

APPENDIX A

Views of Committee Members

A View of the Report of the Committee of Scientists

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Member Committee of Scientists

As a member of the COS, I must note that I have a number of concerns about the Report. First, I believe that the Forest Service must have a clear and unambiguous mission with respects to its objective in the management of the National Forest System. This the Forest Service does not now have. The Report's recommendation, that "sustainability should be the guiding star for the stewardship of the national forests" is clearly fundamentally different from the concept of management for the "sustainable production of multiple outputs," which was the object of the Resources Planning Act and the National Forest Management Act that are the current statutory legislation governing the management of the National Forest System. I note that it is not only my opinion that the charge of the Forest Service is ambiguous, but this view has also been widely expressed by the former Chief of the Forest Service, Jack Ward Thomas. The Forest Service and the American people deserve more clearly focused overall guidelines as to the mission of the Forest Service and the objectives of management of the National Forest System.

Second, I am concerned that the procedures for planning do, in fact, lead to improved Forest Service management. The Committee has made some useful suggestions. However, as currently structured there are essentially two independent planning processes in operation for the management of the National Forest System: forest planning as called for in the legislation; and the Congressional budgeting process, which budgets on a project basis. The major problem is that there are essentially two independent planning processes occurring simultaneously: one involving the creation of individual forest plans and a second that involves congressionally authorized appropriations for the Forest Service. Congressional funding for the Forest Service is on the basis of programs, rather than plans, which bear little or no relation to the forest plans generated by the planning process. There is little evidence that forest plans have been seriously considered in recent years when the budget is being formulated. Also, the total budget appropriated by the Congress is typically less than what is required to finance forest plans. Furthermore, the Forest Service is limited in its ability to reallocate funds within the budget to activities not specifically designated. Thus, the budget process commonly provides fewer resources than anticipated by the forest plan and often also negates the "balance" across activities that have carefully been crafted into forest plans. Balance is a requisite part of any meaningful plan. Finally, as noted by the GAO Report (1997), fundamental problems abound in the implementation of the planning process as an effective decision making instrument. Plans without corresponding budgets cannot be implemented. Thus forest plans are poorly and weakly implemented at best. Major reforms need to be implemented to coordinate and unify the budget process.

Finally, I am concerned that the Forest Service be given charges that are, in fact, reasonable and achievable. The proposed viability regulations, which utilize a proposed "focus species" approach, is experimental in nature. The Report acknowledges that this approach has never been tested on the ground. Furthermore, it is likely to be prohibitively expensive. We need a scientific "peer review" of this proposal in the Report and, if implemented, it should be done initially on a pilot basis and carefully evaluated.

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