



Aspen Wilderness Workshop
P.O. Box 9025 Aspen, CO 81612

970-544-0733

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“The continuity and adequacy of a forest policy rest wholly on the attitude of mind of the American people, and the thinking of those people is not influenced so much by fear of a shortage of inch boards or two-by-fours, as it is by the hope or desire to spend a happy vacation in a scene of unimpaired forest beauty.” United States Forest Service 1948

As the New Year begins, the Bush administration is intensifying its efforts to undermine important and hard-won environmental safeguards protecting our public lands. The strategy has been commendable: launch an avalanche of destructive initiatives in a short time frame to overwhelm the conservation community’s resources; time announcements to attract minimal attention over the holidays and to be drowned out by war rhetoric; cloak the destruction in feel-good names; and end run Congress and public debate by narrowly targeting the federal rules that are supposed to implement democratically decided environmental protections.

Below is copied a letter the Aspen Wilderness Workshop recently signed onto. Premised on the notion that petitioning the Bush administration is futile, it is an open letter to Congress encouraging it to exercise its role as a legislative check on the administrative branch. While this may also seem futile, there are an increasing number of Congressional moderates expressing concerns with the President’s profoundly anti-environmental initiatives.

We feel this letter, initiated by the American Lands Alliance, does a commendable and succinct job of articulating the issues and therefore have chosen to reprint it in its entirety. If you concur, please feel free to borrow its language and send it to Washington under your own name.

Dear Members of Congress,

We fully support an effective program to protect communities from the risks associated with forest fires. But, we are concerned that the Forest Service is failing to focus resources where projects are most needed and is instead choosing activities that will not effectively reduce fire risks for communities. The result is often misguided post-fire salvage logging and thinning projects far from communities, which threaten the environment with no benefit for community protection. There is no conclusive evidence that these types of projects reduce wildfire risk. In these cases, it appears that commodity production is being put ahead of real community protection.

Our concerns about the poor implementation of the fire program and the lack of Forest Service accountability are multiplied by the President’s Healthy Forests Initiative. The administration proposes to weaken public involvement by gutting requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), curtailing accountability and citizen oversight, and creating a powerful new economic incentive with goods for-services stewardship contracting that will encourage large-scale logging and put the agency above public scrutiny. The Forest Service has recently issued proposed rules to implement portions of the Healthy Forests Initiative administratively.

These actions are of even greater concern when considered alongside the Administration’s proposed forest planning regulations, directives weakening the protection of roadless areas and endangered salmon, and initiatives now underway to undermine environmental protections in both the Northwest Forest Plan and the Sierra Nevada Framework. The Healthy Forests Initiative, when combined with these initiatives, amounts to a blank check for uncontrolled logging on our National Forests with little or no meaningful public participation in management decisions.

We urge Congress to prevent lawless logging, to require that the Forest Service remain accountable and to ensure that the public can effectively participate in how public lands are managed. When the 108th Congress begins debate on the fire issue, we urge you to support the following principles:

1. Support community protection as the priority of the fuel reduction program. This requires focusing fuels projects in the Community Protection Zone, which is within 1/4 mile of communities. Government research has found this is the only proven method to protect homes and communities. Please support directing a minimum of 75% of the fuels budget to private, state and tribal lands where the vast majority of the lands within the community protection zone exist.

2. Support public participation and environmental standards. We urge you to oppose efforts to undermine the nation's environmental laws, weaken the public's right to participate and appeal, and limit judicial review. Please oppose legislation such as the Craig fire amendment to the Interior appropriations bill and that introduced last session by Reps. Scott McInnis (H.R. 5319) or Larry Combest (H.R. 5376) and oppose the administration's proposals to change the National Forest Management Act planning regulations, the comment and appeal process, and the list of categorical exclusions.

3. Support the conservation of all roadless areas, and old growth and mature forests. These forests are cherished by the American people, and the overwhelming majority of the general public and the scientific community is calling for their immediate protection. Moreover, a federal court recently rejected arguments that the Rule is illegal. Despite this consensus, roadless areas remain threatened by Bush Administration plans to roll back the conservation rule. Please ensure that roadless areas, old growth and mature forests are protected from logging and road construction in all fire related legislation. An important part of this is to cosponsor the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2002, (H.R. 4865 or S. 2790 in the 107th Congress) which will be reintroduced this year.

4. Oppose new incentives for logging such as goods-for-services stewardship contracting. Please oppose permanently authorizing this program or any additional goods-for-services, designation by description, or receipt retention pilot projects. These authorities allow the Forest Service to give away unlimited amounts of large fire resistant trees to logging companies without budget accountability. If made permanent, this system would let the Forest Service treat National Forests as their own private piggy bank and would encourage more logging just to feed agency coffers.

5. Oppose the inclusion of salvage logging in the fuel reduction program. Salvage logging does not reduce fire risks and it has been shown to cause serious environmental damage to soils, water quality, fish and wildlife. Salvage projects are the most serious environmental abuse of the fire program to date and are a strong indicator that the Forest Service is putting commodity production ahead of community protection.

We look forward to working with you as these issues are discussed in 2003.

This sort of unabashed attack on our public lands is not unprecedented – James Watt tried the same thing under Reagan. Encouragingly, the American public responded with outrage and ramped up their support of conservation organizations to meet the challenge. The Workshop will not falter in our efforts to turn the tide on this latest assault. Please stand by us – it is going to get a lot worse before it gets any better.

AWW FEBRUARY SLIDE SHOW

On Monday, **February 10th, 7:30 p.m.** at ACES a slide show will be presented by Katey Buster on her recent trip to the Alps. The slide show will cover climbing to the summit of Mount Blanc, the highest peak in the Alps, as well as hiking the trails in Zermatt, Switzerland, and in the Chamonix area. Come out to enjoy the show and tell all your friends about it!

NEW COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR TO BE HIRED

The Board of Directors of Aspen Wilderness Workshop is in the process of hiring a second full-time staff person. The Communications Director will be responsible for office operations and working with Sloan Shoemaker, Conservation Director, and the Board to facilitate AWW programs. For information, contact Charles Hopton at Hopton@Kazakh.com

MEMBERSHIP

Thanks to everyone who has responded to our latest membership mailing. Please note the expiration date on your address label, and if your membership is not current we would appreciate a check for \$30 (basic membership) or more to help support our programs. Send the check with your current address and phone # to AWW, Box 9025, Aspen, CO 81612. If you wish to be dropped from our mailings, or have a question about your membership, please contact Warren Ohlrich at 970-927-0796.