

WORKING TO IMPROVE FO

Through the use of environmentally smart thinning, prescribed burns and other scientifically validated management practices, overstocked forests can be returned to a natural balance, reducing the risks of catastrophic wildfire and insect and disease infestations along with the associated expenditure of dollars.

Love It to Death is the third album by the Alice Cooper band, which was released in 1971. Loving it to death is how we, as a nation, seem to be treating much of our public lands, especially our national forests.

More people are engaging in and having a greater influence on natural resource issues than ever before, which is a good thing. People want to do what is best, yet they are not necessarily familiar with what that is. There is a growing belief that “letting nature take its course” with no human interference is the best philosophy for managing natural resources. Many people are mistakenly or intentionally calling this way of thinking conservation, though it is more closely aligned with preservation.

These misconceptions are helping to shift the management of wildlife and its habitat from a “hands-on” conservation approach to a “hands-off” preservation approach that has serious, negative implications, such as the wildfires we have witnessed across the United States. Imagine if we approached healthcare for humans the same way we approached the health of our natural resources. Our life expectancy would be cut by at least a third. Relatively simple surgeries would be no longer. So, our quality of life would suffer. Is that what we want? Many people certainly do not.

Conservation and preservation are both concerned with the betterment of the environment, and both are important. Conservation focuses on using and managing natural resources to benefit people, such as thinning a stand of ponderosa pine. Preservation is a philosophy that generally seeks to keep natural resources in a pristine state by excluding management and limiting how they are used by people, such as the giant sequoia. Conservation is the overarching concept with preservation being one of many management options within a broad conservation approach.

All of us working on forest policy understand that conservation can reverse these forest conditions outlined above through a variety of actions, such as harvesting trees and using controlled burns to mimic natural disturbances. These disturbances reduce buildups of forest litter (fuel) and overgrowth to encourage a variety of successional stages for wildlife, biodiversity, and the prevention of larger, hotter, more devastating fires from occurring that can destroy even old-growth forests.



FOREST HEALTH

JAMES L. CUMMINS

VICE-PRESIDENT AND CO-CHAIR
B&C CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

THE PROBLEM

In August 2017, over 650,000 acres were burning in the Western U.S. At about the same time, over 150,000 acres of the Okefenokee Swamp burned in Georgia. That same year, my home state of Mississippi experienced 2,775 wildfires. And we all remember the images on the news when California was on fire. Most of these fires were on public lands, particularly federal lands. Across the nation, evacuations were taking place, structures were being burned, people were breathing hazardous air, federal and state resources were stretched thin, and many state agencies were out of money.

More than 60 million acres of national forests are at high risk of wildfire or in need of restoration. In the past 10 years, over 65 million acres have burned. Approximately 10 million acres burned in 2015, killing 11 firefighters. Federal foresters estimate that an astounding 190 million acres of land managed by the departments of Agriculture and the Interior are at an unnatural risk to catastrophic wildfire.

On our national forests alone, since 2000, wildfires average 6.9 million acres burned annually. In 1995, fire made up 16 percent of those agencies' annual appropriated budgets. In 2015, fire made up 52 percent of their appropriated budget. That is a decrease of 36 percent in funds that would be used for other activities, including research, forest and wildlife habitat improvements and maintenance.

What caused this wildfire phenomenon? Why, over the course of the last two decades, have wildfires intensified to the point of being natural disasters? What are the impacts on the people, landscape, wildlife, economies, and state and federal budgets and personnel? What can be done to correct this destructive situation going forward? These are the questions the Boone and Crockett Club asked itself early in 2017.

National forests comprise a large segment of the ecosystems in the United States. Most have evolved with fires, insect and disease outbreaks and blow-downs to retain biodiversity and forest health. But times have clearly

changed. More people are living further out into wildland-urban interfaces. To protect lives and homes, this has logically led to a forest policy of suppressing natural fires and insect outbreaks. This intolerance of fires combined with decades of relying on our forests for timber production and then dramatically scaling this back, have helped produce very "unnatural" conditions of fuel buildup ripe for the wildfires we have been seeing.

These unnatural conditions are resulting in wildfires that are destroying human lives, forests, wildlife habitat, and homes and contributing to a changing climate. Wildfires emit carbon that contributes to poor air quality. Healthy forests, as well as forest products, are a carbon sink, sequestering carbon that would otherwise be emitted into the atmosphere.

THE SOLUTION

The Boone and Crockett Club has been working for decades on this issue. My first experience working on it was when the Club's Conservation Policy Committee was chaired by

Bob Model of Wyoming and Steve Mealey of Oregon, in 2002 and 2003. These gentlemen and the Club helped push the Healthy Forests Restoration Act through Congress. The legislation was born out of President George W. Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative. I was working on the act trying to make sure it helped solve forest problems in the Southeast. Paul Phillips, also of Oregon, was leading the way on the public relations and messaging side. David Anderson was working on this issue with the White House Council on Environmental Quality. He is now a government relations specialist for the Club. Paul and I currently co-chair the Club's Conservation Policy Committee, and he, David and

This intolerance of fires combined with decades of relying on our forests for timber production and then dramatically scaling this back, have helped produce very "unnatural" conditions of fuel buildup ripe for the wildfires we have been seeing.



