

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
Statement on the Senate Floor
December 7, 2020

COLLABORATION BRINGS RESULTS

Mr. President, I rise today to highlight some meaningful progress underway on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests to improve the health of the Forests. These collaborative efforts are showing progress and are an example of where we can go nationally.

Collaboration Brings Results

I have been a longtime champion of collaboration to address public lands management disputes, as collaborative processes are good for the environment and good for natural resources-based economies. Collaborative problem-solving is a key way to ensure all voices are heard and long-term solutions are crafted.

Working together through collaboration does not require a sacrifice of principles, but it does require earnest negotiations with respect for ideas from all perspectives and a willingness to work to understand each other's objectives. Inevitably, at several points along the collaborative path, there are strong disagreements. However, participants' refusal to quit is a key attribute of successful collaborative efforts.

One of the greatest benefits of collaboration is that it enables the achievement of solutions that are better than the status quo for all stakeholders. Such solutions are better for the environment and the economy. Through collaboration, participants can actually better achieve their objectives and in ways that benefit the entire community.

Achievements on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

The work on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests is a great example of the benefits of collaborative efforts.

The Clearwater Basin Collaborative, or CBC, which was officially launched twelve years ago, has had an important role in furthering discussions about the management of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. Nez Perce Tribal Representatives, representatives of federal and state agencies, county commissioners, local communities, timber companies, conservation groups and other stakeholders make up the CBC's Working Group that accommodates a diverse array of viewpoints and objectives.

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I met with members of its predecessor group, called the Konkolville Collaborative, and welcomed the opportunity to be part of the CBC's official launch in 2008. I track the group's progress through dedicating a member of my staff to being part of its discussions focused on resolving long-standing concerns regarding land management decisions and fostering communication among different interest groups.

The remarkable landscape it works to enhance encompasses forestlands providing habitat for treasured wildlife and anadromous fish species, resources for local economies—including timber, livestock grazing and mining—and natural carbon sinks that help our planet. The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests span 4 million acres. Three rivers flow through the Forests providing important water sources, outstanding fishing and other recreational opportunities. It is truly a remarkable place. And, the group's work is far from easy, as there is a lot at stake.

The good news is we are hearing reports of remarkable achievements being made on the Forests. The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests have received three significant recognitions this year alone that highlight cooperative restoration work:

- Regional Forester's Award for Fostering Partnership and Volunteerism;
- Chief's Award for Delivering Benefits to the Public;
- and an Undersecretary's Award for Customer Service for the Forests' Historic Routes Project.

Through the Historic Routes Project, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests dedicated approximately \$1 million of retained receipts from stewardship contracts to improve water quality through historically sensitive maintenance along three historic roadways, the Lolo Motorway, Elk City Wagon Road and Magruder Road, that attract visitors from all over the country.

Project leaders, recognizing the importance of these routes to the local economy and historical significance, have partnered with local groups and the University of Idaho to include digital interpretation that is accessible even in locations without internet service.

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The project has also been supported through the Secure Rural Schools Resources Advisory Committee to assist with the maintenance.

Stewardship contracts have also been used on the Nez Perce-Clearwater Forests to enable the Forest Service to accomplish vegetation and watershed restoration. By leveraging this program with other partnerships and funding sources, the Forests are able to have a truly integrated restoration program. Stewardship contracts have enabled fuels and weed treatment; watershed protection and restoration; road maintenance; and enhancements, such the removal of wire fencing, to help wildlife.

A total of 536 miles of streams have been restored on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, resulting in the Forests being ranked fourth nationwide in miles of streams restored. The Forests have a strong partnership with the Nez Perce Tribe, which contributes greatly to its watershed restoration accomplishments. At the same time, the priorities of much needed restoration of landscapes, including water quality improvements, are also providing a supply of raw materials to local mills.

In fact, the Forests are the fifth in the nation in providing wood products for purchase. More work is underway to address significant challenges, but this is the direction we need to continue to go in delivering long-term results. I commend all those involved in this effort for their hard and exemplary work improving our treasured landscapes.

Also, a Good Neighbor Authority program coordinated by the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests and Idaho Department of Lands was recognized with the 2017 Regional Forester Awards. Through the program, forest management has supported fuels reduction and watershed restoration.

Further, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests recently signed a Good Neighbor Authority agreement with Idaho Department of Fish and Game. This will enable the Forests and Idaho Department of Fish and Game to work more seamlessly, as they collaborate on projects to enhance wildlife habitat, such as aspen restoration.

