commend your efforts working with local media for helping folks better understand the forest health situation and what should be done about it.

Rather than react to individual news stories or opinion pieces, I want to generally recap where we have come in the past year.

We now have a wide variety of tools including CEQ guidance on consultation, a model environmental assessment process, a revised administrative appeals process, several new categorical exclusions and expanded stewardship contracting authorities. All these tools can help us expedite hazardous fuels treatment, restoration projects and other forest health activities.

An additional proposed tool would authorize land management agencies to make certain consultation determinations under ESA without project-specific consultation with other agencies. Several legislative proposals under consideration by Congress might give us yet more tools.

Individually, each of these new tools might not seem significant but collectively I think they are huge. When I look back a couple of years ago to when we first started to grapple with "process predicament", I think we have really come a long way.

As next year's presidential election approaches, the proposals associated with healthy forests could become highly politicized. The debate in the Congress could also become political as the various proposals are considered.

I know it is going to be difficult to stay above the fray and out of these political debates. Our job is to continue to provide factual information and explain the science that supports what we know needs to be done on the ground for healthy forests and safe communities.

Our actions will speak louder than our words. The new tools give us a golden opportunity to do what we have been saying needs to be done through demonstrated performance. We will be watched very closely, and rightly so, to make sure that we use these new tools as intended. The tool or combination of tools to use needs to be carefully chosen to fit the circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

I have confidence that we will use the new tools only as intended, and that we will demonstrate through results on the ground what we have been talking about for so long. If we don't, we could lose not only these tools, but also public trust and confidence and we won't get those back anytime soon. If ever there is an area that I want us both individually and as an agency to under-promise and over-deliver, this is it.

At least that's my take.

Dale