

ROD HAEBERLE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY TESTIMONY
AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS

THURSDAY OCTOBER 8, 2015 AT 10:00 AM
1302 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING



OKANOGAN COMPLEX FIRES BLACK CANYON AND SQUAW CREEK FIRES 8-16-15

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ROD HAEBERLE TESTIMONY

“Log it, graze it, or watch it burn” is the subject of my testimony to you today. In 1975, while working for Crown Zellerback lumber company, the Spotted Owl endangered species controversy began. Shortly thereafter, with no bonding or scientific proof, a 37 cent stamp on a letter of protest for each timber sale was enough to begin voiding the timber industry. The result was no logging, no resource to the mill and the eventual closure and dismantling of the mill for scrap prices. Along with that, loggers and mill workers lost their jobs. The merchants in town lost business. The domino effect led to a tremendous downturn in the local economy. Since that time, logging has nearly diminished on the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest in Washington State. The unintended consequences of the environmental movement that began 40 years ago in our forest is an ecosystem that has become densely overgrown. The canopy has completely closed in most places and underlying forage has been diminished by high volumes of underbrush and debris. These forest conditions have resulted in unhealthy forests that are prone to disease and wildfire.

As a result, fire fighting has become big business. The 2015 fires of Okanogan County have scorched 509,739 acres and is still growing. It has cost an estimated 100 million dollars. Fire fighting practices over the last forty years have also changed. Initial attack by smoke jumpers, bulldozer hotlining and aircraft drops of water or retardant onto fires immediately after they are reported is a concept of days gone by. Today hours and hours, sometimes days pass before the fire is attacked properly. Too much time is wasted determining who has authority of the fire. Then resource division is notified and the priority authority orders the determined resources after they have gone through all of the channels. In the meantime the fire gets away from them. One Blackhawk helicopter loaded with water should be available for immediate initial attack. Backed up by other resources as necessary this could potentially extinguish nearly every fire before ever reaching any significant magnitude.

Recently, backburns have been used more extensively. The frequency and magnitude of their use has become the subject of a lot of controversy with local firefighters. This year many of them were failures resulting in huge economic losses of timber and grazing land.

Fire briefings for fire fighters and contractors are mandatory each morning at 6 o'clock am. They inform expected weather including humidity, temperature, wind and dryness of fuels. Safety, radio channels, aerial programs, human resources, updates, sports updates, and fire updated maps are provided. Division supervisors with their assigned personnel are included in the briefings. The break of daylight is the lowest temperature, highest humidity part of the day. Consequently the early morning hours of the day will yield the most productive on ground and aerial results. Again, these are opportunities that are wasted on a daily basis.

Local personnel should be used in the selecting dozer lines rather than out of area people. This years fire had a large amount of out of state division supervisors who did not know old logging road or areas where dozers could have been less jeopardized and saved many more structures and acres from burning.

Noxious weeds, after a fire will germinate very prolifically with spring moisture. If they are eradicated before going to seed they will be eliminated or reduced significantly. If they are ignored and left go to seed they will take over large tracts of ground and eventually crowd out desired forage for wildlife and livestock. Noxious weed management should be a continued ongoing program.