I spend a lot of time working on forest policy on behalf of Boone and Crockett.

All of us working on forest policy understand that conservation can reverse these forest conditions outlined above through a variety of actions, such as harvesting trees and using controlled burns to mimic natural disturbances. These disturbances reduce buildups of forest litter (fuel) and overgrowth to encourage a variety of successional stages for wildlife, biodiversity, and the prevention of larger, hotter, more devastating fires from occurring that can destroy even old-growth forests. Preservation takes the opposite approach. It seeks to halt management actions and multiple use on the mistaken assumption the forests can and will return to their former “natural” condition.

The conservation principles of sustainable use and active management has the greatest chance of producing the goods and services that people want, as well as retaining long-term ecological integrity. Conservation provides the means and knowledge to produce timber from the most productive

growing areas to meet much of the demand for wood products while allowing less intensive management over the majority of the forested landscape. This enhances biodiversity while localizing the impacts of our demands for these products. We have the ability to locate and manage intensive industries (such as energy development) and urban growth so that it aids conservation—consolidating daily life and extractive industries in some places allows other places to produce the benefits of wilderness, scenery, and wildlife habitat.

Managing forests makes them resilient and able to withstand fire, pests, and diseases. Management eliminates or reduces the impact of catastrophic wildfire; protects riparian areas important for stream health (shade, filtering, etc.) and fish species such as trout; and protects water quality due to fires followed by rains washing sediments downstream and damaging important drinking water supplies.

Using 21st century techniques by land management professionals—and not direct mail specialists and litigators—we have the technology and knowhow to restore America’s cherished landscapes back to a healthy, natural condition. Through the use of environmentally smart thinning, prescribed burns and other scientifically validated management practices, overstocked forests can be returned to a natural balance, reducing the risks of catastrophic wildfire and

insect and disease infestations along with the associated expenditure of dollars.

Pure preservation is not working in many places. In order to leave the next generation of Americans a national forest system that is in the best health possible, we need to make sure it has the best care possible.

FOREST REFORM LEGISLATION

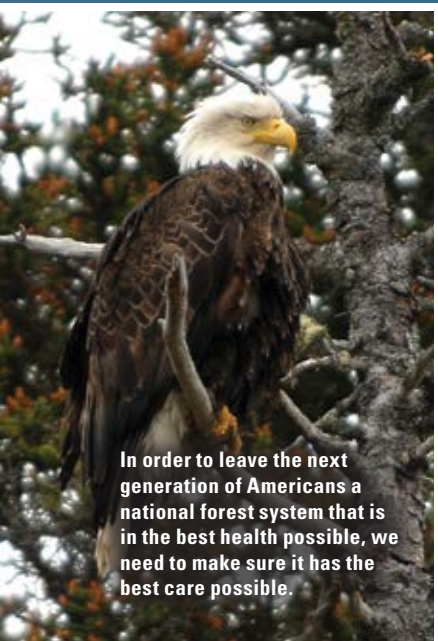
The Boone and Crockett Club has a long history in forest management. The Club was instrumental in the development (and ultimately the passage by Congress) of the Forestland Reserve Act in 1891, which reserved approximately 36 million acres for national forests—which became the initial lands of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

In 2003, U.S. Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), as the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, as well as my former boss, led the way in the U.S. Senate to pass the Healthy Forests Restoration Act after Congressman Greg Walden (R-OR) led the way for its passage in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 2017 and 2018, Congressman Bruce Westerman (R-AR)—the only forester in Congress—led the way to conceptualize and pass forest reform legislation in the House. In 2018, as one of his last actions before his retirement, Senator Cochran added the important bipartisan fire-funding fix and several forest reforms that Congressman Westerman developed for the 2018 Omnibus spending package, a bill authored by

Cochran in the Senate and signed into law by President Donald J. Trump.

According to Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Purdue, “The fire funding fix, which has been sought for decades, is an important inclusion in the omnibus spending bill and I commend Congress for addressing the issue. Improving the way we fund wildfire suppression will help us better manage our forests. If we ensure that we have adequate resources for forest management, we can mitigate the frequency of wildfires and severity of future fire seasons.”

The solution included in the omnibus provides a new funding structure from Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 through FY 2027. Beginning in FY 2020, \$2.25 billion of new budget authority is available to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior. The budget authority increases by \$100 million each year, ending at \$2.95 billion in new budget authority by FY 2027. For the duration of the eight-year fix, the fire suppression account will be funded at the level of the FY 2015 president’s budget request—\$1.011 billion. If funding in the cap is used, the secretary of Agriculture must submit a report to Congress documenting aspects of fire season, such as decision-making and cost drivers, that led to the expenditures. The omnibus includes a two-year extension of Secure Rural Schools, providing rural counties approximately \$200 million more per year.



