

Chairman Mike Simpson
US Forest Service FY13 Budget Hearing
February 16, 2012
Opening Statement

The Committee will come to order.

Good morning, Chief Tidwell and Ms. Spear, members of the Subcommittee, and those of you in attendance. While we kicked off our busy hearing schedule yesterday with Secretary Salazar, today is the first hearing in our subcommittee room this year, and I can't help but take this opportunity to point out the new artwork on the hearing room wall behind me. These stunning photos were all taken by my good friend Ed Canady, who is the Forest Service's backcountry recreation manager in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in central Idaho. I think it's appropriate that these pictures make their debut during our hearing on the Forest Service's FY13 budget. And I have to say, I'm a little jealous of the witnesses, who get a great view of the Sawtooth National Recreational Area throughout the hearing.

I'd like to start by commending the Chief and the Department for the recent announcement to increase the pace of restoration and job creation on our national forests. This leadership is much-needed and long overdue. While this announcement is a step in the right direction, the Forest Service must ensure all its national forests are on board and working hard to achieve the goals in this strategy. In the FY12 Omnibus Appropriations Act, we gave the Forest Service numerous new tools and dedicated funding to increase efficiency and more quickly implement projects on the ground. Chief, now it's up to you to ensure your message is heard loud and clear, that Forest Service officials are implementing your direction and that forests are accountable for the targets and goals set for them. I am your partner in this endeavor and look forward to working with you.

Last year we authorized a pilot for the Integrated Resource Restoration line item. I noticed this proposal is again in the budget. Before we can allow IRR to be employed nation-wide we need proof of concept and robust performance measures to know that it works. The FY12 bill was just completed, so I realize you haven't had sufficient time to implement the pilot. Nonetheless, we look forward to seeing real, tangible accomplishments in the near future.

I know difficult choices were made in this budget, but do have some serious concerns.

Last year we worked very hard to increase funding for grazing management for both the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior. I'm dismayed that after all of that work, the budget proposes to reduce funding for grazing well below even 2004 enacted levels. How will the Forest Service catch up on permit backlogs, NEPA, responding to appeals and litigation, and other much-needed work? How will Forest Service grazing staff complete work needed on sage grouse conservation?

Also concerning is the decrease for minerals and geology. The dollars appropriated to this line item have the biggest financial return to the taxpayer of any in the Forest Service's budget. In 2009 and 2010, the production value of minerals administered by the Forest Service was \$6.1 billion and \$6.9 billion respectively. Royalties, bonuses and bids—which offsets the national debt—was \$1 billion for 2009 and \$613 million for 2010.

Last year, this Committee had to make very difficult choices and we will face the same challenges this year. We do our best to be thoughtful with the funding allocation we have, but we must focus on how to make the Forest Service more efficient. Our budgets will continue to shrink. How do we accomplish more with less? I'd like to work with you and the Forest Service on this.

Fire is a very real concern for this Subcommittee. The Forest Service recently released its long-awaited Heavy Airtanker Modernization Strategy, but I'm still concerned about the near future. Chief, I know you need to replace the current aging air-tanker fleet sooner rather than later. We expect you to keep us updated and move forward quickly to solve this problem and ensure we have sufficient and safe firefighting aircraft.

Finally, I must mention the planning rule. Chief, I know you've been working hard on this, but I'm hearing a lot of concern about the new rule. It was my hope that this rule would be practical and shorten the time and resources needed to complete a forest plan. If the rule ends up in court, which seems to be the pattern with every planning rule, we're back to the drawing board and

have wasted a great deal of time and money. If this happens, we'll need to work together on moving forward.

Again, thanks for being here today.

With that, I'm happy to yield to the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Moran for any opening remarks he may have.

(Mr. Moran remarks)

Chief Tidwell, we look forward to your testimony. You may proceed.