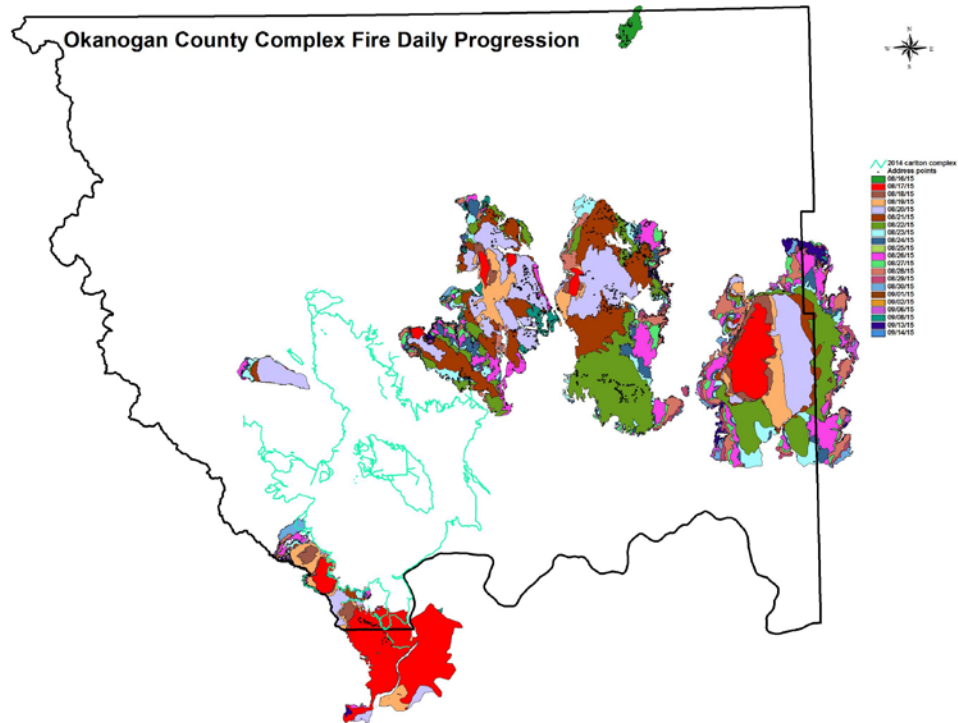
Fire in well managed property can be used as a valuable tool in cleaning up low lying ground fuels and stimulate forage growth without destroying valuable timber. These forests are a savings account for future generations both in economic value and the health of our planet.

Selective timber harvest, prescribed burning , reseeding, noxious weed control, and flexible grazing programs are key to reducing the fuel load that drive the magnitudes of these fires. Immediate initial response to wildfires by aggressive air attacks would come at an overall price savings.

In my opinion, the continued neglect of our forests that leads to their eventual destruction and the loss of enormous savings of economic wealth and environmental stability should be a crime punishable by law. Let's make the commitment to spend a fraction of what we have spent fighting the fire and spend it instead on proactive measures to sustain healthy forests. Hire people to selectively log appropriate densities of trees, thinning underbrush and debris, and using low intensity fires in late fall and winter to clean the forest floor. Doing so will create an abundance of vegetation for wildlife and livestock grazing which converts into edible protein and vitamins for humans.

"Log it, graze it, or watch it burn!" and watch it burn we have. Let's pay it forward to future generations by renewing our forests and rebuilding our economy in a partnership that honors best practices in the management of our natural resources.

EXHIBIT A



LIGHT TEAL = CARLTON COMPLEX 2014 - 256,108 ACRES
332 HOMES DESTROYED AND 149 OTHER STRUCTURES
COST \$60 MILLION
LIVES LOST = 2

(HEART ATTACK PROTECTING HOME, COMPLICATIONS FROM FALL FIGHTING
FIRE TO PROTECT HOME)

OKANOGAN , TUNK BLOCK AND NORTH STAR COMPLEX 2015 – 509,739 ACRES
96 HOMES DESTROYED, 95 CABINS AND 38 OTHER STRUCTURES
COST ESTIMATED \$100 MILLION (FIRES STILL BURNING ON NORTH STAR)
LIVES LOST = 3 (TWISP RIVER FIRE ALL FIRE FIGHTERS)

EXHIBIT B



Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest unmanaged and waiting for a high intensity burn.

Picture taken 10/01/2015



Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest unmanaged and waiting for a high intensity burn.

Picture taken 8/24/2015

EXHIBIT C



Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest unmanaged and high intensity burn.

Picture taken 8/24/2015

EXHIBIT D



Washington State Department of Natural Resource Land that was logged, thinned, prescriptively burned, and grazed by cattle.

