Mrs. CHENOWETH. Thank you.

Ms. COULOMBE. Thank you.

Mr. COUFAL. Thank you.

Mrs. CHENOWETH. Now I will introduce our final witness, Mr. Larry Payne, who is the Assistant Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry of the United States Forest Service.

Mr. Payne, if you will please stand and raise your right hand.

[Witness sworn]

Mrs. CHENOWETH. Please proceed.

TESTIMONY OF LARRY PAYNE, ASSISTANT DEPUTY, STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY, UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE

Mr. PAYNE. Madam Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate being asked to come here today to testify on this draft bill for the administration. I would—as the others have done before me, I would like to request that my written testimony go into the record, and for the sake of time, I will just summarize it briefly.

Mrs. CHENOWETH. Without objection, thank you.

Mr. PAYNE. As you said in your introduction, my name is Larry Payne, I am the Assistant Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry.

It is my understanding that we had some comment and some
input on the previous draft bill back in September of 1997 in the 105th Congress, and we appreciate the work that you have done to address those concerns in the new revised version of the draft bill.

We also want to make clear that there is implications in that for the Bureau of Land Management in your draft legislation, and I wouldn't want anything I say here today to be construed as speaking for the Bureau. This is just Forest Service and administration.

We appreciate the modifications that you made in the past on this bill. We continue to have concerns on certain elements of the draft legislation, and I would like to summarize those if I could now and then explain to you, to the Madam Chairman and the subcommittee, some efforts that we have under way that we think are quite helpful.

We have four major points that I would like to cover. The first point is that we believe at the Forest Service that we have sufficient authority, both existing authority and some of the new expanded authorities, that we have to do a better job of meeting the objectives that you have in your draft legislation.

We have what we consider substantive concerns on the cost effectiveness and the special funds provision of the draft legislation.

In addition, we have some concerns on the definition of
certain terms, like what exactly is wildland/urban interface, that—is—an area, and other witnesses talked about that earlier.

And also we believe that the appropriations that are available to the Forest Service in different forms and different methods and the expanded authorities that we have been given or we expect to be given are adequate and sufficient to help us meet this need in fuel reduction.

The conclusion of those concerns is that we believe that the bill, the draft legislation, is unnecessary at this time, and I would like to talk about some of the efforts that we have under way that we think are going to take us in a positive direction. One of those has already been mentioned today, and that is the forest risk\health\mapping that we are now doing where we are going to have on a map the high-priority, the high-risk areas mapped out for fire, insect and disease, wildland/urban interface areas, and threatened and endangered species. It is our effort to set priorities and focus efforts on where to meet the highest priority needs.

Other efforts that we have under way, you could call current authorities with the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act and with the Knutson-Vandenbergh Act and the Brush Disposal Act. Among the three of those, they give us quite broad authorities, depending on, of course, the funding and
the focus and prioritization of the agency. Those give us, we believe, sufficient authority to move on this.

In addition, it has been mentioned here before we have stewardship contracting as a major investment in the Forest Service with some special authorities in 22 pilot projects that we will be trying in this coming year. In addition, we have six new stewardship projects that will be added in northern Idaho and Montana. It is our belief and our hope that we are going to learn a lot from these, and that to do anything on a broad basis now would be a bit premature.

One other item. We have a new budget line item of $15 million planned for the year 2000 for forest health treatment that will happen outside of the timber production areas, and we believe that will be helpful.

In conclusion, Madam Chairman and subcommittee members, we agree with the priority that your draft legislation gets at and the importance of it. Although we have serious concerns, we certainly support that priority. We think that there needs to be more analysis and more discussion; and for the reasons I mentioned earlier, we think that the bill is unnecessary at this time.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Mrs. CHENO WETH. Thank you, Mr. Payne.