Statewide, the Idaho Department of Lands, or IDL, reports the agency is utilizing Good Neighbor Authority to partner with National Forests in Idaho to expedite projects focused on fuels reduction, forest health improvements and watershed health.

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According to an IDL summary from January of this year, the program has enabled the treatment of 4,800 acres through 50 service contracts at a total value of more than \$3 million to the private sector to treat weed infestation, reduce fuels, complete road repairs and support project planning and monitoring.

Other collaborative efforts have laid strong groundwork, or follow in the footsteps of, cooperative work such as this. In Idaho, we have succeeded with public lands projects, such as the Owyhee Initiative, and are hard at work on others, such as the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative, the Payette Forest Coalition, the Boise Forest Coalition and others, including the Governor's Shared Stewardship Task Force. I also look forward to the soon to be completed recommendations of the Governor's Salmon Workgroup.

Federal Policy Must Empower Collaboration And Forest Health

As senators and shared stewards of these natural resources, we must continuously work to ensure federal statute and policy empowers collaborative efforts and forest health projects.

In 2003, I was proud to work with congressional colleagues, including Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon and many others, to craft the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, or HFRA, to help provide the U.S. Forest Service with the tools needed to do the necessary work on the ground to restore our forests to health and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire to our communities and ecosystems.

The HFRA was designed to encourage fuel reduction efforts, protect old-growth forests, enhance water quality, promote community-based land management and public involvement in forest management and address insect and disease problems. The HFRA has promoted stewardship contracting projects, which incorporate public-private partnerships, emphasizing more localized forest management.

In the years since enactment of the HFRA, Congress has enacted additional legislation to advance forest health. For example, the 2014 Farm Bill included permanent authority for stewardship contracting and the authorization of Good Neighbor Authority. Good Neighbor Authority expanded the federal government's ability to partner with state foresters on restoration projects, including bark beetle treatments, across state-federal boundaries.

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Subsequently, the 2018 Farm Bill included an expansion of Good Neighbor Authority, credited with increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration across Idaho. The 2018 Farm Bill also, importantly, included a 10-year reauthorization of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, or CFLRP, which has enabled the expansion of active collaborative land-use groups in Idaho.

The program encourages large-scale, 50,000-plus acres, collaborative, science-based forest restoration projects in a way that encourages environmental and economic sustainability. The U.S. Forest Service reported that in the first 10 years of the program CFLRP opportunities brought together more than 420 organizations to engage in local collaboratives, and CFLRP projects treated 3.8 million acres to reduce wildfire risk.

The CFLRP has supported collaborative work of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative and the Nez Perce-Clearwater Forests to restore conditions within the 1.4-million-acre Selway-Middle Fork ecosystem, through stream improvements, the replacement of culverts preventing fish passage, road and trail maintenance, and the reduction of wildfire fuel loads.

Also, the reauthorized Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program has two newly approved projects in Idaho with one in each region. Region 1 encompasses the Panhandle National Forest and in Region 4 encompasses the Payette and Boise National Forests.

Wildfires

We cannot let up in making progress such as this. The severely smoke-clogged skies this fire season made the impacts of the fires that have decimated wildlands and communities for years nearly unescapable.

As we think about the lives and livelihoods lost to the wildfires, we must continue to work to enact bipartisan forest management reform to build on progress made in recent years to ensure federal land agencies have the tools they need to protect communities from deadly wildfires by improving the health of our forests.

Bipartisan legislation pending in this Senate would increase active management of federal forests, cut red tape, reduce frivolous litigation and advance fire risk reduction. Senators Steve Daines of Montana and Dianne Feinstein of California worked across party lines for months to negotiate the details of the bipartisan S. 4431, the Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act.

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Enactment of sensible, bipartisan legislation such as this, which is also co-sponsored by my fellow Senator from Idaho, Jim Risch, can better enable land managers to reduce wildfire risk and respond effectively to an increasingly virulent, wildfire reality. This will build on the successful enactment of bipartisan legislation to enable federal agencies to respond to wildfires as they would other natural disasters and end fire borrowing.

Forests make up 39 percent of the land in my home state of Idaho alone. They are key to air and water quality and sustain wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. They support communities through wood and paper product jobs and recreation dollars.

They are the backdrop and means for an unparalleled quality of life. Their vitality hinges on their effective management. I am encouraged by the achievements on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, and I urge continued collaborative efforts to address often contentions, natural resources challenges and the enactment of federal statute that bolsters these collaborative efforts for the betterment of all our communities.

I yield the floor.

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