Picture taken 10/01/2015

EXHIBIT E



Tripod Fire 2006 burned approximately 240,000 acres.
Picture taken 10/01/2015

EXHIBIT F



CATTLE LEAD AWAY FROM THE FIRES



CATTLE THAT WERE UNABLE TO ESCAPE



EXHIBIT G



NOXIOUS WEEDS AFTER THE FIRES – REGROWTH AFTER CARLTON
COMPLEX FIRES OF 2014

EXHIBIT H

To Whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter to bring some light to the events that have led to the largest wildfire that our beloved Washington State has ever experienced.

There has been decades of mismanagement brought forth by special interest groups, whether or not anyone wants to acknowledge the fact that lobbyist control more of the government than the people that vote. Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, USFS, Dept. of Natural Resources, and BLM have historically shown a disregard for what an actual healthy forest or range consists of. It does not take more than a mile or two of driving, riding, or hiking through any of these agencies areas of responsibilities to see that we, as a nation, are in direct threat at any given moment of another devastating event, similar to the one that just passed. Whether it is an endangered bird, a threatened species of fish, or the newest addition, the re-introduction of the grey wolf, our governing agencies time and time again, have not, do not, nor have they shown, any equality when it comes to decision make about the health of our public lands. What better people to engage in the process of management than the people whose livelihood depends the very health and longevity of these lands. For everything that has been addressed in recent history, our voices have fallen on deaf ears. Only now, after the most devastating wildfire in states history, do we hold your attention?

With that being said, there are some major issues regarding how catastrophes like this could be avoided. Time and time again throughout this incident, decisions were made miles from the actual fire line that had a direct deficit to the act of engaging the fire correctly and completion of that task. Miles of dozer line placed in locations where anyone with minimal fire behavior knowledge would have known better. Through treed thickets, when there was greatly more desirable ground that would be faster, more efficient, and have a greater impact on the control of this incident. Being treated like "local idiots" by agency officials only to be asked for information and direction after it was out of hand. To have multiple strike teams, engine crews, hand crews drive by active fire, threatening homes, farms, and ranches, manned by local people and have "resource management" personnel direct and effort worth the raising of the pyramids, drive past to a location to protect a group of "homes", when in reality the structures are all recreational and to no one's surprise, located on or near National Forest. Every owner of these "homes" has a roof over their head somewhere else, not so for the those that were passed by for 6 days. These are just a few of the things that I take issue with not only as a landowner, but as a former Washington State DNR firefighter.

Time and time again, local ranchers, farmers, contractors and average people, pulled together to gain the upper hand. Only to be told "You're not doing it right", or "we don't do structure protection". It is a testament to the hardiness of the residents of this county, to stand up and ignore the ignorance of the agencies

involved and continue to help their neighbor. There needs to be an end to the arrogance of the controlling powers and some humbleness injected into the system that allows the desecration of land "WE THE PEOPLE" have built.

Local resources need to be utilized , period. Too many times, locals engaged in initial attack, many on their own property, were told to pull off, go to the command center, and get "checked in". There are hundreds of combined years of wildfire knowledge imbedded within the residents of this county and to have that ignored is an atrocity. There needs to be a system in place that our local agency, without question, can call upon resources that are in the immediate area instead of out of state. The timeline for response MUST be drastically reduced. The phrase "there just aren't any resources" is an excuse, not the answer. There is too much "technology" involved in this process. A simple list of local loggers, construction contractors, farmers, and ranchers with equipment capable of aiding any effort, should be maintained by, and carried with, agency fire officials in their home area. A list in Wenatchee, 90 miles away, does no good to the forester that happens by a lightning strike near Conconully. Time is of the essence.

Peter Goldmark, Commissioner of Public Lands, requested and received, millions of dollars to add to the firefighting readiness of our state. I now ask, where was that spent? After last year's Carlton Complex, promises were made, and broke less than ten months later . "Fire managers" is a term not to be used in one of the worst drought years in history. August is not the time of year to "manage" a fire, but to engage and stop. Policies and practices of letting fire run it's natural course is not a viable choice. It would be, if there were acts to actively reduce the "Fuel loading" in our forests. Grazing, logging, and thinning are just a few of the methods to be utilized.

As I end this letter, I look out the window, to the land our family homesteaded before the 1900's, to realize that my son, will not live long enough, to see the scars of this tragedy, be healed and view this land as his ancestors once did. And that, brings true sorrow my soul.

