



**Testimony Before the United States Congress
House Appropriations Committee; Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related
Agencies**

Submitted March 28, 2012

Thank you Chairman Simpson and Chairman Moran for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Forest Service's FY 2013 Appropriations bill through the Public Witness Day process.

My name is Kimery Wiltshire and I am the Executive Director of Carpe Diem West, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that works with a coalition of municipal water utilities, elected officials, conservation organizations, scientists, federal and state agencies, and businesspeople to promote the health of the upstream watersheds that provide drinking water for communities in the American West. My purpose in submitting testimony is to call the Committee's attention to vital headwaters and watershed protection and restoration work that communities around the West are undertaking in partnership with federal agencies in order to protect their water supplies, and to emphasize the crucial role that continued federal investments play in supporting that work. Consider the following:

- ▶ Over 50% of the American West's drinking water is produced by watersheds whose headwaters lie on federal lands managed primarily by the US Forest Service.¹ These headwaters serve tens of millions of Westerners, providing them with clean water, flood control, and other environmental services valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars.
- ▶ Widespread portions of these watersheds are currently at risk from severe drought, uncharacteristic insect infestations, uncharacteristic wildfires, and a legacy of mismanagement that requires protection and appropriate active restoration efforts. A changing climate could exacerbate all of these problems as warmer conditions prevail, rain and snowfall events become more erratic, and floods and droughts become more severe.
- ▶ One of the main threats to water quality is the Forest Services' under-maintained vast road system. Logging roads are the number one source of chronic sediment that bleeds into streams, which in turn smothers salmon eggs, increases costs to upgrade or install water

¹ Brown, T.C.; Hobbins, M.T.; Ramirez, J.A. 2008. Spatial distribution of water supply in the coterminous United States. *Journal of the American Water Resources Association*. 44(6): 1474–1487.

filtration systems, and increases the need to dredge reservoirs. Reclaiming roads is a critical step towards successful watershed restoration efforts.

- ▶ There are ongoing successful watershed protection and restoration efforts, carried out at the local level, through public-private partnerships, and with the full involvement of a broad range of stakeholders. Federal funds for these efforts serve to leverage other funding sources and have proven to be highly effective in attracting downstream users as partners.

A leading example is the recent Forest-to-Faucet Partnership between Denver Water and the Forest Service. In 2002, following the Hayman Fire, the largest forest fire in Colorado history, heavy rains sent more than a million cubic yards of ash and soil downhill and into Denver Water's Strontia Springs Reservoir. To date, the utility has spent more than \$40 million to deal with these impacts, including upgrading water quality treatment, sediment and debris removal, land reclamation, and building new infrastructure. That price tag served as a wake-up call about the role that functioning watersheds play in providing clean water and prompted discussions between Denver Water and Forest Service officials about how to prevent the such an event from happening again. In August 2010, the two agencies signed an MOU in which each agreed to contribute \$16.5 million to fund five years of forest restoration work. Those funds are being used to conduct thinning and prescribed burning in carefully selected National Forest watersheds where a century of fire suppression and unsustainable timber harvest has left forests vulnerable to uncharacteristic wildfires. The project has received broad support from across the political spectrum, including conservationists, recreationists, local governments, and the wood products industry - all of whom recognize the important environmental and economic benefits that ecologically healthy forests provide.

Other examples are emerging across the West. Using key federal pilot funds, Santa Fe, New Mexico is partnering with the Forest Service to implement thinning, burning, and other restoration work in the Santa Fe River watershed, which provides a third of the city's water. City leaders in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Eugene, Oregon—both of which have been involved in municipal watershed protection efforts for years—are launching ambitious new partnerships with local Forest Service officials to help shape and help pay for restoration activities on federal watersheds that are crucial to the cities' water supply and provide important ecological and recreational benefits as well. Similar efforts are under way in communities as small as Ashland, Oregon, and as large as Phoenix, Arizona.

Federal investment has been crucial in creating and sustaining these programs. The Original Organic Act of 1897, that created what is now the National Forest Service did so to “secure favorable conditions for water flows.” Now more than ever, one of the most important services that national forests provide is clean, fresh water for communities and businesses, salmon and wildlife.

Although the Forest Service budget currently has no program dedicated exclusively to protecting municipal drinking water, a number of existing programs have been instrumental in funding the work described in the examples above. These include the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program, the Legacy Roads and Trails Program, Travel Management Planning, the Hazardous Fuels Budget and others.

Most importantly, I would like to call special attention to the Watershed Condition Framework Program ("WCF"). The WCF is a smart, new comprehensive approach for proactively implementing integrated restoration on priority watersheds on all national forests and grasslands. The process is more strategic, better integrated, and more likely to contribute to long-term change in watershed conditions than current project-level improvement activities that may not be coordinated at the forest level. The Watershed Condition Framework draws from various Forest Service budget line items.

Degradation of National Forest watersheds didn't happen overnight. Restoration of these vital water sources will similarly require a sustained investment. We urge the committee to continue to invest in watershed restoration programs so that one of the most important services that national forests provide—clean, fresh water for communities and businesses, salmon and wildlife—is secured.

The WCF is providing important new avenues for water utilities, water users, and the public to engage with the Forest Service to help guide restoration efforts in a way that considers the importance of downstream use.

At the same time, local ratepayers are beginning to step up to bear a fair share of the cost through rate surcharges, general operating funds, and municipal bond issues.

While our partners may not always agree about many aspects of how our public lands should be managed, the protection of drinking water has proved to be a key issue that unites them around a common set of goals. All of us believe that federal leadership and continued investments are critical to ensuring Western communities have the water they need to grow and prosper in the years to come.

Thank you for your consideration.