In order to leave the next generation of Americans a national forest system that is in the best health possible, we need to make sure it has the best care possible.

“If we ensure that we have adequate resources for forest management, we can mitigate the frequency of wildfires and severity of future fire seasons.”

- Sonny Purdue, Secretary of Agriculture

© MARK MISENKO

The legislation also includes seven important forest management reforms, including:

- Categorical exclusion for wildfire resilience projects
- Healthy Forest Restoration Act inclusion of fire and fuel breaks
- 20-year stewardship contracts
- Cottonwood reform
- Fire hazard mapping initiative
- Fuels management for protection of electric transmission lines
- Good neighbor authority road rehabilitation inclusion

Until the funding solution was achieved, the fire suppression portion of the USFS budget was funded at a rolling 10-year average of appropriations, while the agency's overall budget remained relatively flat. Because fire seasons are longer and conditions are worse, the 10-year rolling fire suppression budget average kept rising, consuming a greater percentage of the entire forest service budget each year. This increase forced the agency to take funds from prevention programs to cover fire suppression costs. In addition, hunting, fishing, and other recreational programs—such as the funding of the Theodore Roosevelt Visitor's Center—were cut to cover the costs of fire suppression.

Last year, wildfire suppression costs exceeded \$2.5 billion, making it the most expensive year on record. The USFS confronted wildfires last summer that started in the Southeast and continued through the year in the West. At peak season, more than 28,000 personnel were dispatched to fires, along with aircraft and other emergency response resources. ■

THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS

In developing the forest reform legislation, James L. Cummins, co-chair of the Club's Conservation Committee, testified before Congress on forest management and wildfire issues three times. During his last testimony, he stated, "Fifteen years ago I worked hard with the Congress regarding the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. Many of you spent a lot of time on it as well and many of us in the conservation community appreciate it."

He further said, "There is a need to address the issue holistically on federal, state, and private forests. Practically—wildfire and forest management knows no boundary line for fire, insects, disease, etc. Politically—as this committee works to craft forest legislation, try not to make it primarily a Northwest bill; include the Southeast which is primarily private lands and potential political allies. We need a bipartisan forest reform bill that can pass both chambers.

"Professionally trained wildlife biologists and foresters know that forest diversity at the landscape level is the key to proper management achieving species diversity. There are four fundamental criteria each forest-dwelling wildlife species needs for survival: food, water, shelter, and space. Depending on how a forest is managed, various amounts of these criteria become available to the wildlife living there. Many wildlife managers and foresters consider active management the best solution to meet the habitat requirements of the largest variety of species. Active management reduces canopy closure and creates young forest habitat, which provides adequate food sources, nesting habitat and hiding places for forest wildlife.

"From a hunter perspective, canopy closure creates reduced hunter success rates, which leads to fewer license sales, which equates to less money for state fish and wildlife agencies. This is especially true with mule deer and elk in the West and white-tailed deer in the East; these species depend on early forest successional stages for forbs, shrubs, and other food sources. The decline in conservation projects has resulted in a precipitous decline in species that are dependent on young forest habitat, such as wild turkeys.

"The management of healthy forests [is] made economically feasible through the harvest and sale of forest products and timber. The activities also help offset the costs associated with other forest and wildlife management activities such as reforestation, invasive species control, prescribed fire and timber stand improvements. Without the funding that sustainable forest management provides the landowner (including the federal government), we are likely to see less forest management, which in turn, will exacerbate the problems of wildfire, decreased forest health, endangered species, and water quality. Without the revenue that sustainable forest management provides, we are also likely to see increased land conversion to non-forested uses and the loss of the basic operational capacity (i.e., loggers and mills) to accomplish on-the-ground, sustainable forest management that results in healthy, resilient forests important for a wide variety of ecological benefits, not to mention the economic benefits to rural America."

"When something has value, people will protect it. When forests have value as trees (economic, aesthetic, hunting, carbon credits, incentives for recovering threatened and endangered species, etc.), they will be protected, restored, and enhanced. When they don't, there is a greater chance they will be turned into other uses, such as subdivisions, pasture, and row crop agriculture. So, recognize and embrace markets to increase the consumption of wood and wood products, require—or work with other committees to require—the use of wood in federal and state construction and work to increase the use of wood-based energy, etc."

Moreover, Club members Marc Brinkmeyer and George Emmerson made numerous trips to Washington to meet with senators and representatives to help push the final deal over the goal line. They also led a forestry roundtable discussion with Speaker Paul Ryan and other house members in Jackson Hole. Altogether they made countless calls and attended many meetings to secure bipartisan support for the helpful package, and their efforts are truly appreciated.

The Boone and Crockett Club is appreciative of the opportunity to have been involved in federal forest management reform over the past 15 years. ■