Sincerely,

Chad Stansbury
Riverside, WA

EXHIBIT I

October 3, 2015

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture

We are a family of third, fourth and fifth generation cattle ranchers in the Okanogan Valley, having lived in the Scotch Creek area since 1945. The lightning strike Lime Belt fire started 10 miles northwest of our ranch and followed an almost direct path to our doorstep. The result was a major impact on our ranch and the ability to make a living.

This fire started on United States Forest Service (USFS) ground but quickly spread to the 8,694 acre Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. It is owned by Washington Department Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and was purchased in 1991 as a sharp-tail grouse habitat. Prior to the purchase, this land was a working cattle ranch and was largely grazed and cultivated. Wildlife thrived in that environment but, as a result of the programs introduced by the WDFW, they have been forced to find feed elsewhere due to much of the land being allowed to lie fallow. The lack of disturbance to the soils from practices such as grazing and farming allowed massive amounts of fire fuels to be added to this land which borders our 980 acre ranch both to the north and west. When the fire reached this land there was little fighting that could be done safely as it moved rapidly and with intense heat. If this property had been more aggressively managed and a fuels reduction program in use, this fire could have been possibly contained before it reached adjoining areas.

Immediate and aggressive action on the part of the USFS and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to control this fire would have produced a different outcome and losses most likely been negligible. It is rumored that DNR firefighters had to watch it burn as they had not been authorized to enter USFS lands. The time wasted waiting for the approval to fight the fire only helped fuel the ensuing firestorm. USFS, DNR, WDFW and local rural fire districts all worked hard to stop this fire but with little success as it rapidly reached the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. These lands were a tinderbox waiting for the match and once lit, could not be contained.

The fire went around or lightly scorched cultivated areas and burned hot through the undisturbed land and fence lines which border our property. The few areas WDFW had plowed and had allowed new weeds to grow were spared. The small portion of a dry land alfalfa field that, for the first time in many years had irrigation was not touched while the rest of the field had minor scorching. The majority of the Scotch Creek Wildlife area has been severely damaged. When the fire reached our

ranch which has been grazed consistently, the fire still spread but without the intensity which was seen on WDFW lands.

Our cattle were on a grazing permit we have with the USFS at the time of the fire. We lost almost 100% of our fall and spring grazing due to the fire. The majority of this is a 900 acre lease we have with the DNR. Their normal policy following a fire does not allow grazing to return for about three years. The remaining available land was scorched by the fire and at this time will provide no feed when cattle are shipped home from the mountains. We will have to begin supplementing with processed feed (baled alfalfa mostly) in mid to late October through June when they return to the permit in the mountains.

Normally, the cattle would graze until the snow flies which is sometime between November and December. They are fed daily throughout the winter until the grass has grown enough to provide enough feed to allow grazing. This has created a burden of having to purchase extra feed to sustain the healthy condition of our animals. A ball park estimate of feed costs would be about \$30,000 which breaks down to 150 ton at \$200.00 a ton. This is to feed 125 cow/calf pairs, 6 bulls and 3 horses for the additional four to five months that they would normally graze on the ranch.

Not included in this is the feed that the many deer and other wildlife that have come to live in our alfalfa fields consume daily. In a normal year we often have up to 10 deer in our alfalfa almost every night. That number is now more like 100 head. What the predators eat leaves less for the cattle.

The number of predators has also increased. The burned skull and front quarters of a cougar has appeared in our yard and at least two cougars have attacked dogs just outside their owner's homes. One cougar approached a neighbor in her yard, and luckily she was able to get quickly into her home and shut the door. She has pictures of the cougar with its front feet on her door peering in. Predator and wildlife control should become a major part of any fire restoration program.

