



Western
Governors'
Association

Press Release

Diverse interests offer recommendations to Western Governors for improving forest health

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CONTACT:
Karen Deike (720) 840-3526
or Paul Orbuch (303) 623-9378

Missoula, Mont. - Western governors wrapped up a three-day Forest Health Summit after receiving 25 [recommendations](#) from diverse interests on how to improve forest health through locally driven efforts. Nearly 400 individuals from across the West and as far away as Australia spent much of today working on recommendations for the governors to consider for further action.

Also, during today's meeting, Governors Judy Martz of Montana, WGA's Chair, Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho and Ted Kulongoski of Oregon discussed via video conference the summit's objectives and various congressional proposals with Sen. Conrad Burns of Montana, Chairman of the Senate appropriations subcommittee for the Interior. WGA's leadership, on behalf of their colleagues, sent a [letter](#) to Senate leaders for agriculture and natural resources urging them to support collaborative efforts to prevent catastrophic fires and to review existing laws and administrative procedures that will expedite efforts to protect high-risk communities. The letter does not endorse specific legislation or proposals.

"While all of our Governors may not agree on every issue related to forest health legislation, the letter represents a consensus among the Western Governors on many of the difficult and contentious issues the Senate will soon be discussing," Martz said.

Prior to the breakout sessions, Govs. Martz and Kulongoski and Secretary of Interior Gale Norton issued a challenge to participants to come back with consensus recommendations for governors to consider and forward, as appropriate, to Congress and the Bush Administration.

Kulongoski said it is in everyone's interest and the interest of the forests to make collaboration work, and the summit is the best place to start building a healthy forests partnership. "Decision-makers need your best thinking. And even more important - our nation's forests need your best thinking," Kulongoski said. We owe it to rural communities to maintain - but not squander-the economic value of our forests. And we owe it to ourselves to remember in Western states, our environment is our economy. If we lose our quality of life, we lose our ability to attract both new businesses and tourists."

Gov. Kempthorne and Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano addressed the group Wednesday night. Kempthorne said large portions of our forests have reached a critical state and are overgrown, unnaturally dense, diseased and dying.

"There are those who paint forest health issues in terms of the economy versus the environment, pro-logging versus pro-forest," Kempthorne said. "Unfortunately, too much of our time and money is spent in vain trying to quell the rhetoric and resolve conflicts during the appeals process or in

the courtroom. It is time to change the tone from a culture of conflict to one of cooperation. We must shift the focus from courtroom to the forests... and that's what we're doing."

Gov. Napolitano said a conference she convened on forest health and safety in her own state in March resulted in 30 recommendations. Those recommendations formed the basis for her Action Plan for Arizona and the creation of advisory councils with a membership representing a balance of perspectives.

"The days of commerce versus environment in forestry management should be put behind us," Napolitano said. "In truth, this old grudge match has contributed to more ecological imbalances than any other factor. We are moving ahead in Arizona, as I hope you are in your states." Secretary Norton also emphasized the importance of public/private partnerships "that are self-sustaining and can endure for decades."

Recommendations were made on the following topics:

- Improve Fire Prevention and Suppression
- Reduce Hazardous Fuels
- Restore Fire-adapted Ecosystems
- Promote Community Stability and
- Collaboration Challenges

The [recommendations](#), speeches and other supporting materials are available on the WGA Web site at www.westgov.org.

The Western Governors' Association is an independent, nonprofit organization representing the governors of 18 states, two territories and one commonwealth. Through their Association, the Western governors identify and address key policy and governance issues in natural resources, the environment, human services, economic development, international relations and public management.

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