



News from . . .

Senator Dianne Feinstein

of California

Senator Feinstein Raises Questions About Possible U.S. Forest Service Revisions to Sierra Nevada Framework

December 12, 2003

Washington, DC - U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today raised concerns about possible U.S. Forest Service revisions of the Sierra Nevada Framework protection for old-growth trees and California Spotted Owl habitat. The following is the text of a letter sent this week to Jack Blackwell, Regional Forester of the U.S. Forest Service.

“As you know, I am a strong supporter of the protections for old-growth forests in the Sierra Nevada Framework. I am writing to express my concern about what I have heard concerning possible revisions to the Framework.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act, which I cosponsored, took the balanced approach of protecting old-growth stands and large trees while expediting fuel reduction work, particularly near communities. The broad appeal of such a balanced approach is demonstrated by the 80 supporting votes it won in the Senate and the President’s signing the bill into law last Wednesday (Dec. 3).

In negotiating the Healthy Forests legislation, we purposefully included the first-ever statutory protection for old-growth stands. I urge you to be certain that whatever changes you make to the Framework are consistent with the Healthy Forests bill. As I understand it, any projects in old-growth stands using the bill’s authority must either maintain or contribute to the restoration of pre-fire suppression old-growth conditions, and must retain the large trees contributing to old-growth structure.

As you know, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service relied on the existing Framework’s protections of old-growth habitat in deciding not to list the California spotted owl as a threatened or endangered species this past spring.

I have read the appropriate section of the draft supplement environmental impact statement (“draft analysis”) on the potential impacts to the California spotted owl from your proposed revision to the Framework. The draft analysis states (on p. 193) that the proposal:

_____ ‘Tends to disrupt the continuity of habitat conditions (i.e. habitat structure and

distribution) over the 20 year time period. This disruption may lead to increases in fragmentation and habitat patchiness. The increases in fragmentation and patchiness are likely to isolate sub-populations and limit the opportunity for interactions across NFS ["National Forest System"] lands.'

I understand that the draft analysis also concludes that your proposal will improve the owl's prospects over the long-term. I ask whether there is any way to reduce the short-term risks identified in the draft analysis while also retaining the long-term benefits of removing the build-up of hazardous fuels in the Sierras.

I request as well that you consider joining with the State of California and community groups such as the Quincy Library Group in a collaborative Adaptive Management Program trying out different strategies in coordination with the State and communities.

I believe that the great majority of Californians support moving quickly to protect our communities while proceeding more cautiously in the older forests we cherish. As always, I appreciate your consideration of my comments on the future of the Sierras, a subject of great importance both to me personally, and to my State."

###