Besides pasture loss, there is approximately 25 miles of fencing that will need to be repaired or replaced. 54 ton of hay was burned as well, but we were luckier than many as it was insured. Our ranch will also need to look at reducing our cattle numbers to match available resources. Of concern with this possibility is the need to meet the quota set by the USFS for maintaining our permit. Many ranchers may be faced with this same issue and it would be advantageous to all concerned if the USFS could provide a temporary program to assist with these changing needs. Such as allowing earlier access to our permit and longer grazing periods if range readiness is met or a temporary reduction in the number of cattle needed to fill the permits.

We are not alone in this disaster and other ranchers in our area are faced with these same issues as well as others such as loss of animals. Cattle is the second largest

crop produced locally in the largest county in our state. The economic impact of this fire is devastating to ranchers and we need your assistance to get back up and going again.

Sincerely,

Wade and Kevin Cunningham

Jake and Kelsie Cunningham

Linda Pierce ~ P.O. Box 1426, Okanogan, WA 98840
509-826-0377
lepierce2@live.com

October 2, 2015

RE: Okanogan Complex Fires, Okanogan, WA 2015

To Whom it may concern,

I write this letter having just returned from a 60 mile drive through our region in North Central Washington. Plumes of smoke still rise from the hillsides, many of which are ready to slough if and when the rains come, homes and property destroyed and black for as far as the eye can see.

I think it is important to hear from individuals who choose to live in this area due to the beauty and wonderful outdoor opportunities, along with those who make a living working with and on the land.

It is heartbraking to see the devastation that has been caused by this summers wildland fires.

I first want to commend the line troops who spent countless hours protecting land and property. The firefighters were courageous and dedicated to their mission.

I was home when the lightning struck north of our home which was soon thereafter to become the Blue Lake/Limebelt Fire. The trees immediately smoldered and attempts were made by local ranchers to contain the fire.

Over the next four days, the fire grew and broke several containment attempts, eventually consuming all of the Limebelt south to the north City limits of Omak.

While forest/land management strategies can be disussed endlessly, there are a few strategies we believe will make a significant difference in future responses.

1. Pre-stage State and Federal Firefighting resources in areas of high drought with the ability to promptly move resources as the need arises with the intent that the fight is prompt and intended to put the fire out as soon as possible when near populated areas.
2. Remove any financial incentive to let fires grow.
3. Listen to and incorporate local fire departments as soon as practicable. The local departments in this area are all volunteer. The folks fighting the fire are fighting

for their livelihood and are knowledgeable as to local resources, access routes and prompt strategies to address the fire.

4. Remove the disincentive to put the fire out at the earliest possible moment.
5. Work in the off season to address the communication and training deficits. It is amazing to me that there are so many facets of a fire response with very little in the way of common goals and leadership. As a career law enforcement professional, I cannot imagine nor should the community be satisfied with officers handling a fast moving violent riot with a variety of responders who cannot talk with each other and do not have the same goals and mission. It is inexcusable that in this day and age that communication and command and control in a fast moving and potentially deadly wildland fire remains a significant challenge.
6. Coordinate and fund land management strategies. The Blue Lake/Limebelt Fire quickly became out of control as it traveled through the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. The Wildlife area had acre after acre of tall, dry grass and sage, allowing the fire to explode once it reached the area. This area was reserved for Sharped Tail Grouse, which at this point will be lucky to survive after the fire.
7. Develop a pro-active strategy to anticipate the legal attacks against active forest and land management. I cannot believe the US Court system is not nimble enough to allow safe and realistic forest management strategies. It will take creative lawyering and persistence that if not undertaken will result in no forests and immeasurable loss. It is not an acceptable strategy to wait until the cause of action is filed before trying to implement a strategy. Forward thinking and strong leadership is needed if we are to be successful in addressing the quagmire currently in place.

The loss to this area has yet to be fully appreciated. The drive today demonstrated we have significant issues in front of us as the years progress. Between the environmental challenges, housing challenges and continued economic viability of the region, there is much work ahead.

I appreciate the opportunity to express my concerns and hope the information shared from this region is able to positively impact decisions and strategies important to all.

