

**Testimony of**  
**Governor Judy Martz**  
**State of Montana**  
**and**  
**Chairman of the Western Governors' Association**  
**before the**  
**Energy and Natural Resources Committee**  
**of the**  
**United States Senate**

**July 16, 2002**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is Judy Martz, and I am the Governor of the Great State of Montana. I am also the newly elected Chair of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), and I am appearing today on its behalf. WGA is an independent, non-partisan organization of Governors from 18 Western states and three U.S.-Flag Islands in the Pacific. We appreciate the invitation to appear before this Committee.

### **Resources to Address Wildland Fire and Ecosystem Restoration Needs**

Let me begin by stating that wildland fire and ecosystem restoration issues are of extreme importance to the Western Governors, and these issues will be my number one priority as Chair of the WGA. Congressional deliberation on wildland fire appropriations for fiscal year 2003 and additional funding for this year are of critical urgency to this Committee and to Western Governors.

As you know, the 2002 fire season is likely to be one of the most devastating and costly in recent decades, and it has yet to reach its peak. Resources must be available to fight fires this summer without disrupting vital proactive work after the fire season has concluded. That work, such as thinnings and

ecosystem restoration, will help to diminish the devastation of future fire seasons. Western Governors are, therefore, strongly supportive of emergency supplemental funding currently being considered by the Congress for Forest Service and Department of the Interior wildland fire management. In part, the need for these resources is demonstrated by a July 8, 2002, memorandum from Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth. That memo calls on Regional Foresters to defer certain obligations and projects because of the difficulty the Forest Service is having in paying for fire suppression costs. Without emergency funds we will continue to rob Peter to pay Paul, while perpetuating the mistakes of the last century.

Once these resources are made available by the Congress, we urge the Administration to move ahead rapidly as many of our forests and rangelands are in dire need of action. Without diminishing environmental protection, we also need efficient and effective processes to get the job done.

Unnecessary delay, once consensus has been reached on projects to meet our goals, will cost us dearly in terms of dollars, resources and possibly lives.

I would like to submit, for the record, an April 2002 letter from WGA to the leadership of both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees.

Western Governors seek continued substantial funding in fiscal year 2003

for wildland fire management issues. In particular, we urge the Congress to restore funding for community assistance. These resources are critical to our rural communities in their efforts to protect homes, businesses and watersheds. We also seek resources to restore forest ecosystem health, and to rehabilitate burned and unburned areas, so they regenerate in a way that reduces the risk posed by future fires. Finally, the State Fire Assistance program that provides technical and financial assistance to states and local governments to enhance firefighting capabilities must also be fully funded.

I would also like to submit for the record, a June 20th WGA letter to the Appropriations leadership. It sets forth long-term funding projections, developed by the National Association of State Foresters, to implement the 10-year Strategy that Governors developed with the Administration and other diverse partners. I am sure that State Foresters could provide further information on these figures should you request it. We hope these projections will assist the Congress and the Administration to ensure that federal revenues are available over the long term to diminish the risks posed by wildland fire to communities and the environment. These revenues must be consistent with these projections, and allocated across all parts of the 10-year Strategy so that proactive forest health efforts may be undertaken.

Western Governors urge the Congress to increase funding for all components of the National Fire Plan consistent with these projections.

Western Governors believe that over time, with continued substantial up-front investment, we can significantly reduce the damage caused by wildfires, protect lives and property, and improve the health of our lands. It has taken more than 100 years to reach the current situation of extreme fuel loads on our federal, tribal, state and private lands, and it will take a multi-year investment of time, money and on-the-ground work to address it.

### **The 10-year Comprehensive Strategy**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am pleased to report that there is a national strategic plan in place to make effective use of the resources provided to address wildland fire, hazardous fuels and the needs for habitat restoration. It has been transmitted to the Congress, and its implementation has already begun. I commend it to your attention if you are not already familiar with it. At the urging of Western Governors and others, the Congress requested the development of a long-term collaborative and locally driven strategy in the Conference Report for the FY 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (Public Law 106-291).

“A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment” and its implementation plan have been developed and recently endorsed by WGA and the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, the Southern Governors’ Association, the Intertribal Timber Council, the National Association of Counties and the National Association of State Foresters. The Strategy was developed in a collaborative manner by those endorsees, as well as a range of stakeholder representatives. The stakeholders represent the spectrum of natural resources interests from environmental groups to industry. Their contribution to and support for the Strategy speak volumes about its value and to the process by which it was developed. I note and thank the efforts of Governors Kitzhaber of Oregon and Kempthorne of Idaho for leading WGA’s efforts on the Strategy.

The Strategy was designed to implement the National Fire Plan in a comprehensive and collaborative manner with a contribution of resources from all levels of government, the private sector, communities and volunteers. It seeks to accomplish four goals across federal, state, tribal and private lands:

1. Improve Fire Prevention and Suppression;
2. Reduce Hazardous Fuels;

3. Restore Fire-Adapted Ecosystems; and,
4. Promote Community Assistance.

The Strategy sets forth a number of guiding principles to achieve these goals, including collaboration, priority setting and accountability. It establishes a collaborative, results-based framework for achieving its goals with performance measures and tasks to track progress over time. States, tribes and local governments are also full partners in its implementation. These partners strongly believe that the locally driven collaborative approach set forth in the Strategy will lead us to success in tackling the immense task we face.

### **Conclusion**

We believe that the full partnership between the states and the federal government, and substantial budget funding to implement the locally driven collaborative Strategy, are necessary to tackle the threat and consequences of severe wildfire to communities and ecosystems. Over the long term, restoration and thinning to protect homes, watersheds and habitat is much less expensive than fighting fires and addressing their aftermath, and we urge the Congress to support the proactive approach in the Strategy. We appreciate the recognition by the Congress of the need for state leadership and for the resources you have provided so far. We will need your

continued support if we are to ensure the sustainability of our invaluable natural resources and the communities in their midst.

This concludes my testimony on behalf of the WGA. Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.