

US FOREST SERVICE BRIEFING

BEFORE THE

Utah Legislature's Commission for the Stewardship of Public Lands

August 20, 2105 – Utah State Capital – Salt Lake City, Utah

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE – FOREST SERVICE

Nan Christianson, DEPUTY REGIONAL FORESTER

Management Practices That Increase Carbon Sequestration

Good morning Chairman Hinkins and Chairman Stratton, Members of the Commission and guests.

I'm Nan Christianson, one of the Deputy Regional Foresters for the Intermountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service.

I appreciate the invitation to visit with you today about work the Forest Service is doing related to carbon biosequestration. I'll touch on research projects our scientists are conducting as well as management actions we are taking. I look forward to visiting about how the Forest Service and the State of Utah can do even more together, working with researchers and other stakeholders to further explore our shared interests in carbon sequestration, and in designing and implementing forest, rangeland, grazing, and other management practices that increase carbon sequestration through biological processes.

The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the need of present and future generations. The forests and rangelands here in Utah play a vital role in providing public benefits and services such as clean air, clean water, minerals and energy, timber, forage, fish and wildlife habitat, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and carbon sequestration. With that in mind, we share your interests in managing these rangelands and forests so they are healthy and resilient to climate change.

First, let me briefly discuss our research organization. The Forest Service has world-class scientists who are conducting research on the effects of climate change on natural ecosystems. Three of our research laboratories are located here in Utah, in Logan, Ogden, and Provo.

Forest Service scientists are looking at the key components of carbon exchange including photosynthesis, soil respiration, and plant productivity across the warm deserts of North America to determine if common trends exist that can be utilized in management. The Research Station is also providing an overview of how management practices can influence carbon sequestration in this region. Since desertification is projected to

increase in the future, management strategies that increase carbon sequestration or decrease carbon loss are especially important.

I have provided an annual report from the Grasslands, Shrublands and Desert Ecosystems Research Group, to give you a brief introduction to their work.

Forests and forestry have an important role for sequestering carbon and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Forests can sequester large amounts of carbon in several ways including as carbon sinks in the standing forest, in wood products, and in avoided emissions when wood is used as a substitute for more fossil fuel consuming products such as steel, concrete and brick.

Nearly seven million acres of National Forest system rangelands in Utah are incorporated in 556 livestock allotments. Over the past five years, an average of 38 million board feet/year has been harvested from National Forests in Utah and we treat an additional 48,000 acres per year for fuel reductions.

More and more frequently, we are using programs such as the Watershed Restoration Initiative and the new authorities provided through the Farm Bill to work in close coordination with the Utah State Forester. We're completing more fuel reduction, wildlife habitat improvement, and timber management projects, and our treatments are more effective since we are often able to work seamlessly across federal, state and in some cases private lands.

We also utilize State & Private Forestry programs in partnership with your State Forester, to support efforts of private landowners to keep privately owned ranching and forested lands intact and productive. We recently provided funds through the Forest Legacy Program to purchase conservation easements on 1200+ privately owned acres in south-central Utah, supporting the landowners' desires to ensure their lands cannot be converted to non-traditional uses in the future. Our Urban and Community Forestry programs, funded in part by the Forest Service and administered by the State Forester, inspire communities to recognize the value of trees to save energy, improve air quality, strength quality of place and local economies, reduce stormwater runoff - and store CO2!

I look forward to exploring ways in which management of national forest system lands can continue to provide the many traditional services our diverse stakeholders expect and need, while incorporating actions that minimize the effects of changing climates. Jenna Whitloc, my colleague at the BLM, asked me to relay that the BLM also looks forward to participating in future conversations where we can explore opportunities to work together for the health of Utah's forests and rangelands.

Chairman Hinkins and Chairman Stratton, thank you again for the opportunity to speak before the commission today. I welcome questions and will forewarn you that I may not have answers but I will commit to pursuing answers for you as our conversations continue into the future.