Sincerely,



Linda Pierce

OKANOGAN COUNTY
NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL BOARD

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To: House Ag Committee

Re: H.R. 167 – Wildfire Disaster Funding Act

Date: October 1, 2015

Recent wildfires have devastated almost a third of Okanogan County, including Federal, Tribal, State and Private lands. The fires have burned through vast acreages of farmland, forestlands and shrub steppe habitats without regard to landownership or usage. Just as fires know no boundaries, noxious weeds do not respect fence lines or ownership, freely spreading to new areas, replacing desired crops, invading rangelands, and pristine wildlife habitats.

Funding of noxious weed control programs within Federal agencies is already insufficient given the scope of landownership. The current funding mechanism for catastrophic wildfire suppression further decreases the already inadequate funding levels, when the remaining funds are pulled from noxious weed control programs to fund fire suppression efforts.

Many noxious weeds, such as cheat grass, intensify fire activity and cycles, making those fires extreme and difficult to control. The more difficult the fire, the more funding pulled from controlling noxious weeds, increasing infestations of cheat grass and other weeds, and the process escalates.

The Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board supports H.R 167, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. This act will make paying for fire suppression activities the same as other natural disasters and end the ineffective practice of “fire borrowing”.

H. R 167 will allow federal noxious weed programs the ability to do what they were intended to do, namely control noxious weeds and provide the stewardship necessary of good federal land managers.

Anna Lyon,
OCNWCB Manager

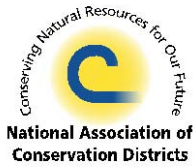


EXHIBIT L

National Association of Conservation Districts

September 9, 2015

The Honorable Hal Rogers, Chairman The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Ken Calvert, Chairman The Honorable Betty McCollum, Ranking Member
House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chairman The Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member
Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Rogers, Chairman Cochran, Chairman Calvert, Chairman Murkowski, Ranking
Member Lowey, Ranking Member Mikulski, Ranking Member McCollum and Ranking Member
Udall:

The catastrophic wildfires engulfing western states this summer are further proof of the need for
Congress to support the management of our nation's forestlands in a collaborative effort of
federal agencies, industry and the local residents most directly affected by these fires.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents the nation's 3,000
conservation districts and their governing boards. Established under state law, conservation
districts are local units of government charged with carrying out natural resource management
programs created or adjusted based on local needs. Conservation districts are directly connected
to local populations and landowners.

Conservation districts work with federal, state, tribal and other local agencies to provide
technical assistance to landowners and other partners to address natural resource issues. With
respect to forests and grasslands, conservation districts are involved in a wide range of activities,
including non-industrial private forest management, wildfire prevention and fuels reduction,
biomass production and utilization, forest pest management, wildlife habitat management and
urban forestry.

Recently, the Okanogan Conservation District proved to be an invaluable resource for assisting
FEMA and state and federal land management agencies for rapid emergency response during the
2014 Carlton Complex Fire in Washington. The district assisted with the identification and
evaluation of priority areas in need of immediate recovery, and provided conservation for both
private and public lands. The 2015 fires far surpass the area burned in 2014 and conservation
districts are already formulating plans to deal with the aftermath. The Emergency Watershed
Protection Program (EWP) will be a crucial part of those plans and funding limitations must not
stand in the way of program delivery.


It is critical that federal policies support the uninhibited flow of vital information between agencies and partners that will allow natural resource concerns to be addressed, private and public property protected and all life, especially human, fully cared for.

Along with dozens of other forestry and conservation organizations, NACD has offered its support of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (H.R. 167, S. 235, S. 1645), which aims to limit the impact wildfire spending can have on the funding of agency programs designed to improve forest health conditions. NACD fully supports increased funding for wildfire prevention, management and restoration of our public forests and rangelands; legislation that expedites analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act; policies and budgets that allow conducting effective prescribed fire, pre-suppression activity and silvicultural treatments; and increased pre- and post-fire grazing on at-risk public lands.

We ask for passage and full funding of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act in addition to increased funding for programs that can be used to reduce fuels such as the Chiefs Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the EWP. These programs are critical to providing the necessary resources to bring about significant change on a landscape level.

Sincerely,

Lee McDaniel
President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lee D. McDaniel". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.